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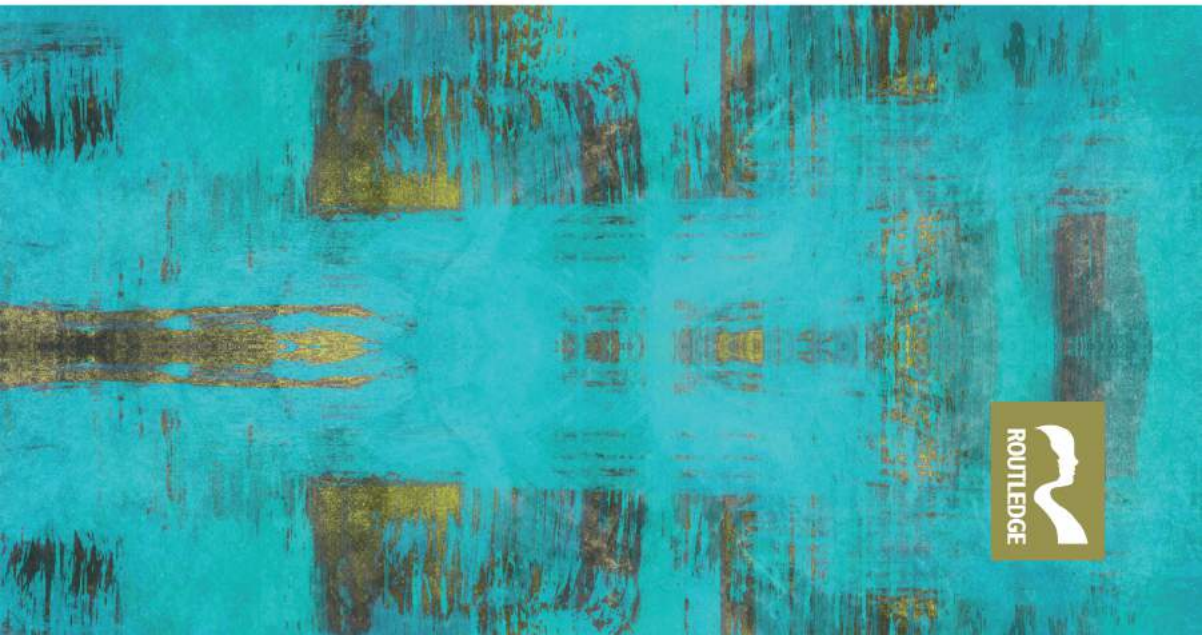
BLACKNESS IN ISRAEL

RETHINKING RACIAL BOUNDARIES

Edited by
Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian



Blackness in Israel

This book explores contemporary inflections of blackness in Israel and foreground them in the historical geographies of Europe, the Middle East, and North America. The contributors engage with expressions and appropriations of modern forms of blackness for boundary-making, boundary-breaking, and boundary-re-making in contemporary Israel, underscoring the deep historical roots of contemporary understandings of race, blackness, and Jewishness.

Allowing a new perspective on the sociology of Israel and the realm of black studies, this volume reveals a highly nuanced portrait of the phenomenon of blackness, one that is located at the nexus of global, regional, national, and local dimensions. While race has been discussed as it pertains to Judaism at large, and Israeli society in particular, blackness as a conceptual tool divorced from phenotype, skin tone, and even music has yet to be explored. Grounded in ethnographic research, the study demonstrates that many ethno-racial groups that constitute Israeli society intimately engage with blackness as it is repeatedly and explicitly addressed by a wide array of social actors.

Enhancing our understanding of the politics of identity, rights, and victimhood embedded within the rhetoric of blackness in contemporary Israel, this book will be of interest to scholars of blackness, globalization, immigration, and diaspora.

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Blackness in Israel

Rethinking Racial Boundaries

Edited by Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-62975-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-11170-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Baskerville
by Newgen Publishing UK

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Introduction

Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian

The musical Al Tikra Li Shachor ("don't call me black"), written by playwright and songwriter Dan Almagor, premiered in 1972 and soon became a hit on the local stages in Israel. Almagor, Israeli-born, spent the tumultuous 1960s in the United States where he was inspired by the African Americans' struggle for equality and the musical trends of the period. This inspiration led him to write a compilation of Hebrew songs referring to the American "black experience," as he viewed it. The composition and musical arrangements, provided by Benny Nagari, who made a name for himself through his work with local military ensembles, drew mainly on black American spirituals and "soul music" so as to retain their "negro elements" (Harsonsky 1972). Finally, on stage, the musical's cultural sensibility was brought to life by complementary colorful dashikis and large Afro wigs. After one year and no fewer than 700 shows, it was the breaking of the Yom Kippur War in September 1973 that put an end to the successful tour. At the very same time when Almagor envisioned his "black Israeli" spectacle, another group of young Israelis drew inspiration from the African American struggle, though in a totally different setting and for different goals. The *Israeli Black Panthers Movement* was formed in 1971 in Musrara, a rundown neighborhood in Jerusalem, by the second generation of *Mizrahim*, Jews from Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa. The movement's goal was to bring to light the reality of "pigmentocracy" in Israeli society, where ethnic origin had become strongly correlated with one's socioeconomic position, and where Mizrahim were systematically discriminated against in comparison to *Ashkenazi* (European) Jews (see Frankel, this volume). Labeling themselves as the "blacks" of Israel added a racial dimension to the segregation and challenged the dominant Zionist narrative by framing it in terms of an internal colonial endeavor (Shohat 1997a). In their struggle for material and political gains, the movement undermined symbolic assets of the Israeli establishment and questioned the state's formal objective of providing independence for all Israeli Jews. After two years of internal upheavals within Jewish society, during which the Panthers managed to mobilize thousands on the streets, the movement was put to rest by the Yom Kippur War. Nevertheless, the miserable war only intensified the public's dissatisfaction with its leadership; along with the growing awareness of social inequalities it eventually brought about the dramatic political turn of 1977.

Both cases presented above, that is the musical and the movement, feature the engagement of Israelis with foreign vernacular of black American aesthetics and index the growing influence of American culture in Israel (Melamed 2008). It is no wonder, then, that even in real time many Israeli commentators already viewed Almagor's musical as an allegory to the social situation in Israel (Glazer 2012). As exceptional as it was at the time, the musical signified the potential of blackness as a conceptual framework for referring to local experiences.

This book engages with expressions and appropriations of blackness as a basis for boundary-making, boundary-breaking, and boundary-re-making in contemporary Israel. The idea of blackness holds sway over the imagination of various populations in Israel - Jewish and non-Jewish – who have selectively adopted key elements from its repertoire of representations mainly to give voice to their marginalization and exclusion in and from the Israeli nation-state. In this national context blackness is far removed from the American context that gave rise to the field of Black Studies which it still dominates today. Yet, in its short history Israel is firmly embedded within the orbit of influence of the mass globalization of histories, narratives, cultural artifacts, political aspirations and contemporary forms of representation that have reverberated from the Caribbean and American outposts of the slave trade.

Throughout history Jews remained alert to the meaning of color and continually deliberated it, having been racialized as dark and inferior minority amidst various hosting societies (see Melamed, this volume). The question remains, however, what to make of blackness that does not tether upon "conventional" black (read: African) bodies, and what to make of blackness that is aligned with racialized black bodies but not in the same way as those associated with the Black Atlantic. What then is the value of blackness in Israel, and how does it figure in the lives of those who claim it? What are the ways in which blackness is operationalized in the tense and militant social atmosphere in Israel, and what does this mean for the conventional understanding of the concept?

The cases presented in this book explore forms of blackness that do not consistently and neatly align with the corporeal property with which this notion is often associated. As a trope for representation, it speaks to the overlapping configurations of race, ethnicity, politics, religion, territorial rights and nationhood that make up modern-day Israel. Unlike pan-Africanist paradigms that would have blackness as a unified inclusive whole, a bound collectivity of sameness casted by and held together in the face of adversity, in Israel the contrary is occurring. At its most polar opposite, segments of Israeli society claiming blackness view one another as rivals struggling over a common territory and the ability to govern it, while applying the discourse of blackness to back their claims of victimhood and ownership. Indeed, the contested discourses and practices crafted around blackness that appear among Jewish Israelis do not carry the same stakes as in the case of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Moreover, illegal migrants from continental Africa propose yet another type of blackness, in that they do not lay claim to the land of Israel (as in the case of Palestinians), nor do they lay claim to a righteous affiliation to Judaism,

(as in the case of Ethiopian-Israeli Jews). Competing forms of blackness are thus derived from various aspects such as phenotype, a socially attributed corporeal property, lived experiences of marginalization, the mastering of a cosmopolitan cultural capital and performative skills, to name just a few. Instead of deliberating questions about its "validity" or "authenticity," this book explores the potential scope of blackness, its "elasticity" so to speak, as various people utilize it. By looking at how blackness in Israel aligns with, but also diverges from, the common representations of blackness canonized in the field of Black Studies, we hope to engage readers by providing ethnographic cases that question the very notions of race, blackness and belonging.

What is blackness?

To offer firm answers to the question "what is blackness?" is improper, as if taken from another epistemological and political age. And yet, given the convenient manner in which scholars use this term, and regardless of the sophisticated arguments they construct with it or around it, blackness often seems to be self-evident. This volume proposes to engage with people who evoke tropes of blackness to make sense of their everyday lives in Israel, or who are incontestably racialized as black. This approach lends itself to discussing what blackness means, implies, and does for those who anchor some aspects of their lives within it. What does it signify, and what are the properties or qualities that seem to be embedded in it? If, for example, one embraces the conventional claim that blackness "is a relationship and not a thing" (Tabili 2003), then we should also explain what these relationships are to avoid making blackness appear as a mere and inevitable outcome of it, and hence turn it back into a thing.

Building on Du Boisian foundations, leading theoreticians like Stuart Hall, Henry Louis Gates, Paul Gilroy and Cornell West perceived blackness as a liminal position within modernity, one that bears constant reflections on society, on the self, and on the act of representation itself. Under the imperative influence of such works it has become an axiom to think of blackness in terms of hybridity, or a multiplied subjectivity at the nexus of opposing cultural traditions and axes of power. The unique modes of expression that developed within this context are the devices by which blackness realizes itself as a viable shared label for wide variety of groups and individuals. The explanatory power of this approach lays in its innate sense of duality: the overwhelming variety of "black expressions" points to ongoing dynamics of (re-)construction while at the same time these expressions are also relegated to the status of "signifiers" of a shared cultural kernel (Gates 1988). It must be noted that scholars were not blind to the dual nature of their analysis, and in fact openly advertised it as an "anti-anti-essentialism" (Gilroy 1993) or a "strategic essentialism" (Hall 1993). Hall in particular was very explicit about it. Good black culture, he asserted, can pass the test of authenticity, to "serve as the guarantees in the determination of which black popular culture is right on, which is ours, and which is not" (1993: 110). Not unlike others, Hall comes to the conclusion that blackness denotes an identified form or style but not an identified

content. This distinction is important because it explains how and why blackness is viewed simultaneously as an inclusive yet reductionist definition.

This paradigm has long constituted the cannon in Black Studies. As such it demands that each writer posits oneself in relation to it, though it is often simply taken as a point of departure for discussions about blackness without much scrutiny. This corpus, however, does not go without criticism. Few authors, for example, have been promoting in recent years the idea of a "post- blackness" America, based on the perception that the "holding of race" – mainly after the election of Barack Obama for presidency – is an obstacle that hinders African Americans from extracting their full potential as both individuals and a community. In his *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness* (2011) Touré illustrates this by recalling an episode in which an African American person, a man who was a stranger to him, tried to dissuade him from experiencing skydiving, telling him that "black people don't do that." But Touré did, explaining that "If I'd let being black hold me back from skydiving I would've cheated myself out an opportunity to grow as a human" (ibid.: 4.). Likewise, Debra Dickerson, in *The End of Blackness* (2004), wonders why black subjects are never allowed to "simply *be*" who they are: "Isn't one real measure of oppression overcome the moment an individual loses the power to represent anyone but herself?" (pp. 3–4, emphasis in the original). While it would be incorrect to say that spokespersons of post-blackness deny the achievements made by decades of black identity politics, as some of its criticizers claim (e.g. Baker and Simmons 2015), they emphasize the multiplicity of blackness to leverage individual endeavors.

The normative and political dimensions of post-blackness is beyond the scope of our discussion, although the reality that led to the formation of the *Black Lives Matter* campaign raises serious questions about them. As a theoretical trajectory, however, the "end of blackness" does not seem very promising, given how ubiquitous blackness is in our speech, our imagination, the lives of those racialized as "black," and the steady appeal of whatever it stands to signify for a variety of groups around the world (Johnson 2003, Marable and Agard-Jones 2008). This book turns instead to other critical approaches whose efforts to push the rather restricting boundaries of conventional Black Studies whose efforts to push the rather restricting boundaries of conventional Black Studies seem more relevant to us. are more relevant. From all the prominent thinkers, it is John Jackson Jr. who became most critical about the mainstream theoretical tradition. Like Touré, Jackson reflects on his encounters with black folks and shows how certain experiences and choices are perceived as "legitimate black" while others are not (2005). For Jackson, however, the lesson is not to denounce the whole notion of blackness, as Touré suggests, but to eliminate the restricting elements embedded in it, that is the authenticity tests mentioned by Stuart Hall. Indeed, for Jackson the reductionist approach to blackness – judging "real blacks" from non-real ones – is not simply a matter of common knowledge but one that is being promoted theoretically by the Black Atlantic paradigm: "As much as they add tools to the theoretical arsenal of anti-essentialism," Jackson concludes, "critics of racial authenticity may also be anchored in the very same kind of objectifying and thingifying they

attempt to debunk" (2005: 17). His timely critique urges us to realize that by analyzing the substance of blackness, even in terms of duality or hybrids, scholars in fact construct the boundaries of blackness which help define what and who may be categorized as black. Exposing case studies that offer a significant departure from essentialized blackness that both Touré and Jackson are writing against, contributors to this volume work to expand the potential embedded in the concept of blackness at this current moment in history in an unlikely place: Israel.

This expansion is needed for when Jackson provides counterarguments to Gilroy and Hall, or when Baker and Simmons critique Touré, they all remain rooted in an American-oriented Black Studies that takes Americocentrism as a given. In other words, these scholarly works gravitate around the American (and, to a lesser degree, British) context. It is no wonder, thus, that scholars who focus on blackness in other regions of the world and in other contexts are struggling with authoritative model that rendered their case studies to a marginal position as if examining "unusual" configurations of blackness.

One of the more persistent criticisms made against the American-oriented canon is that it is bounded, epistemologically and analytically, by the white/black color-line. Scholars studying Latin American and Caribbean societies, for example, have long pointed to the local social conditions in which racial and ethnic categories seem to be more ambiguous and rarely exclude one another (e.g. Gudmundson and Wolfe 2010, Charles 2003, Sansone 2003, Whitten and Corr 2001). This ambiguity can partially be attributed to the social conventions that allowed for a high degree of mixture between people from European, African and indigenous backgrounds, as well as between their offspring. It is not only the social mechanics, however, that yield a less rigid perception of race but also the cultural orientation and established national myths of integration (Wade 2009). In this context, one can understand why Afro-Latino and Caribbean immigrants in American society feel "nothing in common with Afro-Americans" or with their racial agenda (Charles 2003: 170). However, since the 1970s many scholars of Latin America and the Caribbean defy the integrationist myth of a racial democracy and emphasize instead the similarities between blacks throughout the Americas, both in historical terms (i.e. uprooting, slavery and oppression) and current affairs (i.e. institutional discrimination, poverty and degrading representations) (see Sawyer 2005). Whereas similarities cannot be underestimated, focusing exclusively on them seems like an effort to construct blackness as a sort of "radial category" (Collier and Mahon 1993). One of the problems with this approach is that it leads to an instrumental comparison that overlooks – or deliberately ignores – historical and cultural nuances. As the scholars mentioned above have shown, even under the steady influential flow of (black) American culture, communities of African descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean tend to understand blackness differently than African Americans. Hence, even if it is true that national regimes promote the image of a racial democracy for their own political interests this image still strikes a chord with popular perceptions (Wade 2009). Research in Latin America teaches us that although difference of color is widely endorsed, color-based classification is not used as criteria for placing social groups into separate categories.

A second strand of criticism of American-oriented Black Studies questions the Middle Passage as the ultimate point of departure for examining the Black Atlantic. Few anthologies highlighted the experience of black subjects and black communities that migrated (mostly) to Western nations during the last century, and for whom migration was not entangled with colonialism and slavery (Hintzen and Rahier 2003, Marable and Agard-Jones 2008, Rosenhaft and Aitken 2013, Shaw-Taylor and Tuch 2007). In a world of increased emigrations from former colonies, Africa as the seed of diasporic consciousness has been reconsidered against and challenged by the recent formation of "new African diasporas." "New African diasporas" refer to migrants from the continent who established diasporic infrastructures starting from the late 1900s in Europe and/or North America (Akyeampong 2000). Amongst other differences with African diasporas that were shaped as a result of slavery, contemporary migrants remain connected to their homeland in ways that were not possible in the pre-twentieth-century era (ibid.). The first or second generation of African immigrants in the late twentieth century are attached to a specific geographical location defined by their parents' nation-states, rather than draw their diasporic identities from the symbolic status attributed to continent, as did members of previous African diasporas.

While the logic behind the Black Atlantic aimed to encompass a variety of experiences of blackness, its chronological historiography foregrounds slavery and the racialist black/white color-line used to justify it. What does blackness outside of this paradigm look like? Figuring the Black Atlantic as the only possible epicenter of blackness devalues and ignores the experiences of blackness of recent African migrant populations (Táíwò 2003). Michelle Wright (2015) suggests that more than a mere historical narrative, the Middle Passage should be understood as the canonic epistemology of blackness interpreted as an uninterrupted and linear movement along time and space. According to her, the persuasive narration of continuity comes at the expense of diversity. She suggests instead a reversed approach she titles "postwar epistemology": "If the spacetime [*sic*] of the Middle Passage Epistemology can be represented by a line (or an arrow), then the postwar epistemology … should be represented as a circle with many arrows pointing outward in all directions" (ibid. 20). Unlike the Middle Passage epistemology rooted in the past, postwar epistemology relates to the here and now and provides a more comprehensive view on, and a more nuanced historiography of, black diasporas.

This argument provides us with a foothold in the discussion on blackness since it allows one to think of it as a decentralized, multidirectional and trans-local phenomena rooted in the present time and in a specific location. This rhymes well with Hall's contention that:

> cultural identities are the points of identification […] which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin."
>
> (Hall 1990: 226)

As Wright suggests, if we understand blackness as the sum of networks spread through a broad range of geographic locations, or the accumulated narratives circulated therein, then blackness located outside of the Western hemisphere "does not strike one as odd or marginal" (2013: 222). And yet, close reading reveals that Wright draws a taken-for-granted parallel between blackness and African-ness, and hence her critical argument ironically endorses the principal axiom offered by the epistemology that she aims to challenge. No matter how many lines and arrows make up the circuits of blackness, and how complex and dense are the networks being created, grounding it once more with a specific point of origin also limits its scope. Whereas we see the promise embedded in postwar epistemology, we seek to take it one step further by negating this perceived common denominator, apparently laying in the foundation of blackness. The chapters in this book not only complicate original Afrocentric experiences of blackness, but they also extend the horizons of blackness well beyond the connection between blackness and African diasporic experiences.

Blackness in Israel

Despite its manifestations in everyday life, and its dissemination in both colloquial and academic discourse, blackness in Israel so far has remained underestimated and mostly undertheorized.[1] This is not to suggest that scholars have ignored blackness altogether but, rather, to claim that the notion of blackness is often echoed through discussions on associated topics like race and racism (Yona and Shenhav 2008), diaspora and migration (Markowitz 2004), ethnicity (Khazzoom 2003), and visibility (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2010). In other words, while blackness has been acknowledged, it has also been relegated to the status of an epiphenomenon, as an offshoot of ethnic or race related issues. Grounding studies of blackness as its own central premise allows us to consider its current social and political import, as well as its theoretical potency.

Indexed by physical features that stand out from those of the dominant society, blackness harks back to the complementary and often unmarked category of *whiteness* (Ahmed 2007). It is the very transparency of whiteness that enables it, and the qualities associated with it, to be accepted as a matter of norm and to operate as an invisible mechanism for the differential distribution of social privileges. This perspective has been applied by many scholars to depict the social stratification in Israel between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews, on the one hand, and between Jewish and non-Jewish populations, on the other hand. However, Israel provides a conundrum in that regard since whiteness has never been established as a self-evident category in local society and cannot be attributed in an unproblematic manner, not even to Jews of European background who represent the political, economic, and social elite of the country. While in Europe, Jews were considered the antithesis of local whites through an Orientalizing framework. Like other "Others" in the European context Jews could be seen first and foremost as a metaphor, a reference against which dominant host societies constructed their own sense of superiority (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993). This stigmatization, which served as the

foundation for racial doctrines and antisemitism, led (among other things) to the eventual founding of the Zionist Movement and the idea of Jewish repatriation to the land of Israel in the form of a European-like modern nation.

For leading Zionist thinkers, life in Europe brought about the physical, cultural, and moral degeneration of the Jewish people. Driven as they were to renew the historic alliance between Jews and their ancestral land, early Zionists rejected European body-aesthetics to embrace the model provided to them by biblical images and local Arabs in Palestine whose appearance and habits seemed to offer a link to antiquity (Shapira 2012). More than anyone else it was Max Nordau, a medical doctor and a former student of Cesare Lombroso, who fused his teacher's eugenic ideas to the Zionist project. Rehabilitation of the Jewish mind and body, according to Nordau, entailed radical change in ecological conditions, i.e. the replacement of "the darkness of our sunless homes [in Europe]" with hard labor in the open air in Palestine (quoted in Gluzman 1997: 19). This imagined process of collective healing was to be indicated, among other aspects, by the darkening of the once-pale skin. Theodor Herzl, in his utopian novel *Altneuland*, repeated this motif so as to emphasize the desired transformation ("that seem so miraculous") from weak pale European boys into "strong tall men *whose face are suntanned*" (quoted in Gluzman 1997: 154, emphasis added).[2]

Not unlike other national projects, Zionism harnessed eugenic-based ideas in an effort to construct its own national "chosen body" (Weiss 2002). However, unlike other European nations, Germany and Sweden for example, where eugenic ambitions constituted a national ideal type associated with ultra-whiteness (Miller 2017), Zionism deliberately drew on a model that is other-than-white. Unlike European Jews who immigrated to the United States, and whose successful assimilation to mainstream American society entailed their collective "bleaching" (Brodkin 1998), Zionists in Israel swapped European stigmas of their nonwhiteness with a configuration of the suntanned image of the indigenous biblical Canaanite they wished to become. Regardless of any orientalist perceptions that may be attributed to Israeli culture and politics, a tanned skin tone has always remained and accepted as "normal" in Israeli society. If the Zionist *Sabra* protagonist lost some of its appeal in the course of the last 50 years, then the aesthetic codes associated with it have not.

Blackness and Mizrahi Jews

Symbolism infused in shades of skin color betrays Israelis' ambivalence not only toward Europe but also toward the Levant and "the orient." This dynamic reveals how the discourse of skin tone was adopted with regard to the marginal position occupied by Palestinians and Jews from Islamic countries in Israel. The master narrative of the Zionist project, constructed from a European point of view, allotted Mizrahi Jews a secondary position in it. Unlike European Zionists, Mizrahi Jews were less affected by the intellectual and ideological winds of a secular nationalism or socialism, and instead based their idea of a homecoming to Israel on religious sentiments (Shohat 1997b, Shenhav 2006).[3] As such, many

Mizrahi newcomers did not share some of the core values that afforded one social prestige in Israel; this was compounded by the heavy orientalist gaze cast upon them by their European neighbors who perceived the cultural heritage of the Mizrahi as a signifier for incompetence, laziness, and backwardness. Subjected to discriminatory state policies, and without an effective social network, Mizrahim were left to their own devices and forced into the country's peripheries, where the foundations for a local working class was laid. The eventual division of labor and class between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi citizens was often explained by means of differential access to modern knowledge and professional skills (e.g. Eisenstadt 1967; Shokeid 1971). The differences between them, however, was often imagined to be essential and at times were indexed by physical traits. Journalist Arie Gelblum's early depiction of life in the Ma'abara (transition camp) became particularly (in) famous in that regard:

> This is a people whose primitivity sets a record, their level of education borders on total ignorance, and yet worse is their lack of ability to absorb anything spiritual. For the most part they are only a tad better than the general level of the[ir] Arab, Negro and Berber neighbors. (…) In the Africans' living quarters in the camps you will find filth, card playing for money, drunkenness, and prostitution. … These ways of life the Africans carry with them to where they are settled, and there is no wonder that a wave of crime is rising in the country.
>
> (Gelblum 1948, quoted in Chetrit 2010: 33)

Gelblum does not refer explicitly to color but his repeated reference to people of the Maghreb as "Africans" implies blackness. The comparison he makes between them and their "Negro neighbors" makes the association with blackness even clearer.

Similar cases of glossing over the identity, social class and level of education of Jews from the Middle East, and pejoratively casting them as "Africans," can be found in earlier writings in reference to Yemenite Jews during the pre-state era. In an effort to reduce Jewish settlers' dependence on Arab labor, leaders of the Jewish Yishuv came up with the idea of promoting an organized immigration of Yemenite Jews, whom they saw as "natural workers" at "the same backward level as the [Arab] fallahin" (Shohat 1997a: 50). Shohat quoted comments made by Shmuel Yavnieli, an emissary for the Zionist movement sent to Yemen in 1911 to explore the local Jewish community and select migrants who seemed adequate laborers. In his reports Yavnieli goes into detail about the physical appearance and properties of different Yemenite communities, an indication of a "quasi-eugenic selection" policy (ibid.). The actual division of labor on the basis of ethnicity not only ran against the official Zionist narrative of equality but, as Shohat demonstrates, was sometimes expressed openly through racialist discourse. This was the case of Arthur Ruppin who said of Yemenite laborers that "recognizable in them is the touch of Arab blood. … [T]hey have a very dark color" (ibid.). Indeed, if the imagined blackness of the Maghreb Jews was denoted by their

"African" origin, then Yemenites' dark complexion sometimes classified them in Israel as *Cushim*.[4]

What brought blackness into the limelight in the study of Israeli society was the growing influence of the postcolonial approach starting from the late 1980s. Ella Shohat's seminal essay quoted above, for example, offered a revision of the historiography of ethnic relations in Israel and examined the Zionist project first and foremost as a colonial endeavor lead by European Jews, one in which Arabs (Jews and non-Jews) occupy the position of oppressed communities (see also Khazzoom 2003). Although she is informed mainly by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Shohat's title *–Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish victims–* makes a deliberate reference to Malcolm X's famous speech *The Ballot or the Bullet*. In that regard, Shohat creates a linkage between Mizrahi Jews and African Americans by providing an alternative to the official integrationist/assimilationist ethos and discourse. In postcolonial analysis the apparent dichotomy between black and white is implied in a Straussurian sense as a "good to think with" categories, that is a model that can shed light on social relationships in which differences are less strict. Yhouda Shenhav (2006) for example finds Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* to be a relevant model for how disempowered people, like Mizrahim in Israel, leverage denigrating stereotypes imposed on them as a strategy for inclusion and empowerment (see also Shoshana this volume). Following Homi Bhabha, local advocates of the postcolonial and post-structural approaches illuminated how intuitive references to skin color in everyday discourse may affirm but also destabilize essential differentiations between marked and unmarked categories, in part by unveiling otherwise transparent privileged positions (Sasson-Levi 2008).

In a different theoretical application of the postcolonial approach Sami Shalom Chetrit (2010) offers a more elaborate comparison between African Americans' struggle and that of Mizrahim in Israel. In his essay Chetrit employs empirical analysis rooted in theories of protest movements and collective contention actions to show similarities in both the social backgrounds for protests and the strategies that were eventually taken. Based on this empirical approach Chetrit dubs Ashkenazim and Mizrahim in the subtitle of his essay as "*White Jews, Black Jews*."[5] Since they draw on similar perceptions of the black/white color-line as a stable and enduring social construct, the scholars presented above paradoxically tend to validate the sense of essentialism they aimed to question. Their politically driven analysis diverges from Homi Bhabha's plea that inspires them, to see how the mutual correspondence between black and white creates different shades of gray.

Blackness and Arabs

Beyond intra-Jewish relations, blackness has long been adopted to refer to the position of Palestinians in Israel as part of a larger framework of race-like relations between Jews and Arabs. Like the Mizrahi case, here too attention to the symbolic aspect of color did not originate in academia. Honaida Ghanim's chapter in this volume shows how, since the 1950s, under the trauma of the 1948 Nakba, Palestinian national poets repeatedly depicted Palestinian subjects as black or

blackish, while the Jewish presence was described in terms of whiteness. Colors are thus used, as Ghanim explains, to index the dichotomy between indigenous subjects, embodying the darkness of their soil, and the colonial power whose imagined whiteness denotes strangeness. It is important to note that "blackness" is not associated in this example with the genealogy of an African diaspora nor is it deployed to mobilize a sense of political affinity to other colonized people; rather, it denotes national exclusivity. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1960s, the potential link between Palestinians and African Americans was made explicit when organizations of the extended *Black Power Movement* in the United States emphasized their support of third-world people's struggle for independence, including Palestinians (Fischbach 2018). Inspired by the successful assimilation of American Jews into the American white society (Brodkin 1998, Forman 1998) black activists established the equation between Zionism, colonialism and whiteness in opposition to its black – or black-like – victims in the United States and the Middle East. Although the Black/Palestinian analogy should be understood first and foremost in the context of African Americans' effort to align their local struggle within global anti-colonial endeavors, Arab and Palestinian spokespersons responded positively and sometimes identified themselves as black (e.g. Fischbach 2018: 138).

As Honaida Ghanim's chapter reveals, the utopian dream of a Palestinian redemption dissipated mainly after the defeat of the Arab forces in the 1967 War, and Palestinian citizens of Israel started to invest more in their civil status. Their references to blackness waned during this period too. In other words, at very same time that the flourishing Palestinian nationalism found its affinity to black power, blackness as self-representation seemed to lose its appeal among Palestinian citizens in Israel. Whereas Jewish identity remained *the* key for belonging in Israeli society, thus relegating Palestinians to the position of second-class citizens, growing interactions in the shared civil arena made it difficult to tell Jews apart from Arabs based on visual appearance. Similar to the logic that creates boundaries between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, one can argue that perceived similarities and differences between Jews and Arabs today are based, to a large extent, on one's own socioeconomic position (e.g. profession, modes of consumption, access to resources, political clout, etc.). Yet, the concomitant aspects of "Israelization" among Palestinian citizens and the struggle for an independent Palestinian state posit Palestinian citizens of Israel in a "double periphery" in both Israeli and Palestinian collectives (Al Haj 2004).

The reality of a developing apartheid in the Palestinian territories and of constant tensions within the Israeli society provides the ideological fodder for connections to be made between blackness and Palestinians on both sides of the green line. Today more than ever the operationalization of blackness, spurred by the proliferation of popular culture and social media, promotes the creation of supra-local networks and provides a platform for new transnational affinities. As many pointed out, during the last ten years hip hop became a prominent means by which Palestinians – rappers and consumers alike – represent themselves as "the" local blacks (Eqeiq 2010, Maira 2008, McDonald 2013, Swedenburg 2013).

Prompted by the conditions of disenfranchisement in which they evolve at home, Palestinians have adopted "black music" as "a cultural vocabulary and historical experience with which to bond and from which to draw elements for [the] local repertoire of resistance" (Aidi 2004: 13). Not unlike other disempowered minorities, Palestinians thus strategically essentialize blackness to express their sense of victimhood. Given the ubiquity of pop culture and the fact that hip hop is indeed practiced in all segments of society, the discourse of victimhood becomes entwined inevitably with contested claims for blackness and with the perceived hierarchy in regards to authenticity and pain (Dorchin 2017).

The associative and strategic paradigm of global colonialism provides an epistemological framework that is hard to dispute. Applied to the arena of international politics and characterized by the massive efforts made by all sides of the Arab/Israeli conflict to influence public opinion, it seems that few are bothered with nuances that might question the validity of this paradigm. In his chapter Michael Fischbach shows how Zionist supporters of Israel negate the representations of Israeli Jews as colonizers by asserting that Jews were historically Levantines and Middle Easterners, and therefore themselves can be considered as "people of color." This tactical maneuver does not challenge the colonial argument itself but only the perceived disposition of actors within it. Second, by featuring the narrative of a homecoming, this propaganda rhetoric endorses the character of Jews as a Semitic "race" and questions their whiteness.

Blackness and Ethiopian Jews

Ethiopian Israelis who made *aliyah* between the late 1970s and early 1990s may remember their initial contact with Israeli society as one compounded by the increasing awareness through the logic of contrast that no other Jew – Mizrahim or Ashkenazim – looked like them. Their arrival galvanized their sense of being black – a racial identity that did not translate directly onto the register of the racialist logic in their native Ethiopia – into a generalized state of hyper racialized self-consciousness (Kaplan 1999, Anteby-Yemini 2005). The phenotypic contrast between Ethiopian Israelis vis-à-vis both Ashkenazim and Mizrahim homogenized Ethiopians – a cohort quite varied in terms of culture, language, region of origin, level of education, and religious practices –into "blacks," that is the ultimate carriers of Jewish otherness. The presence of Ethiopian Jews disturbed established ethno-racial categories; as a result, other Jewish Israelis, including the Mizrahi, thus became more "white" in the process (Salamon 2003). Yemenites, for example, the quintessential Jewish blacks in Israel, have now somewhat "whitened" as racial labels shift through contact between new and former immigrants. Like other Mizrahim, however, they continue to straddle across the internal Jewish black/white divide without being fully white, nor fully black.

To be sure, the transfer of the racialized identity "black" as a symbolic status hallmarked by the Mizrahim onto a racialized Ethiopian Jewish blackness has not erased the stigma associated with the former group. Mizrahim have now moved one step closer to "whites," or in other words to Ashkenazim, not only because

of the social mobility they have experienced in the last 30 years but also by virtue of the presence of Ethiopians who currently occupy the position as the "real" blacks in the Jewish sphere of Israel (Djerrahian 2015). For Ethiopian Israelis, no matter the increasing level of education or the social mobility of some segments of the community, what their skin tone indexes, namely as vestiges of a "primitive" Jewish tribe plucked out of a pre-modern Africa, can never be washed off or "whitened."

It is thus through contrasts between Ethiopian-Israeli blackness and Mizrahi blackness on the one hand, and between Ethiopian-Israeli blackness and Ashkenazi whiteness on the other hand, that the blackness of the most recent cohort from sub-Saharan Africa carries significant implications. Unlike the Mizrahim, Ethiopian Jewish blackness can never be erased or passed onto a darker (i.e. more "backward") Jewish Other (see Djerrahian, this volume). The arrival of the "blackest" of black Jews who were by and large from a rural African provenance, farmers with rudimentary tools, indexed physical markers of differences that came to stand together with other references of stigma like religious authenticity, ethnicity, class, gender, culture, etc. This is precisely how a variety of stigmas (ethnocultural, linguistic, religious) ascribed to Ethiopian Jews have bled into the stigma of race and an experience of blackness that is an offshoot rather than a replica of Mizrahi blackness. Race and blackness thus epitomize and come to stand for a spectrum of differences that are not necessarily racial *per se*. These differences operationalize a racial discourse among Ethiopian Jewish Israelis that articulate a clear separation between *schorim* (blacks) and *levanim* ("whites"), or in other words between Ethiopian Jews and the rest of Israeli Jewish society.

As is the case of immigrant children in receiving countries around the world, the first generation of Ethiopian-Israeli youngsters and teenagers born in Israel felt a severe disconnection from their family's frameworks of belonging (Djerrahian 2015). For some youths, the past in Ethiopia is a deep source of embarrassment and shame, considering it a hindrance to their present-day realities as Israelis. Instead, they selected usable information about their Ethiopian heritage highlighted in rap music and reggae, thanks to the Rastafarians' deification of Ethiopia's last emperor, Haile Selassie (Djerrahian 2017). Subtleties like these to be found in the lived realities of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers and youngsters provide the lens for situating their marginalization within existing local racial constructs and global ideas of modern blackness.

Ethiopian Israelis' features such as hair texture, facial features, and skin tone are identified as being "truly" black compared to other forms of Jewish blackness. Such racialized markers of blackness that figure externally, on their bodies, along with their perceived level of civilization upon arrival to Israel and the doubts cast upon the purity of their genealogical lineage as Jews, cue the Ethiopians' distance from the ideal, normative white Jew. However problematic, ascribing Ethiopian Israelis' racial identity as genealogically Jewish gave way to their insertion into the Jewish nation as "black" Jewish citizens of Israel. It is within this framework that parallels are made in academia, without scrutiny in most cases, between "blacks" in the United States and "blacks" (in other words, Ethiopian Jews) in Israel.

Blackness and African descendants

Being recognized officially as Jewish, and therefore as insiders to the national collective, place Ethiopian Jews on a different scale of intimacy compared to non-Jewish African groups who found their way to Israel. Although non-Jewish African groups arrived in different periods and in different circumstances, their visible blackness and non-Jewishness emphasized their illegitimate position in Israeli society beyond their official (il)legal status.

The earliest African diasporic group that arrived to Israel was the African Hebrew Israelite Community (AHIC), often referred to by Israelis as *ha-Cushim ha-Ivryim* ("the Hebrew Cushis") (Markowitz 1996, Michaeli 2000, Singer 2000). Formed by African Americans during the Black Power era, AHIC finds in the Old Testament many indications for their historic connection to biblical Hebrews. Like African American groups that preceded them, the AHIC integrated Afrocentric sentiments with claims to Judaic heritage (Chireau and Deutsch 2000); contrary to other groups however, they embarked, by the late 1960s, on a journey "back home" to Israel. Perhaps because of their limited number (originally, they were a several dozen that grew to several hundreds of members), or their peripheral residency in remote desert towns, the AHIC was tolerated in spite of its illegal status. After decades of living on temporary visas, and occasional deportations, in 2003 the Ministry of Interior granted all community members permanent residency in Israel.

Since the early 1990s Israel experienced a massive influx of Africans from continental Africa in search of work and shelter.[6] Although their immigration was fundamentally illegal – during the 1990s most Africans entered as pilgrims with tourist visas and overstayed – it occurred within the context of Israel's own neoliberal policy to open its gates to labor migrants (Kemp 2004). By the beginning of the new Millennium over 15,000 Africans, coming from some 20 different nations, concentrated mainly in the southern part of Tel Aviv and earned their living by working in housekeeping, nursing, hotels, and restaurant kitchens. Following continual public and political pressures, in 2003 Israel began deporting undocumented laborers in high numbers that nearly wiped out the lively African community in Tel Aviv. Shortly after, however, a different wave of migrants made their way, this time on foot through the Israeli-Egyptian border. Within a few years Tel Aviv, Eilat and other cities witnessed the arrival of thousands of African asylum seekers, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea. Although many of them were legally acknowledged as asylum seekers and granted temporary visas, Israel took practical steps to curb the infiltration and to encourage Africans to leave the country. By the end of 2012 the construction of a 240-kilometer-long physical barrier on the border with Egypt was built preventing infiltration almost entirely, and a year later a new "open detention center" was established to keep asylum seekers from city centers. In addition, since 2013 Israel has been promoting a "willingly leaving plan," granting $3,500 and a flight ticket to a third (African) country for those who are willing to leave. Today there are 33,000 African asylum seekers in Israel, about half of which arrived after 2006 (Population and Immigration Authority 2019).[7]

African labor migrants and asylum seekers emerge from different national, cultural and religious backgrounds; as such they seldom tend to think of their skin tone merely as "black" and see it within the sum of other characteristics (Táíwò 2003). For the average Israeli, however, they are perhaps seen to be made from one black fiber. Thus, not unlike Ethiopian Jews, they too have come to "discover" the significance of their blackness once in Israel, as a result of the stigmas imposed on them by locals (Dorchin 2018). In that respect one can understand the difference proposed by Fran Markowitz (this volume) between those who's sense of blackness results from experiences in Israel and those, like the AHIC, who considered themselves "already black."

As the case of Ethiopians and Mizrahim revealed, even if self-identification on the basis of skin tone is in part prompted by the gaze of the local society, it is likely to be adopted as a signifier of uniqueness by those being stigmatized. The phenomenon in which ethnic groups emphasize a sense of a distinguished identity proposes multiculturalism as an alternative ideology for the assimilationist model of a melting pot. What was once tolerated in the case of the AHIC became more problematic with the arrival of African migrants; not only did Africans not make claims about being a part of the extended Israelite collective as the AHIC did, but their larger numbers, their presence amidst Israel's largest urban centers, and their integration into the private sphere of the labor market was experienced by many Israelis as a direct threat to the nation's ethno-demographic character (Sofer 2009).

And yet, a closer look at the identity politics proposed by Africans and the ways in which it is associated with their own discourse of color reveals something more complicated. In spite of all the differences between them, African descendants in Israel, whether Jewish or not, try to mitigate the perceived contradiction between blackness and Israeli-ness. In the case of Ethiopian Israelis, it is the institutionalized national order, that is the Zionist narrative of the "ingathering of the Jewish exiles" that premised their arrival to Israel as yet another "tribe" of the Jewish family. The AHIC, as self-declared Hebrews, proposes an alternative basis for their alliance with the Jewish state, previously depicted by Markowitz et al. (2003) in terms of "soul citizenship." More recent African migrants, unlike Ethiopian Israelis and the AHIC, do not see Israel as their homeland but they too tend to underscore similarities between the history of the Jewish people and their own fate as contemporary exiles (Hankins 2018). In so doing Africans not only "represent the idea of African belonging within Jewish Israel" (Hankins 2018: 194–195), but also endorse the national order and official authority of the state.

In combining differential identity politics and affiliation with the Jewish nation-state, Africans demand Israelis to confront racist dimensions embedded in their national culture as well as the latent aspects of victimhood that fuels it.

Structure of the book

The book is divided into four sections, each illuminating a different aspect of blackness in Israeli society. The first section sets the background for understanding

the complicated position of blacks and blackness in Israel and in Jewish culture. This section provides the context against which the rest of the chapters are read. In the first chapter Abraham Melamed examines the representation of black people in Hebraic and Jewish sources from biblical times to the early modern era across various genres. In these writings, black people signified an "inferior other" for those who were themselves considered to be inferior "others" in their respective societies. The question of otherness is once again approached in Nurit Kirsh's chapter from the realm of genetic studies. Discussion in that chapter derives from the imperative question of whether or not Jews can be seen as a distinguished "race," and if so, what this implies for people who are black and Jewish. Kirsh's persuasive conclusion is that while scientific evidence may support the inclusion of groups whose Jewish identity has already been acknowledged already acknowledged, it cannot pave the way for those who are not considered Jews by Rabbinic or national logic.

The second section provides case studies based on three segments of the Jewish population in Israel whose members identify themselves with or as blacks, or identified as such by others. Gabriella Djerrahian and Omer Keynan look at young Ethiopian Jewish adults and their incorporation of new styles and new technologies by which they construct a sense of a black community in Israel. By focusing on ideas of race and blackness (Djerrahian) and social media (Keynan), they show how Ethiopians redefine, on their own terms, the supranational aspect of blackness and what it means to be Ethiopian-Israeli. Oz Frankel and Miranda Crowdus' chapters focus on two different moments in the history of Mizrahim in Israel. Frankel's chapter examines the Israeli Black Panthers Movement and considers it a watershed event in the normalization of a racially informed imagination among Jewish ethnic groups. Crowdus focuses on Mizrahi musicians whose selective use of blackness in popular genres provides a means to claim their parents' Middle Eastern heritage. These two chapters reflect the ongoing process of incorporating American and/or global cultural references to Israel during the last 50 years. Finally, Nissim Leon's chapter explores Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) society in Israel as "a different hue of blackness." Indeed, as he clearly shows, in this case blackness refers to a visibly encoded dress code and not to phenotype. Yet, for the mainstream public this blackness once again denotes aspects of marginality and backwardness.

Realizing that "blacknessess" differ from one another, the third section highlights cases in which different manifestations of blackness are contested. Avi Shoshana revisits blackness associated with Ethiopian Jews and Mizrahim by looking at adolescents from these two populations who attend the same boarding schools. Shoshana shows that while both groups feature "their" blackness, this is evaluated differently by both the youth themselves and the professionals working at these educational institutions. Sarah Hankins' chapter focuses on the population of African refugees residing in Tel Aviv and the different approaches manifested by Israelis toward their presence. Attending to an "urban soundscape" dense with music and media, political activism, work and leisure, Hankins follows the momentary contacts and iterative arrangements of sound, image, text, body and affect that (re)produce Tel Aviv as variously "Israeli" and "African" terrain.

Solidarity and separation are also the subject of Uri Dorchin's chapter in reference to African labor migrants in Tel Aviv. The ethnography that presets his chapter takes place in two prominent and competing dance clubs, operated by and for undocumented African Aliens. These clubs are presented as key locations for cultivating a sense of mutuality among labor migrants themselves, and between migrants and Israelis. Fran Markowitz's chapter closes this section by representing the AHIC as an exceptional case of a group whose sense of blackness was well established before their arrival to Israel. In fact, as Markowitz argues, the proximity that AHIC members recognize between blackness – as an accomplished subject position – and the history of Israelites in the region motivated them to repatriate to what they consider their homeland.

The closing section looks at how discourses and representations of blackness entwines into the national conflict between Palestinians and Jews, and how it informs questions of belonging to the land. Honaida Ghanim interprets various cultural texts produced by different generations of Palestinians in Israel. The different subject positions taken by Palestinians in Israel, whether against or as part of Israeli society with regard to their citizenship, illuminate the symbolic meaning of color and the changing values of blackness. In Michael Fischbach's chapter we can see once again how strongly blackness is associated with issues of indigeneity that bear upon the contested claims to belonging and ownership. Fischbach, however, gives us a glance at Israel from afar, focusing on the working of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian devotees (mainly) in the United States. He shows that, in contrast to the accepted narrative that presents Zionism as a part of a global white colonial endeavor, pro-Israeli partisans hinge their claims on the Semitic background of Jews to defy the sense of whiteness attributed to Zionism. According to these contenders, it is the virtues of non-whiteness that bespeak the Jews' birthright to live in Israel.

This book aims to explore the versatility of blackness in Israel, its various manifestations and the various meanings attributed to it by different people at different times and from differential positioning. Instead of proposing a clear answer to the question of what blackness is we suggest an alternative question of what blackness *may be*, or what it has become in different contexts and circumstances. And yet, since these various "blacknesses" take place within the demarcated boundaries of Israel – the land and the state – they do not exist in silos, separated from one another. Contrary to this, very often they encounter, correspond and shape one another. It is within this context that we can acknowledge the continual dynamics and potential elasticity of blackness in Israel.

Notes

1 A quick *Google Scholar* search combining the keywords *Blackness* and *Israel* reveals not even one title. A search based on the combination of "Black" and "Israel" prove to be more fruitful but here too, once nonrelevant subjects are filtered (e.g. Black Friday, Black September, Black Mold Disease, etc.), one remains with a meager list of no more than few dozens.

2 According to Gluzman, Herzl and Nordau rejected the anti-Semitic presumption about "racial" essence of Jews and explain it as a result of the degenerate conditions in the diaspora. "Hence, the immigration to Palestine brings with it an immediate transformation of the body and temperament of the Jewish subject" (ibid. See also Gluzman 2007).
3 From this reason, the Zionist movement(s) found it difficult to take root in Middle Eastern and North African countries, and became more relevant only toward the end of the Second World War, and within the new condition formed in the region after the 1948 War in Israel (Shenhav 2006).
4 A popular kids song, dating from the 1940s and acknowledged as a "folk song," opens with the lyrics "Pa'am hayiti be-Teiman; sham ra'iti Cushi katan" ("Once I was in Yemen, where I met a small Cushi").
5 Chetrit's book first saw light in Hebrew in 2004. It is only the English version, however, that feature the subtitle "White Jews, black Jews."
6 Differentiation between labor migrants and asylum seekers is complicated. Since it bears practical and political implications, it has soon became an issue debated in the public sphere, media, and academia (Sofer 2009).
7 This number does not include those who were born in Israel during that time.

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Part I

Background

Predicaments of Jewishness and blackness

1 The image of the black in Jewish culture

An overview

Abraham Melamed

Blessed art thou O God who hast not made me an idolater, and not a barbarian, or a black (negro) or even an Indian.[1]

This paper will offer an overview on the image of the black in the Hebraic and Judaic sources, as it evolved in biblical and rabbinic literature, until early modern times. It will focus upon the mechanisms by which an ethno-religious minority group, considered by the dominant majority to be the inferior "other," identified its own inferior other, in an attempt to enhance its own superior image, and distance itself from those who are of truly inferior humanity. This especially since the Jews themselves were depicted as dark-skinned, or swarthy, by majority cultures; thus, the urge to distance themselves from those who are truly black and present themselves as white.

The dread of blackness

In Western culture, including Jewish culture, there is a primordial associative distinction between white and black as colors. Black is associated with negative phenomena, as something dark, dirty and ugly, thus threatening and repulsive. By contrast, white has a wealth of positive associations with cleanliness, purity (*Song of Songs* 6: 10), lightness, clarity (*Joel* 1: 7), thus necessarily beautiful, good and hopeful. The black garment symbolizes mourning and widowhood, or moral baseness (for instance, *Babylonian Talmud* (*BT*) *Kiddushin* 40a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 9: 42). White, on the other hand, represents purity and virginity, hence is proper for a bride at the wedding canopy and for Hassidic Jews on Shabbat and holidays. The black-plumed raven, not to mention the black cat, are signs of evil and impending doom, while the white dove represents peace and hope. These are just a few examples; There is an enormous reservoir of examples, from various cultures and periods – since antiquity until modernity, attesting to the power of this color symbolism (Melamed, 2003).

Thus, activities considered to be bestial, such as sexual intercourse, should be performed only in the darkness of night (*Ruth Rabbah* 2: 17; *BT Pesahim*, 112b), hidden from public view. In the midrash on the sin of Ham (*Bereshit Rabbah*,

36–37), the *locus classicus* for the Jewish and Christian treatment of the image of the black, the punishment of Canaan for castrating his father Noah, is said to be the change of his skin color to black. This is explained by the assertion that the deed prevented Noah from having sexual intercourse, which is supposed to take place out of the public view, i.e. in darkness. The punishment, which fitted the crime, blackened the skins of the sinner and his descendants forever. Blackness is described as a punishment for a mortal sin and is directly associated with sexual depravity.

Likewise, the name of Lilith, the archetypical wicked women, is derived from the Hebrew word for night, *Lailah*, while the harlot seducing the innocent lad in *Proverbs* 7:9, does so in the darkness of night. Shakespeare describes his black mistress thus: "…as black as hell, as dark as night" (Sonnet 147). Here we can find already the connection between racial and gender stereotypes, which enhanced each other.

This mechanism of color symbolism is a byproduct of the primordial fear from the dangers of darkness, and the hope the light of day brings with it. This cluster of associations was superimposed by people of lighter skin color on those of a darker shade, in order to establish their superiority. Hellenistic and Roman authors directly identified black skin color with the darkness of night. Blacks, usually *niger* in Latin, were called *nocticolor*, i.e. having the color of night, or *noctis alumnus*, the adopted son of the night (Snowden 1970, Thompson 1989). Africa, the native continent of the blacks, was associated with the blackness of night. According to a story in *BT Tamid* 32b, the elders of the Negev tried to persuade Alexander the Great not to invade Africa, since it lies "beyond the mountains of darkness." The Roman Historian Pliny called these mountains *Mons Nomine Niger*, a dangerous region, difficult to cross (Dan, 1969: 19). This mechanism was also used by people of so-called "swarthy" skin color in order to prove their superiority over the true blacks and associate themselves with those who are truly white. The Jewish case is a typical example of this phenomenon.

As a consequence, black skin and the physical features that generally go with it – kinky hair, a broad nose and flashy lips – were considered ugly, thus evil and frightening, while light skin and the hair and body features that generally go with it (preferably blonde hair and blue eyes), were considered beautiful, even divine. Greco-Roman culture saw a link between physical beauty and moral perfection. The same attitude can be found in rabbinic culture. A person described as "white," would be necessarily described as beautiful, good and cultured, while the "black" would be described in opposite terms: ugly, evil, and primitive. The proportion of melanin in his/her skin cells became the touchstone of the individual's human quality.

It is no accident that in most so-called "white" cultures, blacks were mostly designated by their skin color: "Ethiopian" in Greek means one whose skin shines. They were called *niger* in Latin, "negro" in English, *noir* in French, *schwarz* in German and Yiddish, and so forth. Even now, when the old Anglo-American "negro" was abandoned, due to the negative connotations attached to it, and replaced by "black," which does not have these connotations, and even acquired

a positive meaning in contemporary American culture ("black is beautiful!"), but still designates the same thing. Although terms relating to the black's original geographic location, such as "African," or "Afro-American," are also current now. Skin color apparently became the main mean of identification because it was so convenient.

The case of Hebrew is different; It did not designate the blacks by skin color, but by ethno-geographic location. The biblical word for a black *cushi*, which has been used until modern times, means the descendants of Cush, son of Ham, son of Noah, and their land was called *Cush*, after him, apparently somewhere in Africa. His skin color is not even mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, nor were the original connotation of the name negative. Only much later, in rabbinic culture, was *cushi* unambiguously linked with blackness, and acquired the negative connotations that have remained with it ever since. Hence, the term *cushi* mostly disappeared from the vocabulary of contemporary Hebrew speakers, and the word *shahor*, i.e. black, replaced it. A once popular Hebrew nursery tune, "*Cushi* little doggy," about a black dog with this dubious pet name, is no longer sung, and the once popular children story "Ten little *Cushim*," is no longer told. Belatedly, Hebrew went over to the terminology of Western cultures, and now designate a person of African ancestry by skin color – with all its negative primeval connotations. However, in contemporary culture these associations are changing, black as a color is undergoing a gradual rehabilitation.

The swarthy Jew and his black counterpart

The same psychological processes that operated on the image of the black other in other cultures, operated on the Jews. Frequently similar negative traits were attributed to them. The Roman Historian Tacitus famously presents the Jews as wallowing in superstition, sexual promiscuity and idleness. He describes them as ignorant and base (*Iudaeorum mos absurdus sordidsque*). Ironically, the Latin *sordes*, which indicates baseness here, later came to signify a dark complexion (Stern 1980). These are the very faults attributed to blacks for generations, even by Jews. Particularly prominent are the superior sexual powers that both Jews and blacks were said to possess, making them fearsome competitors for the ruling white male. Paradoxically, the inferior other, whether woman, blacks, gentile or Jew – depending on the designator, was always identified as having sexual drive more potent than the one who considered himself superior, thus had to be contained and removed.

Moreover, a European tradition, dating back to the Middle Ages, maintained that Jews were semi-black, or swarthy. Christian iconography frequently shows the contrast between the black figure of the synagogue and the white one of the Church (Gilman 1986). Since Satan was depicted as black, and the Jews were perceived to be his allies, they were also depicted as black. What was seen as their physical ugliness (the "long" nose, the "flat" foot, the "hairy" body, and so on), were considered to be merely component of their "blackness" (Gilman 1994; Eilberg-Schwartz 1992). As early as Hellenistic literature, the Jews were described

as a band of lepers (having defective skin), who were expelled from Egypt (which means black, since Egypt was son of Ham who became black, according to the Midrashic legend). This culminated in the Nazi race theory, which claimed that the Jewish "race" was created by miscegenation with blacks during the Hellenistic period, hence their similar swarthiness, ugly physiognomy and dubious character traits (Gilman 1992).

Under such circumstances, the Jewish other strived to distinguish himself from the black other, as different thus superior. Within the "nonwhite" framework of otherness, there evolved a hierarchic order of the others other.[2] The black was identified as their inferior other, in order to separate themselves from him, and show their own relative proximity, if not superiority, to the fair-skinned ruling group: they had, after all, received a unique revelation, and therefor theirs is an older, more developed culture.

That being so, the Jew always strived to identify himself with the dominant white male, even to portray himself as his superior, inter alia, to maintain the distinction between himself and his own other, the inferior black. There is a tense ambivalence here between feelings of superiority and inferiority. Even the rabbinic scholar, with his sense of superiority as the one chosen by divine providence, identified he who is by nature a master, as "German" (*Bereshit Rabbah*, 76: 4) i.e. a white European male. He is full of admiration for the handsome sons of Japhet (identified by the sages with the Greeks): "Japhet and his sons are *all* white (*levanim*) and handsome (*yafim*)" (Rabbi Eliezer 1963: 830).[3] Being 'white' and 'handsome' are presented as equivalents. It is emphasized that they are all handsome, no exception. Such pronouncements stand out sharply against the rabbinic prohibition to praise the gentiles for their beauty (*BT Avodah Zarah*, 19b–20a). The very fact that such utterances were strictly forbidden, only proves how widespread they were in reality; one does not prohibit a nonexistent phenomenon.

An outstanding example appears in the medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemic literature. The very fact that the authors found it necessary to confront, again and again, the Christian claims that Jews were dark-skinned, and therefor ugly, in comparison with the fair and handsome Christians, shows how much the subject bothered them. They too seem to have accepted as an empirical fact that Jews had darker skins and internalized the notion that dark was ugly and degenerate in comparison with the beauty and goodness of being white. The great exegete Rashi interpreted the verse in *Isaiah* 52: 14: "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men," as follows:

> When many nations looked upon them in their abasement and said, why is the appearance [of Israel] thus marred, they saw how much darker (*hashuch to'aram*) they were than other people, which our own eyes behold.

Rashi's explanation is theological; the darkening of the Jews skin color was part of the punishment they suffered in exile as a result of their disobedience to God.

The assumption that the Jews were originally white and handsome finds different forms of expression in the course of Jewish cultural history. The desirable woman in the *Song of Songs* is "fair as the sun, clear as the moon" (6: 10), while here beloved is described as "white [and ruddy]" (5: 10). Later on, when the whole *Song of Songs* was interpreted as a metaphor for the relationship between Israel and God, this received a metaphorical meaning: whiteness signifies Israel's original perfect condition, while the blackening of the skin signifies their sins.

In a midrash in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 13: 10, we find: "'thou art all fair, my love, and there is no spot in thee' (*Song of Songs* 4: 7), which speaks of Israel." Being fair was considered equivalent to being white. The late-fifteenth-century exegete, Isaac Abravanel, interpreted the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah's descent to Egypt (Genesis 12: 11) accordingly. Following the sages, he explains Abraham's description of Sarah as "fair to look upon" as: "a woman fair to look upon […], because her appearance was here whiteness (*ha-loven shelah*)." That is why Abraham feared that the black, ugly Egyptians would kill him and take her.

The sages depicted the dichotomy between Jacob the "good" (*tam*), who lives in tents, and Esau, the "wicked," a bestial "man of the field" (Genesis 25: 27) by means of the primordial distinction between light and darkness: "And God called the light day; this is Jacob. And the darkness he called night; this is Esau" (*Bereshit Rabbah*, 2: 4). Abravanel translated this distinction into the difference in skin color. He identifies Esau, the archetypical father of Edom, i.e. the Christians, not as white, but as ruddy, while Jacob, who is Israel, is said to have white skin. The difference in external appearance is perceived as expressing the essential difference in their internal quality (Abravenel 1979).

The original color of the skin of Israel, then, was "white," according to this widespread tradition. Just as the old prayer says: "For our sins we were exiled from our land," so our skin was darkened. The punishment is both in the geographical sphere and in the skin color. When the people of Israel will repent and return to their land they will become "white" again. The link between skin color change and geographic location is connected to the theory of climatic influences. Since the land of Israel was considered to be located in the ideal fourth temperate climate the return to the land will also restore their original skin color (Melamed 2016).

Thus, Jewish culture had to cope not only with the primordial fear of darkness, and the metaphorical association with people who have "black" skin color, but also with the old-age white European association of the Jews with swarthiness. They made great effort to dissociate themselves from this dubious connection and prove the opposite: they are not only completely unrelated to the despised blacks, God forbid. On the contrary, they are the true "white" humans, at least in their inner essence, thus superior to the "white" Europeans, whom they tried to emulate in actual reality.

In the biblical and rabbinic traditions

The Hebrew Bible depicts "black" (*Cushi*) people as other and different, who live in remote places, "Beyond the rivers of *Cush*" (*Isaiah* 18: 1), but rarely as inferior.

This is clear from Jeremiah's familiar utterance: "Can the black (*cushi*) change his skin?" (13: 23), as well as "Are ye not as children of the black (*cushi'im*)?" (*Amos* 9: 7). It does use the archetypical dichotomy, identifying darkness as negative and light as positive, but nowhere is this dichotomy projected upon dark-skinned people. The racist stereotype of the black does not appear here. It was later superimposed upon the biblical sources by rabbinic sages and medieval commentators, who projected their own biases upon it, in order to give in canonic legitimacy.

The most influential example of this phenomenon is the sages' allegorically interpretation of *Song of Songs* (1: 5–7). There is indeed ambivalence here as to the aesthetic value of darker skin color, but it relates to excessive tan, rather than skin naturally dark; there is no reference here to black people whatsoever. Moreover, the heroine, a shepherd-girl, boasts: "I am black and comely" (*shehorah ani ve-navah*), which practically sounds like the modern battle-cry: "black is beautiful!." "Black" appears here as completely equivalent to "comely." Later on, she explains that her swarthiness (*sheharhoret*) was caused by the fact that her brothers forced her to tend to their flock in the field, under the fierce sun, instead of taking care of her own interests, at home, apparently, shielded from the sun. The implication is that excessive tan is less beautiful then her natural lighter skin shade, but still she is proud of it. She addresses here the so-called "daughters of Jerusalem," who mocked her for her swarthiness, creating a contrast between the "white" city girls, and the tanned country girls. The debate between them concerns the aesthetic value of pale skin color vis-à-vis tanned skin, not white versus black.

The rabbinic sages interpreted the love story of the *Song of song* as an allegory on the relationship between God and Israel. In every nuance of the story they identified allegorical meaning. They interpreted her being "black" literally, disregarding the fact that the text relates to tan, not black skin color. They read the verse as "I am black *but* comely," assuming that there could be no equivalence between the two, since "black" is ugly, thus inherently contradictory to "comely." The Hebrew syllable *ve*, which literary means "and," was interpreted as "but," in order to create this dichotomy (Shir ha-Shirim 1: 35–36).[4] Just like the Shulamit, Israel turned "black," thus ugly and debased, but will turn "white" again, when they will again shield themselves from the sun, i.e. reject material needs, and repent. Blackness is punishment!

There is an abundance of examples for this tendency in rabbinic literature. It was influenced by current tendencies in the surrounding Roman-Hellenistic culture which the sages were well acquainted with. While ancient Greek culture had a neutral-descriptive attitude toward blacks, just like the Hebrew Bible, the Roman-Hellenistic attitude was not "racial" in modern terms, but definitely stereotypical, influenced by color symbolism and the emergence of black slavery in the Roman empire.[5] The sages were influences by these tendencies, and the fact that the phenomena of black slavery penetrated Jewish society. Their tendency was more extreme than the Romans', presumably influenced by their psychological need to defend their own superior identity in a dominant culture which treated them as inferior others, almost like the blacks.[6]

In Halakhot appearing in the *Babylonian Talmud* (*BT*), the black appears first in a list of deviant humans, the sight of whom requires one to recite a certain blessing, or those who are disqualified for certain functions because of their defects. In *BT Berakhot* we find:

> If one sees a Black (*shahor*), a very red or very white person (albino), a hunchback, a dwarf or a dropsical person, he says: Blessed be He who makes different creatures. If he sees one with an amputated limb or blind, […] he says: Blessed be the true judge! -There is no contradiction; One blessing is said if he is so from birth, the other if he becomes so. […] Our Rabbis thought: On seeing an elephant, an ape, or a long-tailed ape, one says: Blessed is He who makes different creatures. If one sees beautiful creatures and beautiful trees, he says: Blessed is He who has such in his world.[7]

There is a distinction here between three different blessings said on encountering different types of people, animals and plants. The first blessing may seem neutral, even positive, but the groups linked to it necessarily make it negative. The black appears first among those who are different (*shone*), like albinos, hunchbacks and dwarfs. Their deviance is presented as a negative quality, which places them as an inferior, "abnormal," human group. It is no coincidence that this group includes all those whose complexion does not meet accepted norms. In contradistinction, when seeing "beautiful creatures," such as light skinned humans, one should bless "He who has such in his world." The distinction is clear.

The most important cluster of *midrashim* in which the negative depiction of the blacks received its theological foundation, are those discussing the sin of Ham and the punishment of his son Canaan. This discussion had a profound influence on later attitudes, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The three sons of Noah were identified as forefathers of the three main human groups: Shem, the forefather of the Hebrews, Japheth, the forefather of the Greeks, and the white European at large, and Ham, the forefather of the African blacks (*Genesis*, 10). The various *midrashim* endeavored to explain the fact that Ham, being Noah's son, who was apparently "white," had dark-skinned descendants: Cush and Egypt. They explained this as punishment for Ham's sin, when he saw his father's nakedness. Noah cursed him and said that Ham's son, Canaan, and his descendants, will be punished with everlasting slavery. The authors of the various *midrashim*, who instinctively identified slavery with the blacks, concluded that Ham was punished by turning his skin black, thus his Black African descendants. The punishment was simultaneously in the blackening of their skin and slavery. Both are described here as punishment for a sexual sin, which is based on the instinctive stereotype which assumed that blacks have exceptional sexual potency, and are prone to bestial behavior, thus have to be contained, lest they will endanger the white male's dominance over his females.

The main discussion appears in *Bereshit Rabbah*, 36–37. According to the rational of this *midrash*, Ham was punished for his sin, measure for measure. He disgraced (*bizitah*) his father nakedness, thus his descendants will become humiliated slaves. The motif of the sin of Ham and the punishment of his

descendants became a major theological justification for the claim of everlasting black slavery in Western civilization, up to early modern times.

The medieval view

Medieval Jewish scholars, who were active both in the Muslim and Christian cultural environments, combined their rabbinic heritage with influences from the surrounding cultural milieu. This biased attitude toward the blacks was ingrained in all these cultures.[8] The views of two major medieval Jewish thinkers who were active in the Muslim cultural milieu will be discussed here: Judah ha-Levi and Maimonides. The philosopher's speech, at the beginning of ha-Levi's dialogue *The Kuzari*, represents the Aristotelian-Neo-Platonic scientific views current at this period, which ha-Levi agreed with, by and large. The philosopher claims that every person's character, talents and conduct are determined by a combination of hereditary, astrological and climatological factors. He accordingly distinguishes between two dichotomous groups of the human species, as follows:

> Therefore, every individual on earth has its complete causes; consequently, an individual with perfect causes becomes perfect and another with imperfect causes remains imperfect, e.g. the black (*al habashi*)[9] is fit to receive nothing more than human shape and speech (i.e. intellectual potential) in its least developed form; the philosopher, however, who is equipped with the highest capacity, derives there from moral, intellectual and active advantages, so that he wants nothing to make him perfect.
>
> (Ha-Levi 1969: 28)

The black person appears as the archetype of those at the bottom of the human scale, lacking any intellectual potential. He is presented as the complete antithesis of the philosopher, who alone is capable of intellectual perfection. Since, according to the dominant Aristotelian theory, intellectual potential is what makes one truly human, the lack thereof, puts the black in a subhuman position.

The climate theory also dominated Maimonides attitude toward the blacks. He clearly identified people who inhabit extreme climates – both in the cold north and the hot south – as ugly and intellectually inferior. As we find in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 3: 51:

> Those who are outside the city are all human individuals who have no doctrinal beliefs, neither one based on speculation or one that accepts the authority of tradition; Such individuals are the furthermost Turks found in the remote north, the Blacks (*al sudan*),[10] found in the remote south, […] The status of those is like that of irrational animals. To my mind they do not have the rank of men, but have among the beings a rank lower than the rank of men, but higher than the rank of apes. For they have the external shape

> lineaments of a man and a faculty of discernment that is superior to that of the apes.
>
> (Maimonides 1963: 618–619)

Maimonides did not hesitate to present radical views which did not conform with prevailing views, albeit in an esoteric manner; He was notorious for this.[11] Here, however he followed the normative anthropological view. Maimonides' universal-rationalistic tendencies had their limit. Although his theological and philosophical views were very different from those of ha-Levi, both held the same position as regards the black, whom medieval anthropology considered to be not fully human, existing somewhere in a zoological space between man and ape.

Unlike Jewish scholars who were active in the Muslim milieu, those active in the Latin-Christian environment in the later Middle Ages, where black slavery did not exist until the great geographic discoveries since the late fifteenth century, had virtually no direct contact with blacks.[12] Thus, Jewish scholars active in Provence, Italy and Christian Spain, relied mostly on literary sources: Rabbinic *Midrashim*, science, theology, travel literature and literature, rather than on any personal eyewitness experience. Their interest in this issue was indirect, a byproduct of geo-theological issues, such as the climate theory, the ongoing curiosity considering the whereabout of the lost ten tribes of Israel, and relevant places in biblical and Midrashic commentary. They inherited a rich textual reservoir, from Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources alike, which shaped their views.

Only in Jewish travel literature can we find scattered information concerning encounters with blacks. Eldad ha-Dani (ninth century), was looking for the lost tribes in Africa but found blacks there. He describes them, following the most biased stereotypes:

> And they are black negroes (*chusim shehorim*), so very tall, with no covering upon them, because like beasts they are, and eat human beings.
>
> (Epstein 1884: 23)

The black is depicted as exceptionally tall (Sanders 1978),[13] going about naked, with all the associated sexual connotations, behaving like beasts, and cannibals. To highlight the last point, ha-Dani reports that his travelling companion, a sturdy fellow, was quickly slaughtered and eaten up, while he was fattened up for the slaughter, but managed to outwit his captors and escape (Epstein 1884). The description of the blacks as cannibals is typical of this literary genre (Sanders 1978, Pieters 1992). All serve to emphasize their bestiality, the complete otherness from the rest of humanity. The fact that the writer managed to outwit them shows, in his view, not only his cleverness, but their natural stupidity.

A Similar description appears in the *Itineraries* of Benjamin of Tudela (Christian Spain, twelfth century). Blacks, dwelling somewhere south of Egypt, are described as follows:

> Some are beasts (*behemot*) in all their ways, eating grass […], going about naked in the fields,[14] and, unlike other people, they regard not whether a man lies with his sisters or anyone else. […] And when the people of Assuan come to raid their land, they throw bread and wheat and raisins and figs at them, and after they have eaten, they are taken prisoners and sold as slaves in Egypt and in all the kingdoms around; These are black slaves (*avadim shehorim*), the sons of Ham.
>
> (Asher 1840: 96–97)

The rabbinic designation of the descendants of Ham as condemned to everlasting black slavery, is superimposed on this depiction of the blacks. It seems that ha-Dani's and Benjamin of Tudela's direct encounters with black people did not mitigate their biases but later reinforced them.

In medieval Jewish literature there is an abundance of examples of this type. A common denominator is the tremendous fear the very appearance of a black person created. One story describes a meeting between a man searching for his lost wife, and a black man, in the woods. The black is big, black, hence ugly, arousing terrible fear: "A black (*shahor*) man, very tall and most ugly […] and the man feared and dreaded, for he had seen no one like him." The black is described again and again as "The huge (*gadol me'od*) man," whom "he feared terribly" (Pesach and Iassif 1998). The man meets the black in a great forest after "a six-day journey," and in the end the black leads him to hell. The black's hideous, bestial nature is stressed, linked to a frightening aspect of nature, far away from civilized society.

Likewise, the *Book of the Seeker* (*Sefer ha-Mevakesh*), written by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (Provence, mid-thirteenth century), describes a traumatic dream of a rich man who ignored the spiritual end of human existence:

> He saw himself walking in the desolate wilderness, naked and barefoot, hungry and thirsty. And he was stricken with terror and fear. […] Darker than the night (*hashach mi-sh'hor*) was his visage, his body defiled with filth and upon his shoulders lay a heavy, fatiguing burden. Then two blacks (*cushim*), hideous to see (*mechoar be-to'aro*), ran after him, brandishing spears to run him through. Running desperately away from them, he reached a mountain whose crooked course was covered with snakes. […]. Thence he fell into a death pit […]. Thereupon the man trembled violently and fell from his bed to the ground, wailing loudly.
>
> (Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, 1976: 21)

The dream kept recurring, until a pious man arrived, and interpreted the dream as follows:

> The episode […] signifies that your doom is sealed […] Your naked and barefoot state shows that you have no good deeds to protect you. Your intense hunger and thirst can be attributed to your strong appetite for the accumulation of wealth and delightful pleasures. The blackness of your countenance (*shehor to'archah*) can be understood to mean that your evil deeds will darken

> your face as you die. […] Moreover, the two men who sought to kill you stand for your wicked actions and wicked thoughts which lead you to destruction.
>
> (Ibid.: 22–23)

The poor man repented, and his dream changed accordingly. This time he found himself walking in a beautiful serene garden, were "two man, bright as the sky above (*ke-zohar ha-rakiahi azhiru*)," apparently angels, led him to "a place so completely bathed in light (*orah*) it contained no darkness (*hoshech*), not even a shadow," to paradise (Ibid.).

Skin color appears here as a powerful metaphor for the human condition. The dreamers' skin became filthy and black as an indication of his evil deeds. When he repented, he was led by two bright men, to a place full of light. The two threatening blacks represent perpetual evil. While in the white men's case blackness, i.e. evil, is temporary, and he regained his whiteness when he repented, it is an everlasting condition in the case of the two blacks, their evil is perpetual. The white man's dirty body only contributed to his blackness, and when he cleans himself, i.e. repents, it will become white again. The blacks, however, stay "dirty" forever. The different geographic spaces described here only accentuate the white man's changing situation. His skin becomes black and filthy when he is walking in a desolate wilderness, while when he repents, he finds himself in a serene cultivated garden, full of light. The blacks, however, remain forever in the wilderness. Typical of medieval mythic geography, the blacks are relegated to a no-man's land, remote from cultured society, at the edges of the world, where devils and ghosts dwell (Maimonides 1963, Melamed 1994). This dichotomy is a deeply ingrained metaphor for the changing of the human condition; It will continue to dominate the Western consciousness.[15]

Of special interest are those instances in which black women are described. Here we can find the interaction between sexism and racism brought to the fore; Blackness only reinforces gender stereotypes. *Sefer Ha-Meshalim* (*The Book of Parables*) by the poet Jacob ben Elazar (Christian Spain, early thirteenth century), contains some of the harshest examples of this kind. One story describes the adventures of a hypocritical old man who pretends to be pious, but the author finds out that he is lechers, fornicating with a black female, a fact which only reinforced the author's disdain:

> From her room a woman, all black (*cushit*) came/ Her lips like an ember from the fire/ Her eyes like glowing coals/ Nostrils open wide/ And he said: "Now for all the fornication!"/ And their evil deeds did so enrage me/ I struck and stripped them of their clothes/ I left them naked and despoiled/ Jealous was I of their lustful deeds.
>
> (Ben Elazar 1993: 82)

The act leads to a sharp verbal confrontation between the author and the old adulterer, regarding the relative worth of black and white women, from a purely male vantage point, of course. The author castigates the old man sharply for what he defines as his strange lust for black, meaning ugly, women, whom he prefers

to white ones, who by definition are beautiful. In doing so, he followed the aesthetic ideal normative in Muslim and Jewish Andalusian culture, where a light, pure complexion was considered the first condition for female beauty. The old lecher, however, undermines these accepted norms, exalting the sexual virtues of the black woman. He ridicules the author, whose rejection of the black female is simply the result of ignorance about love-making. In his experience, a black woman is the perfect lover. His response is full of erotic innuendoes:

> Is there no heart for those burning/ By the fig-like gates […] by day my lions would throb/ In secret I bypass the gates/ But they refresh me as a balm/ I learn the cure O ye who burn! [… / Why disdain a beautiful black *(cushit*), not gaze upon her black splendor (*hadrat sheoarhoret*)/ I choose the black and not the white (*barah*)/ Her hue brings to mind a blight (*baheret*).
>
> (Ibid.)

There is a subversive element in the old man's defense of the erotic qualities of the black woman, but still it does follow the old stereotype of the exceptional sexual potency of blacks, which created so much fear and disdain among white spectators.

Against the aged adulterer, the author presents the normative position:

> How can a stinking black girl/ compare to one scented with myrrh? / Pure as a rose in desiring hand/ A joy and beauty to every eye/ For the black woman (*shehorah*) has no mind/ She lures, she roils and she rebels/ Tell each black female (*cushit*) to her face/ Back with you to your native place.
>
> (Ibid.: 136)

The fiery debate was joined by a few white females, who happily participated in the old lecher's fornication, but were aghast by his preference of a black woman over them:

> And they laughed at his long white beard/ They knew not nor understood/ That a white woman (*barah*) was for him as a black (*shehorah*) one/ A black one as a fair (*orah*) one just as good/ His lust for black women – so dark (*afelot*) are they – was not understood.
>
> (Ibid.: 82)

Typically, in their struggle to survive in a male dominated world, these white women attempted to banish the black competition, giving preference to their specific interests, over any kind of supposed female solidarity. To this they added a healthy dose of what we call "ageism" today.

Following the great geographical discoveries

Following the great geographical discoveries, since the mid-fifteenth century, European first came into direct contact with non-European human groups

that were neither white nor Christians. They arrived with the entire system of anthropological associations developed since ancient times, and grafted them onto those people, of dubious humanity in their eyes, whom they encountered. With the appearance of black slavery, especially in British colonies in North America, the enslavement of the blacks received its definitive theological legitimacy from the Midrashic commentary on the punishment of Canaan (Evans 1980, Sweet 1997, Schorsch 2004).

Jewish scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries followed suit. A few Jewish scholars of the late fifteenth century already related to this encounter. Abravanel disproved the stereotypical view that black women tend naturally to promiscuity, claiming that his observation of black slaves in Portugal, before the expulsion of the Jews (1492), showed that blacks behaved in this regard just like any other people:

> And rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra wrote […] that the women of the blacks (*neshei ha-cushi'im*) are promiscuous (*hefker*) and not one knows his father. […] I know not who told [him] of this custom he recalled, […] because in my native land [=Portugal] I saw many people whose women belong only to themselves, unless their enemies' rule over them as prisoners, and in this they are no different from other peoples.
>
> (Abravanel 1956: 109)

This is a rare case in which empirical observation dispelled ingrained stereotypes. Later, however, Abravanel himself continued to voice the old stereotypes. In his extended commentary on Ham's sin, composed later, he maintains that the black has a bestial nature "to this day":

> Thus, from Ham cam Cush […] all of whom *to this day* are ugly in appearance, dark (*shehorot*) in form as a raven, awash in lust and drawn to animal pleasures, lacking intelligence and knowledge and statesmanship and the qualities of virtue and heroism.
>
> (Abravanel, 1979)[16]

This was his authoritative view on this issue.

Like their Christian counterparts, also South European Jews came now into contact with real life blacks, also as slave owners and slave traders (Faber 1998). The main genre in which this encounter appeared is the popular travel literature. While medieval Jewish travel literature mainly focused on the holy land, now there was also growing interest in the fascinating geographical and anthropological discoveries, even where there was no link to Jewish issues.

The first Jewish writing that describes the human groups now discovered is *Iggeret Orhot Olam* (*An Epistle Concerning the Ways of the World*, 1525), by the Italian Jew Abraham Farrisol. The author faithfully followed contemporary geographical literature and his book was very popular among Jewish readers (Ruderman 1981). Into the material he borrowed from these Christian sources, he inserted Jewish motifs to suit the interests of his Jewish readers.

Farrisol still followed the traditional division of humanity into the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet, but now superimposed on it the new findings:

> And they began to find on this continent [Africa] to the left of the sea [the Atlantic Ocean] many settlements of black (*shehorim*) people […] who go about naked […] they have no houses nor stone nor locked doors. They simply live in clusters of villages, naked men and women awash in lust (*shtufei zimah*). And the women have an evil custom of making of their two breasts four, done when there are still of tender years, with weights hung on the breasts to draw them down. After that string is tied to the breasts with great force, till a crack forms, and this is beauty according to their custom.
>
> (Farissol 1793, Iggeret Orhot Olam 1793: 32a)

Farrisol provides a detailed discussion to the whereabout of the African blacks, their society, costumes and behavior. Their supposedly promiscuous sexuality is described in detail. This motif was dominant in the European and Jewish perception of the blacks, now reinforced by new anthropological findings, as views from a subjective white European males' vantage point. This was the ultimate proof of the black's bestial nature. It always represented an expression of fear and envy. The sexual repression, so pervasive in Judea-Christian morality, made them react with such curiosity, even a kind of voyeurism, to reports of the sexual freedom they supposed the non-European, non-whites enjoyed (Baudet 1965). Farrisol supposedly assumed that such details would be of great interest to his readers.

He noted that the Africans went about (almost) naked, due to the hot climate in which they dwelt. This was an objective scientific explanation, but still created a direct link between their nakedness and their deplorable sexual practices, thus giving their nakedness an inherently negative significance: "naked an awash in lust." Lust (*zimah*) is presented as the inevitable result of going naked. Likewise, the cosmetic changes that women make in their breasts is descriptively presented as corresponding with African ideas of beauty. However, the link with their reprehensible sexual practices attaches a dubious significance to such concepts of beauty. The detailed description of African techniques to enlarge the male organ so as to increase pleasure in intercourse, and the presentation of males as sex objects while women actively initiate sexual ties, exemplifies clearly the mingled rejection, dread and envy aroused by what Europeans, trained by Judeo-Christian sexual repression, identified as sexual freedom – or promiscuity. As Farrisol sums up the whole issue:

> Great fornication (*ni'uf*) goes on there, with no shame or disgrace, because it is an important commandment (*mizvah*) for them.
>
> (Iggeret Orhot Olam, 1793: 40b)

Additional characteristics related to the blacks are their occupation with witchcraft, their idol worship and cannibalism. Still, following his Italian source,

Farrisol's discussion is quite often more descriptive then judgmental. Even their most despicable habits are occasionally described neutrally, sometimes even positively. The political structure of African society is described without any negative value judgments. Moreover, Farrisol uses the opportunity to criticize European monarchies, hence the almost favorable view of the African alternative, which is described, in European terms, as an aristocracy with democratic traits, in which the new king is chosen by a so-called aristocracy, unlike the European system of hereditary succession (Ibid.).

There is an echo here of the old ambivalence between the image of the "good savage" (*bon sauvage*) and the "evil savage" (*mauvais sauvage*). On the one hand, there was a clear sense of superiority over those primitive creatures, thus the urge to save – or enslave – them. On the other hand, such societies were associated with a kind of primitivist utopian existence, simple, natural and uncorrupted by the greed and violence prevalent in a society that envisioned itself to be cultured. This kind of response echoed a romantic-primitivist urge to return to the pre-political natural state of humanity, a utopia supposedly represented by the imagined "noble savage."

Still, the concept of the blacks as the *mauvais sauvage* predominated; It fitted well with the old Midrashic and ethnographic views, predominant in medieval culture. By and large, the first-hand acquaintance with the blacks following the great geographic discoveries only intensified the old perceptions. Such was the picture of the black African that the educated Jewish reader obtained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The two early iconographic depictions of the blacks – in the Rothschild *Mahzor* and the Venice *Haggadah* – reinforce this image of the black as it consistently appears in written sources throughout the history of Jewish culture.[17] The iconographic image is most important because, added to oral and written transmission of knowledge, it made it easier to imprint these images on the broad public among Jewish believers who did not read Hebrew or any other language fluently. The Venice *Haggadah* circulated widely and was reissued in various Jewish languages for hundreds of years. Thus, the iconographic image of the black was circulated widely, and influenced the worldview of those who read or heard about it, or those who just looked at pictures.

To sum, the nuances of the image of the black in the history of Jewish culture changed and evolved throughout the ages, influenced by ever changing historical circumstances. Still, there is a strong common denominator here; the black is consistently depicted as bestial an inferior, of dubious humanity. This view was common to all the cultures in which the Jews dwelt throughout history. However, since the Jews were consistently identified as "swarthy," thus inferior and bestial, by these majority cultures – since Roman culture until Nazism – they had a special interest in identifying the blacks as the ultimate inferior other, in order to totally disconnect themselves from any identification with blackness, and whatever it represented, and identify themselves as true whites, in color as well as in essence, even superior to other whites, the one and only people chosen by divine providence.

Notes

1 Menasseh ben Israel, *Esperanca de Israel* (Amsterdam, 1650) 4: 27.
2 See detailed discussions in Silberstein and Cohen 1994.
3 *Pirkei de' Rabbi Eliezer*.
4 See the same allegorical interpretation also in Christian sources. St. Jerome's Vulgate version of this verse reads: *nigra sum sed formosa*. King James English version follows it: "I am Black but comely."
5 There is a debate between scholars concerning this issue (see details in Melamed 2003). I follow here the nuanced approach of L.A. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks* (1989).
6 There is some research on the Rabbi's attitude towards blacks, mostly by American-Jewish scholars, but this is mostly apologetic. See, for instance: Isaac 1980, and especially Goldenberg 1997.
7 Almost identical forms appear also in *Tosephtah* Berakhot 86: 3, and the *Jerusalem Talmud*, Berakhot, 12. See also in *BT Bekhorot*, 45b, a similar list of those who are disqualified from the commandment of redeeming the male firstborn. Also, here the black appears first. See discussion in Melamed 2003: 73–75.
8 For the Muslim attitude toward the black, see Lewis 1971.
9 *Al habashi* was a current name in the Muslim environment for those who inhabited *Habash* or Ethiopia, and later for blacks in general.
10 Another current Arabic word for the blacks.
11 See, for instance, his radical attitude concerning women (Melamed 1998).
12 Slaves who were employed in Southern Europe were mostly of Slavic origin, from which the word slave (or *sclave*) originated in various European languages.
13 This was a traditional depiction of the black (see Sanders 1978, pp. 7, 48, 51, 58, 64).
14 The usage of the term "in the fields" is highly significant and reinforces this description. Following the Biblical story of Cain, who slew Abel "as they were in the field" (*Gen.* 4: 8), medieval Jewish scholars perceived existence in the field as bestial, the pre-political state of man, outside the authority of the law.
15 It is not surprising, thus, that a similar dream appears in the contemporary Israeli author Amos Oz's, My *Michael*. The heroine, a young Israeli woman, of European descent, has recurrent dreams where two frightening dark-skinned Arabs attack her.
16 See detailed discussion of Abravanel's position in Melamed 2003: 178–189, and Schorsch 2004: ch. 1.
17 See detailed discussion in Melamed 2003: 217–223.

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2 Jewishness, blackness and genetic data

Israeli geneticists and physicians tracing the ancestry of two African populations[1]

Nurit Kirsh

In 1959, an Israeli expedition of geneticists and physicians traveled to Ethiopia to study the inherited traits of a small community called Beta Israel.[2] Chaim Sheba, director of Tel-Hashomer hospital and a Zionist activist, initiated and organized this expedition. The survey's results were published as a series of articles in 1962 in *the American Journal of Physical Anthropology*; they reported an absence of genetic similarity between the Beta Israel and other Jewish groups. Almost 40 years later, the origins of a different black population were tested using genetic data. Karl Skorecki, an Israeli physician from Rambam hospital and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, was on the team that discovered that a very high frequency of the "Cohen modal haplotype," common among Jewish priests, was present in members of the Lemba tribe from southern Africa. In the article Skorecki and his colleagues published in *American Journal of Human Genetics* in 2000, they described the use of Y-chromosome testing to reconstruct the genetic ancestry for the Lemba, who have long considered themselves Jewish.

In this chapter I will analyze the use of genetic data as a vehicle for deciphering questions of ancestry and origins of black populations perceived as "lost Jews" and examine their effect on inclusion or exclusion from the nation-state of Israel and the Jewish people. Based on two historical testcases, I will discuss the restricted implications of scientific knowledge on religious and national identities. In the first section of this chapter, I'll describe in brief the global scientific trend of human population genetics after World War II and focus on its expression in Israel during the 1950s. In the next section, I will lay out the research of the Israeli genetic expedition to Ethiopia in 1959. In the third section, I present genomic techniques that were applied as a vehicle for resolving questions of ancestry and origins of populations toward the end of the twentieth century. The following section will focus on Y-chromosome testing; it examines the search of the Cohen modal haplotype among males of the Lemba clan in southern Africa. In the conclusion I strive to understand the political implications for Israel of this sort of interplay between science and identity, and their effect on inclusion and exclusion of black populations. I will conclude by claiming that genetic studies do not serve as a tool for questionong the Jewishness of groups that are perceived as Jewish nor pave the way for the inclusion of those whose cultural and religious affiliation with Judaism is regarded as insufficient.

The genetics of human population – historical background

From the late eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the development of race science imbued long-held beliefs in racial differences with considerable intellectual prestige and social acceptability. This science was based on supposedly statistically "demonstrable" anthropological and biological differences between human groups. However, the horrors of Nazi Germany in World War II resulted in the examination of physical "racial" traits becoming a taboo (Barkan, 1992, p. 341; Gould, 1996).

During the 1940s and 1950s, scientists were increasingly interested in human population genetics, fueled in part by the discovery of many new blood groups, which were found to be good markers for population studies. The British school, and in particular, the Galton laboratory in London, played a large part in the rapid development in human populations genetics. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the Society of Human Genetics and its periodical, the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, were both founded in the United States in 1948.

Researchers of human population genetics examined traits that were different from those that were commonly studied in race science. Rather than rely on body measurements, they applied novel biochemical methods. New terms like "gene pool" and "genetic counseling" gradually replaced terms such as "race" and "eugenics." For example, in the mid-1950s there was an editorial decision in London to change the journal's name from *Annals of Eugenics* to *Annals of Human Genetics*.

It is worth pondering if there truly was a clear line of distinction between race science and the newly emerged human population genetics. Significantly, the continuity of racial ideas shaping human genetics is apparent even after the formulation of the UNESCO declaration that claimed that "race is less a biological fact than a social myth" (Unesco, 1952).

Research in Israel on the genetics of Jewish populations began during the 1950s, shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Within a short time, the research activity gained momentum. Israeli researchers never overtly mentioned the presence or absence of racial aspects in their research. Rather, they tried their best to employ terms and criteria that differed from those applied in the German bio-racial science and eugenics. For example, they focused on biochemical traits and refrained as much as possible from using anthropometric measurements. Their studies involved estimating the incidence of rare clinical disorders, such as Familial Mediterranean Fever (FMF); thalassemia– a hereditary hemolytic anemia; and favism, a severe allergy to broad beans due to deficiencies in the enzyme G6PD. Israeli geneticists and physicians also studied inherited polymorphic characters, such as blood groups and taste sensitivity to PTC (Kirsh, 2003).

Israeli human geneticists and physicians shared the same conceptual and methodological framework as their non-Israeli colleagues. Yet the Israeli researchers were also influenced by Zionist ideas that colored their scientific activity. The Zionist ethos aspired to rely as little as possible on religious beliefs, practices or

customs to define "Jewishness." In an era of nationalism, the Zionist claim for a nation-state ought to be based on national identity, not solely on religious factors (Shapira 1992, Shimoni 1995). In this respect, the Zionist movement adopted the conceptual framework of the European national movements that had flourished from the second half of the nineteenth century onward and took into consideration biological factors. The development of human population genetics over the post-World War II period gave geneticists and physicians in the nascent State of Israel novel scientific tools with which to search for Jewish common genetic identity.

There was a noticeable duality in the manner in which Israeli researchers approached their subject matter. On the one hand, the researchers that were Ashkenazi Jews, who in the main had completed their academic education in German universities, adopted the colonialist approach of a European researcher studying a non-European, "primitive" population. In their articles, they often underscored the distinction between Ashkenazi and "non-Ashkenazi" Jews, a newly defined category. On the other hand, and perhaps even paradoxically, they concurrently viewed those Oriental communities as their lost brothers. In their academic papers, the Israeli researchers emphasized the similarities between all Jews in order to confirm and affirm claims for a common biological origin and uniqueness that had been preserved for centuries in the diaspora. I analyzed articles on the genetics of Jewish ethnic communities from the 1950s and found that national perceptions superseded racial perceptions; the tendency to emphasize similarities between all Jews was much more common and dominant than the tendency to distinguish between Ashkenazi and Oriental Jews (Kirsh, 2004a).Yet how did those geneticists and physicians react when the Jewishness of a specific ethnic group was questioned? This question will be explored via a detailed description and analysis of the genetic expedition that was dispatched from Israel to Ethiopia.

The genetic expedition to Ethiopia

The Israeli scholar Steven Kaplan, a renowned expert of Ethiopian Jews' history, claimed that the emergence of genetics as the most important identity marker for the Beta Israel Jewishness began during the 1990s (Kaplan, 2006). As I will describe below, Israeli researchers were already exploring the Beta Israel community as subject for genetic study during the late 1950s.

Economic ties between Israel and Ethiopia were established in the early 1950s. After the 1956 Sinai Campaign, known as "Operation Kadesh," and the opening of the Straits of Tiran, Israel's maritime relationship with Ethiopia was strengthened,[3] and diplomatic relations were established. Three years later, in May 1959, the Ethiopian empress traveled to Jerusalem on a private medical visit. The warming relations with Ethiopia during that decade may have inspired the increasing interest in the Beta Israel.

Out of 20 million people in Ethiopia, the Beta Israel community numbered an estimated 25,000–60,000 people.[4] They observed many Jewish customs, identified themselves, as a distinct ethnic and religious group within the Ethiopian

landscape and were also viewed that way by others. In 1955–1956, 27 selected young members of Beta Israel arrived to study at the Kfar-Batya school in Ra'anana under the auspice of the Jewish Agency, with the intention of returning to Ethiopia as teachers. In August 1958, Yisrael Yeshayahu, then the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament),traveled to Ethiopia, and one of his main goals was to study "the Falasha affair and the problems of the relationship with them."[5] Four months later, Yeshayahu attended a meeting held in the President's Residence to discuss the status of Beta Israel, and how the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency should relate to them.[6] The surge of interest in Beta Israel was also reflected by the decision to translate to Hebrew the book, *Quer durch Abessinien* (A Journey to the Falashsas). The book was penned in German almost 50 years earlier, in 1910 by Jacques Faitlovitch, a scholar of Ethiopian languages and culture, who devoted his life to study the Beta Israel and support them.[7]

Israeli scientists were keenly attuned to the rapid changes occurring in diplomatic relations with Ethiopia and were eager to seize the opportunity to conduct research there. In October 1958, an expedition of zoologists from Tel-Aviv University, a parasitologist from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a botanist from the Agriculture Research Organization of the Volcany Center and two technical assistants traveled to Ethiopia. Over a two-month period, the eight members of that research group studied the Ethiopian fauna, flora and parasites.[8] In July 1959, less than a year later, an expedition of seven Israeli geologists spent two months in Ethiopia and other East African countries in order to study the Great Rift Valley.[9] While the Israeli geologists were still in Africa, Chaim Sheba already began organizing a genetic expedition to Ethiopia. Although the motivation to send Israeli geneticists and physicians to Ethiopia was probably influenced by the two previous expeditions, it was also an expected outcome of Sheba's scientific interests in genetics of human population, coupled with his strong Zionist ideology.

Sheba, director of Tel-Hashomer hospital and a Zionist activist in both the military and political frameworks, headed one of the three scientific groups that studied genetic traits among ethnic communities in Israel during the 1950s (Kirsh, 2004b). Sheba and his team examined the frequencies of thalassemia and color blindness among Israeli ethnic communities, yet the primary genetic disorder they studied was G6PD deficiency. In the summer of 1959, Chaim Sheba decided to dispatch a team of researchers to Ethiopia to study the frequency of G6PD deficiency and other genetic traits among the Beta Israel tribe and find out if it was similar to the frequency among Jewish ethnic communities in Israel (Bondi, 1981, p. 309). Chaim Sheba himself could not personally make the trip to Ethiopia because he had a previously scheduled visit to the United States and South Africa to raise money via diplomatic advocacy, as per the request of Israeli's Foreign Ministry.[10] Nevertheless, Sheba made all the necessary arrangements.

First, Sheba sought sources of funding. He applied to the Rockefeller Foundation, to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare of the United States, as well as to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, also known as the Joint.[11] In addition, Sheba contacted "Incoda," an Israeli beef preservation company in Eritrea,[12] and asked them to offer accommodations to the researchers

en route to Ethiopia, and serve as their contact. In addition, Sheba penned a letter to the director of the Menelik hospital in Addis Ababa and contacted the Ethiopian Consulate in Jerusalem; he received a supportive response. However, when Sheba reached out to the Israeli consul in Addis Ababa,[13] things got a little messier. After receiving Sheba's letter, the consul issued a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, saying: "In view of our policy on the problem of the Beta Israel, we ask you to inform us of your position on this matter."[14] The request raised concerns at the Israeli Foreign Ministry. A few days later, the consul asked Sheba to minimize the focus of the Beta Israel as the research topic at hand.[15]

The caution and concern were rooted in the Imperial Ethiopian Government's considerable efforts to create **i**ntegration and national unity among the various Ethiopian tribes. The emperor also objected to the immigration of the Beta Israel to Israel because he feared a hostile response on the part of the Arab states. Thus, national representatives of the State of Israel as well as from Jewish organizations working in education and health services in Ethiopia at that time were careful not to focus exclusively on Beta Israel.[16] Another reason to maintain a subdued and cautious posture was the fact that Israel had not yet decided whether to recognize this community as Jewish.[17] As such, efforts were made not to cultivate expectations among the Beta Israel and not to stir unwarranted messianic hopes in their hearts. For example, this thinking guided the educational plans of ORT (World Union of Societies for the Promotion of Handicrafts and Industrial and Agricultural work among Jews), which choose to locate their schools in "an area where Falashas are predominantly found…." However, ORT could not teach only one tribe; thus, the union declared that – "…the school will be open to all other Ethiopians living in that area."[18]

Congruent with the consul's advice to maintain a low profile, Sheba drafted another letter that did not single out the Beta Israel. Rather, it addressed the entire spectrum of Ethiopian tribes. To ensure that he would receive secure approval to his request to dispatch an expedition to Ethiopia, Sheba also emphasized the planned research's medical component:

> I hope that our results apart from their interest for us, who are concerned with global epidemiology and genetics, will be of great value for our colleagues practicing medicine in Ethiopia.[19]

This letter assuaged the concerns of the consul and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the expedition was approved. While the official research goal was framed as studying the genetic characteristics among the Ethiopian tribes, there was a special unstated interest in the Beta Israel community. The expedition was financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee; the research team comprised two geneticists, two physicians, and a nurse.

Data collection in Ethiopia transpired from October 1959 through January 1960, primarily through schools as well as in hospitals, villages, and at the Incoda factory located in Asmara, which employed about 400 people. The investigation included six Ethiopian tribes: Tigre, Billen, Falasha (Beta Israel), Amhara, Galla,

and Guragha. In each school, institution, or village, researchers worked with an interpreter to explain to the director or head of the village that their study findings had implications for preventive medicine. After the director received the information from the researchers, he would order the children or adults to line up in order to be tested (Adam, 1962).

A comparison of the particular characteristics measured in Ethiopia to those measured in Israel during the 1950s yielded both similarities and differences. Examined both in Israel and in Ethiopia were the blood groups (ABO, MN, Rh), as well as other biochemical traits like haptoglobin and transferrin types and test sensitivity to PTC. Also examined both in Israel and in Ethiopia were three genetic disorders: deficiency of the enzyme G6PD, hemoglobin abnormality, and color blindness. However, it was only in Ethiopia that scientists conducted anthropometric measurements, such as distribution of mid-digital hair, tongue folding and tongue rolling, and morphological features of hair, lips, eyes, skin, and nose. As noted earlier, those sorts of measurements were not part of the study on Israeli citizens. The type of tests and measurements administered in Ethiopia illustrates the weakness and fragility of the illusory distinction between race science and human genetics. In the studies conducted in Israel in the field of human population genetics, the national component dominated the racial one. It seems that while the study of the genetic expedition to Ethiopia was initiated primarily as a national project, in the end racial concepts were more dominant than national ones. This was, most likely, due to the questionable nature of the Jewishness of Beta Israel, and due to the fact that other Ethiopian tribes were part of the same study.

The results of the aforementioned survey were published as a series of articles in *the American Journal of Physical Anthropology*. The expedition's findings indicated an absence of genetic similarity between Beta Israel and groups belonging to the Jewish mainstream. The discussion section of the article included sentences describing the Falasha thus: "…their physical features are in some respects more 'negroid' than of other tribes" (p. 207), and also "It is worth noting that the ABO MN and Rh pattern in the Falashas is certainly very different from any of the Jewish populations described by Gurevitch et al." (p. 208A).

The survey's results were not presented to the Israeli public nor were they shared with political leaders and decision makers. In contrast to the zoological and the geological expedition to Ethiopia, which both enjoyed extensive coverage in the daily newspapers,[20] nothing was reported on the genetic expedition in the newspapers. In an official report on the Falasha, submitted in January 1973 to the Planning and Research Department at the Ministry of Immigration Absorption, their genetic traits or biological characteristics were not mentioned. Later that year, the fact that no genetic similarity between Beta Israel and other Jews was found did not prevent Rabbi Ovadia Yosef from declaring them to be Jewish. In Operation Moses ("Mivtza Moshe") in the mid-1980s as well as in Operation Solomon ("Mivtza Shlomo") in 1991, Beta Israel were flown to Israel and upon arrival, were granted citizenship based on "the law of return." In both instances, genetic information and any biological data were not taken into consideration.

Genetic ancestry testing in a genomic age

The methodology of biochemical tests as the primary means to explore human population genetics ultimately gave way toward the end of the twentieth century to the study of human genetic diversity at the molecular level. The use of non-coding regions of the human DNA, "neutral markers" that are not connected to disease, ability or physical appearance, helped to differentiate between genomic studies of populations and race science, because "they differentiate groups and, simultaneously, make no difference at all" (Abu-El Haj, 2012, p. 23). Over the last three decades, genomic techniques have been employed as a vehicle for answering questions of ancestry and origins of different populations, such as Native Americans (Tallbear, 2008), Asians (McGonigle and Schuster, 2019) and contemporary Jewish communities (Tenenbaum and Davidman, 2007; Kahn, 2013; Falk, 2017; Imhoff and Kael, 2017). Genetic ancestry testing is conducted both by scientists as well as by direct-to-consumer commercial services.

Genomic studies of human populations, also known as anthropological genetics or archaeogenetics, can be divided into two types:

A. Lineage-based tests:
   Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) are circular small non-nuclear DNA molecules inherited from one's mother. The use of mtDNA as indexes of maternal lines began in the mid-1980s.
   Y-chromosome is inherited from father to son. Y-chromosome tests were adopted as a tool to discover paternal lines in the late 1990s. Maternally and paternally inherited DNA are not subject to recombination and are passed from generation to generation with minimal change; both of them allow the identification of continuities despite the admixture that occurred among the tested population. The disadvantage of these kind of analyzes is that they trace a single ancestor in each generation and neglect the vast majority of the tested subject's ancestors.
B. Genome-wide patterns of variation
   This method is based on using whole genome genotypes in order to find the genetic patterns of a population and compare them to those of other populations. These studies are focused on sites in the DNA sequence where individuals differ at a single DNA base (SNPs – single nucleotide polymorphisms).

The elucidation of the entire human genome has made it possible to develop a haplotype[21] map of the human genome ("HapMap"). In 2009 the Jewish HapMap, a genome-mapping project of the Jewish people, was launched by Prof. Harry Ostrer, director of the human genetics program at NYU Medical School and Prof. Eitan Friedman of Sheba's clinical genetics unit. Its agenda was intended to answer questions of origins and migrations of contemporary Jewish communities by characterizing genetic variation; compare the various Jewish

ethnic groups; and compare Jews of different ethnicities with non-Jews who lived in the same areas.

Most Israeli researchers who study the DNA of Jews over the last three decades try their best not to formulate conclusions that would contradict the accepted Zionist narrative. Their point of departure was, and still is, the notion that the Jewish people's uniqueness was preserved in the diaspora, where over the course of two millennia, groups of Jews across many different countries maintained their religious and genetic identity. On many occasions, Israeli-Zionist geneticists preferred to display and discuss Y-chromosome studies rather than mtDNA ones as the basis for narrating Jewish history. That is because the former present more persuasive evidence for a Jewish common ancient ancestry in the eastern Mediterranean (Kahn, 2005, p.3). In the next section I will describe and examine the genetic research on the Lemba from South Africa, who were considered a "lost Jews" tribe and the data achieved through their Y-chromosome tests.

CMH on Y-chromosome and the Lemba tribe

The Lemba are an African population of 80,000–90,000 people who have long considered themselves Jewish. Most live in South Africa and Zimbabwe and the rest reside in several other countries, including Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania. According to their oral tradition, the Lemba ancestors were white men who came from the remote "Sena" in the north. When they settled in Africa, they married African women, yet carefully preserved their ancestral traditions and customs, such as not eating pork or animals that had not been ritually slaughtered (Zianga, 2011, pp. 42–43; Parfitt and Fisher, 2016 pp. 13–16). Despite their claim to Jewish roots, many of the tribe members are now Christian or Muslim. The Lemba are physically similar to other local groups; nevertheless, they are described by others and view themselves as having lighter skin and Jewish appearance (Parfitt and Fisher, 2016 pp. 13–15). Some of them even feel that their 'Jewish noses' are "one of the most important things about them" (Parfitt and Egorova, 2005, p. 199).

Interest in the Lemba arose in the late 1980s after they were discovered by the British historian and orientalist Tudor Parfitt. Less than a decade later, two South African scientists studied DNA samples of 49 Lemba males in order to determine their origin. Based on analysis of four markers in the Y-chromosome, the scientists concluded that 50% of the Lemba Y-chromosome are of Semitic origin while only 40% are Negroid and the rest 10% are indeterminable (Zianga, 2011 p. 47; Abu-El Haj, 2012 pp. 183–186). The semitic descent could have been interpreted as Jewish or Arab, and the researchers believed it was more plausible that they were Jewish, basing their claim on the cultural customs of the Lemba that resonated with Jewish tradition. Very soon after the first genetic study of the Lemba was published, another study was planned; the second one included tests for the presence of Cohen modal haplotype (CMH) in the Lemba's Y-chromosome.

The Cohen modal haplotype is the name Karl Skorecki gave to the halotype that was found in high frequency among Jewish priests (Cohanim). In 1997 and

1998 Karl Skorecki of the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology published two articles in *Nature* describing his team's discovery of a single halotype that was found in the Y-chromosome of 56% of the Sepharadi (Oriental) priests and 45% of the Ashkenazi priests (Skorecki, 1997; Thomas, 1998). The findings on CMH occurrence were remarkable because of the similarity that was found between ethnic communities that were geographically separate for hundreds of years. Following Skorecki's discovery of the CMH, he became a member in a team of eight researchers from four different continents who study together 339 Y chromosomes in six population groups. The studied populations were: Lemba, Bantu (another South African tribe), Yemeni-Hadramaut, Yemeni-Sena, Sephardic Jews, and Ashkenazic Jews. The research included 108 Lemba men; 13 belonged to the Buba – the most senior Lemba clan, which is both the oldest and the most important for some ritual purposes. A very high frequency of CMH was found within the Buba members that were tested; 7 out of 13 had this haplotype (Thomas, et al 2000).

The findings of apparent genetic affinities between the Lemba and the Jews drew considerable media attention. The *New York Times*ran it as a front-page story and it also appeared in a vast number newspapers around the world; it was featured on the most-watched newsmagazine CBS program "60 minutes" and was the subject of two documentary films (Parfitt and Egrova, 2005, pp. 195, 200).[22] Media enthusiasm and interest continued for several years. For example in 2010, a BBC report explored the subject matter and the topic also appeared in the Israeli daily Haaretz.[23] The media reporting of the research avoided the complexity; rather than dwell on the details, it emphasized the claim that the Lemba were Jewish. It bears mention that what really mattered to the press, the documentarians and the interested public was that a group of "blacks" were found to be Jews. It was a sensation since today in the Western world, most people identify a Jew as a Caucasian European-type person.[24]

The Lemba regarded the results of this genomic study as affirming what they had maintained in their tradition. It bolstered the credibility of the Lemba's beliefs in their Jewish origin and encouraged Prof. Mathiva, president of LCA (Lemba Cultural Association), to renew efforts to achieve recognition from the South African rabbinical authorities as black Jews. But these efforts were to no avail. Rabbis from both the Orthodox and Reform movements argue that genetics do not prove anything about the Lemba's Jewishness (Zianga, 2011, pp. 55–59).

Rabbis in Israel also did not exhibit much enthusiasm and were not convinced by the novel genomic information on the Lemba. For example, Rabbi Yaakov (HaKohen) Kleiman, the co-director of the Center for Kohanim in Jerusalem, published a book, *DNA and Tradition: The Genetic Link to the Ancient Hebrews* (2004), and declared that "Jewish is not genetically defined" (p. 20), Rabbi Kleiman, wrote in his book that Dr. Skorecki, discover of the "Cohen gene":

> emphasizes that being Jewish is a spiritual, metaphysical state, and DNA is a physical characteristic, like nose size. But we wouldn't dare go around saying

> we're going to determine who is Jewish by the length of their nose. Similarly, we're not going to determine who is Jewish by the sequence of their DNA. (p. 34)

The State of Israel does not have a clear-cut policy or guidelines for addressing the Lemba or other communities with affinity to the Jewish people. The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs established a committee to examine Israel's approach to those communities whose total number was estimated at 15 million people.[25] The description of the Lemba in the committee report mentioned that:

> A possible corroboration to their claim of Jewish ancestry was discovered some years ago via an unexpected source: genetic tests revealed that they carry a gene usually only found in such high frequency in families of Cohanim. (p. 36)

Despite the genetic results, Israeli rabbinical and governmental authorities expressed skepticism toward the Lemba and other Africans who claim to be of Jewish origin or belonging to the lost tribes. Rabbi Eliyahu Avikhail, the founder and head of *Amishav* (My people return), an organization that promotes the *Aliyah* (immigration) to Israel of groups considered to be "lost ten tribes," asserted that the Beta Israel from Ethiopia are the one and only case of Jewish settlement in Sub-Saharan Africa (Zianga, 2011, pp. 98–99). He opines that the historical tribes of Israel were spread to the north and northeast of Israel but not toward the south; according to that theory, none of the lost tribes could have reached the black continent.

While refusing to identify the Lemba as descents of Jews, Rabbi Avikhail is very committed to supporting the Bnei Menashe community from north-eastern India and helping them settle in Israel. The Bnei Menashe come to Israel as tourists, take part in a conversion process and only then are naturalized as Israeli citizens. Karl Skorecki checked DNA samples of 350 of Bnei Menashe subjects in 2003, and found no evidence indicating Middle Eastern origin. Still, on March 2005, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, the chief Sepharadi Rabbi, declared them seeds of Israel (Zera Israel) (Abu-El Haj, 2012, pp. 205–210; Ostrer, 2012 p. 153). Their faith and willingness to observe Jewish religious commandments were more significant than DNA in determining the rabbinate's position toward the Bnei Menashe population.

The sense of Beta Israel's belonging to the Jewish people was not undermined by the comprehensive research which showed that Ethiopian Jews were distinguished from other Jewish populations by the frequencies of their Y-chromosome haplotypes (Hammer et al. 2000). While Jewish populations formed a fairly compact cluster (on a multidimensional scaling based on Chord genetic distances), Ethiopian Jews were placed closer to the non-Jewish Ethiopians. The Lemba were located roughly halfway between the sub-Saharan African and Jewish clusters, yet that genetic similarity did not grant them recognition as Jews.

In 2010 *Nature* published the research of Doron Behar and his 20 colleagues of the genome-wide structure of the Jewish people. In this study too, most Jewish samples formed a tight subcluster, whereas the Ethiopian Jews as well as the Bnei Menashe cluster with neighboring populations in Ethiopia and western India. Again, these findings did not shake accepted conventions about the Jewishness of the two groups.

The American-based NGO *Kulanu* (Hebrew: "All of us") aims to diversify the Jewish world. Kulanu does not ignore the findings of the genetic studies of the Lemba, and it interprets the results of the genetic studies as an indication for the Lemba Jewish origin. Since 1999, Kulanu sponsored a number of missions to the Lemba (Parfitt and Egrova, 2005, pp. 202–204; Abu-El Haj, 2012, pp. 199–202). It is compelling to compare Kulanu to the Israeli non-profit, "Shavei Israel" (Israel Returns). Founded in 2002, Shavei Israel is currently the most active organization in creating and strengthening ties between descendants of Jews around the world, the Jewish people and the State of Israel. While Shavei Israel oversees activities that include assistance to a variety of communities in many countries around the world, its website states clearly that the organization is not active in Africa.[26]

Conclusions

This chapter explored two test cases of genetic studies that looked for similarities between black, African populations and known Jewish communities. While the 1959 expedition to Ethiopia examined frequencies of blood groups and biochemical disorders, researchers at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century studied chromosome markers and DNA haplotypes of the Lemba tribe and other groups. The central scientific concepts and particular methods have changed, but the notion that genetic data of groups claiming Jewishness ought to be tested underlie both projects. When the findings of the studies that were planned to provide, among other things, answers to questions about the Jewish origin of those two black populations did not fit the expectations and accepted notions of policymakers in Israel, they were ignored. The results of genetic research were embraced by Israel authorities only when they were congruent with the religious and cultural status of the tested community.

Thus, genetic study of Beta Israel from Ethiopia or Bnei Menashe from India, both did not reveal evidence of Judaic roots, was not injurious to the perception of their Jewishness. At the same time, the CMH (Cohen modal haplotype) that was found among males of the Lemba tribe in southern Africa was celebrated by researchers and by the Kulanu American NGO but greeted with skepticism and criticism among rabbis in Israel as well as in South Africa.

The differences in the way the Beta Israel and the Lemba were initially perceived stemmed from their different historical and cultural contexts. The "Jewishness" of Beta Israel has been known for hundreds of years, and they lived in communities that resembled Jewish communities in other places. On the other hand, the

Lemba were identified as Jews only during the last 100 years. The Lemba's claim of Jewish origin was based on slimmer evidence: a persistent oral tradition of uncertain antiquity and a number of suggestive customs, from circumcision to food taboos, which appear to be "Judaic" but could be Muslim or, indeed, in the case of circumcision, African. Moreover, despite their "Jewish roots," many of the tribe are now Christian or Muslim.

In summary, the ability of genetic information to impact Israeli understanding of the Jewish status of a certain population seems to be close to zero. Data on the prevalence or absence of certain genes or haplotypes did not result in the exclusion in the case of Ethiopian Jews, nor did it lead to inclusion in the case of the Lemba tribe.Genetic evidence may only affirm and strengthen an existing stance but not contradict it.

Notes

1 This research was supported by The Israel Science Foundation (grant No.1258/18)

2 Faitlovitch and other researchers used the term "Falasha" to describe the Ethiopian Jewish community. Members of the community deem this term humiliating. In this chapter I use the term Beta Israel, "the house of Israel," which is the preferred moniker that Ethiopian Jews deem appropriate.

3 Litvak Yosef, The Falasha, January 1973, p. 22. American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) Archives, Falasha file 1964–1973.

4 In an official report, ordered by the Planning and research Department at the Israeli Ministry of Immigration Absorption, the author admitted that there are no accurate and reliable estimates of the number of Beta Israel in the past or present. Litvak, 1973 (cit. 2) p. 4. In the Journalists Yearbook of 1960, p. 85, the Beta Israel estimated number was 25,000 (in Hebrew). Yisrael Yeshayahu, then the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset who traveled to Ethiopia in 1958 wrote that their estimated number was 50,000–60,000. Meir M. "And again – who is a Jew?" *Lamerchav*, 22 September 1958, p. 4 (in Hebrew).

5 Yeshayahu, Yisrael "Friends and enemies on the African coasts," *Davar*, 12 September 1958, p. 3.

6 A report of the meeting on the issue of the Falasha that was held in the President's Residence, 25 December 1958. The Zionist Archive, file S6-10016.

7 During his lifetime, Jacques Faitlovitch (1881–1955) went on 11 missions to Ethiopia.

8 A zoological and parasitological expedition to Ethiopia – a document signed by O. Theodor 5 May 1958; ZIM Integrated Shipping Services to O. Theodor 29 August 1958; Yoseph Hadas to Zim management board 29 August 1958; Ben-David to the inter-ministerial committee for overseas travels 23 September 1958; A telegram from the Jerusalem Office to Israeli Government representatives in Addis Ababa 10 October 1958, all these documents are from Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/ 3741 file 18.

9 "An Israeli scientific expedition goes out for investigations in Africa" *Ma'ariv* 6 July 1959; "An expedition of geologists to East Africa." *Al Hamishmar* 7 July 1959.

10 Sheba to Baron, The Consul General of Israel in Etuiopia, 9 August 1959. Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/439, file 7.

11 Sheba to Baron, 6 September 1959. Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/ 439, file 7.

12 The company was established in Asmara, in the early 1950s, and later served as a commercial cover for a station of the Mossad (Israeli intelligence) in Africa. See: the digital archive of ISPADA (Israeli planning, architecture, and development in Africa), retrieved 4 February 2020.
13 Sheba to Baron, cit. 10.
14 IsraelGO, Addis Ababa to ME, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 17 August 1959, Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/ 3740 file 35.
15 Bar-On to Sheba, 28 August 1959, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/ 439, file 7.
16 Bar-On to ME, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 26 November 1959, Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/ 3741 file 18.
17 Only in 1973 did Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, then the Sephardi chief Rabbi of Israel, declared the Beta Israel Jewish and descendants of the tribe of Dan.
18 Gilbert to Bar-On, 11 September 1959, Israel State Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs unite/439, file 6 (7593).
19 Sheba to Baron, 6 September 1959. cit. 11.
20 For example: "Scientific expedition to Abyssinia" *Davar* 22 September 1958; "Scientific expedition from Tel-Aviv to Abyssinia" *Al Hamishmar* 7 October 1958. See also op. cit. 9.
21 A haplotype is a set of genetic markers on a chromosome that are inherited together.
22 See for example: www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/israel/familylemba.html.
23 Haaretz service, Report: "DNA Tests Support Zimbabwe Tribe's Claim of Jewish Roots." 7 March 2010, www.haaretz.com/1.5037915, retrieved 10 February 2020.
24 It is worth mentioning that for many years in the past, in European and North American discourses, all Jews were thought to be black, both metaphorically and literally (Parfitt and Egrova, 2005, p. 195).
25 Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, *Report of the Public Advisory Committee for Examining Israel's Approach Regarding Worldwide Communities with Affinity to the Jewish People Committee*. 10 March 2017. www.mda.gov.il/antisemitism/documents/eng200818.pdf.
26 https://shavei.org/, retrieved 11 February 2020.

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Part II

Blackness in the Jewish Israeli society

3 Kinked race and Ethiopian Jewish blackness in Israel

An ethnography

Gabriella Djerrahian

"Listen to this," Rabbi Eli says, addressing a group of Ethiopian Israeli college students in 2008:

> I'm in Washington DC a few months ago and the driver tells me, 'Salam alaykum.' I told him, 'Wa alaykum as-salam.' Now, he's 100 per cent confident that I'm … what? [the crowd answers, 'Muslim']. I was wearing a kippah. I can't be Afro-American because I have a kippah, and I can't be Jewish because I'm? [the audience replies "black"]. He asks me, 'Where are you from?' I told him, 'From Israel,' and he starts slandering the Jews, saying: 'Jews are like this, and Jews are like that.' I told him, 'Right, right' [the audience laughs]. Then he said: 'I didn't know there were black brothers [black Muslims] there.' So I answered "I'm not black, I'm brown!"[1]

The crowd of 20- and 30-year-olds erupts, at this point, in a roar of laughter at the image of a "brown" man in a skullcap in Washington; a 'brown' Jew[2] misread as a black Muslim. The students know all too well the murkiness between race and religion in both American and Israeli society. They also know that race and religion are configured differently from one location to the next. Rabbi Eli's anecdote highlights the complexity of blackness and racial identification for Ethiopian Jews in Israel and beyond.

The visibility of Ethiopians as historically ambiguous Jewish nationals in Israel calls attention to race as an epidermic and skin-deep marker of Jewish otherness. This construct operates alongside a second notion of race as bloodline and lineage inscribed inside the body, deep under the skin. The belief that Ethiopian Jews – or Beta Israels, as they referred to themselves historically in Ethiopia – are the descendants of the lost Israelite tribe of Dan is upheld as proof of an unbroken bloodline racially linking Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish people. In Israel, these two readings of race intermingle under the umbrella of blackness, casting Ethiopian Jews as internal – in terms of being recognized as part of the Jewish people – racialized "others."

Lineage, descent and religious belonging is bound up with civic status in Israel. Ethiopian Jews' claim to full civic, political, economic and social rights in Israel – a state founded on the contentious concept of a Jewish 'race', as determined by the

Orthodox rabbinate – is premised on their Jewishness. Race bears strongly on the very question of who partakes in the Jewish nation-state established in Palestine in 1948, and under what conditions. For Ethiopian Jews, the stakes of the debates around race, religion and blackness thus could not be higher, and represents the culmination of a century of un-coding and recoding themselves as modern, contemporary Jews and blacks.

I situate the racial formation of Ethiopian Jews as blacks and their positioning as Jewish in two interconnected historical developments: their collective repositioning following official recognition by chief rabbis in Israel in the early 1970s as descendants of the lost Israelite tribe of Dan, which in turn empowered Beta Israel activists and their international supporters' campaign for Ethiopian Jews to be brought to Israel under the Law of Return.[3] This process demonstrates the link between the politics of recognition and the ideology of attributing political rights on the basis of racial and religious membership in the Zionist political context.

In this way, the Beta Israel became a specific, cohesive black Jewish group modeled on the Western European ideal of what it means to be halachically Jewish (according to Jewish religious law). The European-made image of "The Black Jews from Ethiopia" slowly began to take shape during interactions between Ethiopian and Western Jews beginning from the late nineteenth century, and spearheaded patronage activities to "save" them, particularly intensifying during the second half of the twentieth century. Some hundred years after the initial contact between European Jews and Beta Israels, migration transformed what was a decentralized group of Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia whose members were culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse into a seemingly homogeneous "Ethiopian community" of "black" Jews in Israel.

In contrast to the gradual "whitening" experienced by Irish, Italian and Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants to the United States,[4] Ethiopians in Israel have become 'blacker' over time in regards to their physical features that distinguish them from other racialized Jewish ethnic groups in Israel.[5] Their increasing acceptance as Jews and as Israeli citizens has reinforced their 'blackness'. The partial lightening of the Mizrahi, or Jewish immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, in part resulted from the arrival of Ethiopians – the darkest African Jews in contemporary Israel.[6]

Jewish blackness as Stigma

Goffman's concept of "stigma," developed in the 1960s, provides a useful conceptual tool for unpacking Ethiopian Jews' blackness. In Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity (1963), Goffman writes that stigma "refer[s] to an attitude that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed" (p. 3). Stigma, in this sense, constitutes a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype (p. 4). In the case of Ethiopian Israelis, their "difference" is embodied in race as a somatic indicator of cultural difference (being Ethiopian), blackness (skin tone, facial features, texture of hair,

etc.), and historical ambiguity regarding their Jewish racial authenticity and religious purity. These three stigmas coalesce with the ultimate "bodily sign," to borrow another term from Goffman, of somatic blackness. Other stigmatized attributes, including low socioeconomic status and education level, become attached to the visible stigma of race. When speaking of race and blackness, I refer to the process of indexing physical attributes as markers of difference that coalesce with other stigma such as religious authenticity, ethnicity, class, gender, culture, etc. The boundaries between these various stigmas are often blurred, and race can overshadow and come to stand for other factors in practices of exclusion. This is precisely how a variety of stigmas (ethno-cultural, linguistic, religious, being "olim," in other words a new Jewish immigrant to Israel) ascribed to Ethiopian Jews have bled into the stigma of race and blackness though blackness has come to epitomize and denote a spectrum of differences that are not racial per se.

While the social and cultural mechanisms by which stigmatized color labels are attached to a diverse group of people change over time, blackness, however contingent on time and place, becomes coded in specific ways and attains some level of fixity through cultural and institutional reification. The fixity of the racial label "black" ascribed to Ethiopian Jews in Israeli society renders their experiences of racism and marginalization very real. Ethiopians Jews racialized as black are, in Franz Fanon's words, "overdetermined from without" (1990: 112). Blackness is a membrane that acts as the interface between themselves and their outside Jewish world. From the perspective of Ethiopian Jews themselves, blackness is an unambiguous social fact reified by the processes of both positive and negative systemic discrimination in the Israeli nation-state.

In Israel, Ethiopian Jews' blackness signals the ongoing tension between race – understood here as genealogy and descent – and belonging. It provides the backdrop for daily interactions between Ethiopian Israelis and their so-called "white"[7] Jewish counterparts, the vast majority of whom also immigrated to Israel in the twentieth century. By defining Ethiopian Israelis' racial identity as genealogically Jewish, religious authorities paved the way for their insertion into the Jewish nation-state as somatically black citizens of Israel. Ethiopian Jews have carved their place in Israeli society through the prism of blackness, which, as a stigmatized attribute, is unambiguously and unanimously cast over the Ethiopian population as a whole.

Historical context of Ethiopian Jewish blackness

The awareness of racial difference among Ethiopian olim initially germinated in Ethiopia at the crossroads of two classification systems, one local and the other European. In Ethiopia, ethno-racial and religious communities occupied specific positions in the local social hierarchy. Other groups referred to the Beta Israel as "Falashas," and discriminated against them primarily on the basis of their occupation and religion. Although Falashas were stigmatized as buda, or holders of dangerous supernatural powers associated with blacksmithing, they otherwise resembled the dominant Christian Amharas in that both groups were considered "racially" red or reddish-brown (Kaplan 1999; Salamon 2003). Falashas, much

like Amharas – and unlike groups such as the Afar or the Gurage – were believed to be descendants of a noble lineage (the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon) that resonated with Ethiopia's Solomonic national myth. In contrast, groups such as the darker-skinned and derogatively named "Shankilla," were considered less "civilized," with neither history nor roots according to the local ethno-racial classification scheme. As in many other African societies, the Ethiopian aristocracy traditionally favored light-colored skin and so-called "Semitic" facial features, which were considered more delicate than (sub-Saharan) "African" traits.

"White" Jews and "Black" Jews in Israel

Ethiopian Jews old enough to remember their first interactions with Israeli society recall how the sight of "white people"[8] everywhere precipitated the perception, by logic of contrast, that no other Jew looked like them. The culture shock Ethiopians underwent upon discovering the extent of their difference – physical, linguistic, religious and cultural – was paralleled by Israeli residents' bewilderment at the sight of black rural Ethiopians straight out of refugee camps streaming into Israel, as Avi consciously notes:

> We started school in Ashkelon in 1987. There were a few Ethiopians in a classroom full of Israelis. But we did not bond right away [with other Israelis], we felt comfortable being with ourselves [among Ethiopians] because it was still fresh, people were still not familiar with Ethiopian Jews. […] It's difficult to accept that there is a large amount of black Jews. […] There was a shock for me; suddenly I see a lot of whites and suddenly the food is different, I'm not used to it, a language I don't understand. Technical things like television and stove and so on, that can be learned, but what's more difficult is the people, how they accept you.

Beta Israel communities in and around Gondar, Ethiopia, had very sporadic and uneven contact with white people. Hence, their arrival in Israel catapulted their sense of blackness to a generalized, collective state of hyper-self-consciousness. Individuals who had not necessarily come into contact with one another in Ethiopia were suddenly homogenized into a group of blacks in Israel. Addis and Ambessa, both young men in their early thirties, reflect on the extent to which they came to embody difference in their blackness only after making aliyah:

> When I made aliyah to the country, I saw that everyone is white, it was strange for me, I thought I would only see blacks (Addis).
>
> […] Of course when you make aliyah over here you see that the majority of Jews are white and everything, it gives more, let's say, meaning, to it [racial difference, as opposed to in Ethiopia] (Ambessa).

The prospect of realizing the centuries-long dream of 'returning' to Jerusalem had conjured an idealistic image of a new home, which was quickly shattered by

the realities of life in Israel (Anteby-Yemini 2004). Aaron was in his early teens when he arrived to Israel in the mid-1980s. His initial interactions reveal the shock and ignorance of the local Israeli population:

> When we went to the beach in Ashkelon we didn't have cars, we would walk for kilometers by foot on Saturday for two, three hours. I had a cousin who is a good friend of mine and he was blacker [darker] than me, so many people would approach him doing like that [rubs his skin with his fingers] and checking to see if the color comes off. […] People were passing by doing that to him on the beach because they thought that… someone painted his skin; they did not think that there are black people. This was in '86-'87. […] Even adults, not the young people. We were kids so we were like "don't touch me" and we would laugh about that.

Many Ethiopians I interviewed evoked incidents where they were stigmatized as "cushi."[9] Cushi is a historical term used to describe people from the biblical Land of Kush. In its popular usage today in Israel, it has a derogatory, racist connotation when used to identify dark-skinned people. Even comparatively light-skinned Ethiopians were not exempt from this racialized slur. Such events work to reinforce the boundary of the Ethiopian Jewish community as outsiders within Israel, and maintain the "black Jewish/white Jewish" dichotomy that defines Ethiopian Israelis' social world.

Explaining blackness as stigma: Forms of discrimination

Stereotypical interpretations of Ethiopian Jewish blackness in Israel demonstrate that blackness as stigma never stands alone. Rather, prejudices relating to such factors as socioeconomic status, level of education and perceived intelligence, national origin, and cultural and religious practices take on racial tropes. Discrimination against Ethiopian Jews in Israel can be categorized according to four stereotypes. The first revolves around a perceived level of inferiority in regard to "civilization" (being "backward"). As contact between the Beta Israel and Euro-American Jews intensified during the twentieth century in Ethiopia, a genealogical link was conceived, and religious bonds were highlighted. Henceforth, the Beta Israel were conceived by "white" Jews as culturally and religiously inept construction sites. This cemented a condescending notion that Israelis and other Jewish donors abroad "made" Ethiopians who they are today (i.e. modern), which is now strongly ingrained in Israeli society. Anita, a petite Ethiopian woman in her early thirties, recounts an incident that illustrates this discourse of "civilization":

ANITA: I was parking my car in Haifa. I got out of the car and a man came up to me and said, "Wow, look how far you've come!"
Q: And what do you answer to that?
ANITA: I just smiled [smiles sarcastically] and said thank you, I mean, what am I supposed to say?

This exchange clearly displays the subtle (and not-so-subtle) donor–recipient dynamics of patronage that prevail in Israel today. For this man, Anita's ability to drive symbolizes how effectively "reformative" measures have improved the lives of Ethiopian Jews. Were Anita a man, however, I doubt this gentleman would have made the same comment. Scrutinizing the intersection of gender and race points to differences in the ways Ethiopian men and women are received, and in turn perceived, by mainstream Israeli society.

Secondly, discrimination emanates from representations of Ethiopian Jews as a "special group" in constant need of state support (Abbink 1984). In different ways, this stereotype ensues from the first, in that Ethiopians are viewed as dependent upon assistance to be made and remade into modern, respectable Jewish citizens of Israel. The Beta Israel emerged in the popular consciousness of other Israeli social groups as a charity case with colossal needs, not all of which were "imagined," as I have argued in my previous work (Djerrahian 2014). Once the mediatized frenzy surrounding Ethiopians' aliyah abated, and the integration process revealed major long-term hurdles, the foci of the Ethiopian Jewish aid industry shifted from organizing their migration to helping them cope with "absorption." To this day, within white Israeli society, Ethiopian Jews are widely believed to be – and some members of this community occasionally self-present as – a group in perpetual need. By and large however, Ethiopians have been reluctant to accept this mantle of dependence.

Thirdly, Ethiopian Jews experience discrimination by virtue of an Israeli tendency to associate Ethiopians with racialized and/or racist representations of Black North American communities. Accordingly, positive and negative stereotypes of Ethiopian Jews are modeled on stereotypes of African Americans. For Ethiopians, adjusting to life in Israel as blacks with low socioeconomic status was not without pronounced social challenges. Key turning points like the 1996 Blood Scandal sparked unprecedented mobilization and protest among Ethiopian Jews in Israel, who explicitly express their grievances in terms of racial inequality.[10] This watershed moment in Ethiopian–non-Ethiopian Jewish relations sealed the racial divide between black and "white" Jews. The clustering effect of housing segregation – whereby Ethiopians live in specific neighborhoods, in part due to social housing availability – has further reinforced this division. Media narratives emphasizing youth gangs, drug and alcohol use, suicides, uxoricide cases, and other incidents of violence in Ethiopian communities solidified the stereotype that "Ethiopians" constitute the "blacks" (i.e. the disruptive underclass) of Israeli society.

Fourthly, practices of race-based exclusion also derive from lingering doubt about the authenticity and purity of Jewish Ethiopians' bloodline. Uncertainty around their heritage harks back to the claims of validity Ethiopians had to make in order to vindicate their religious inclusion as Jews and their civil inclusion as Israelis (Seeman 2009).

These four stereotypes – uncivilized backwardness, poor communities dependent on handouts, youth behavior analogous to stereotypical representations of Black North Americans, and doubtful Jewish racial/genealogical purity – cut across one another to form the core racial stigma of blackness through which

Ethiopians in general, and Ethiopian men in particular, negotiate their place as Jews in Israel. Racist incidents including forms of quotidian micro-aggressions are explicit and implicit, informed by discrimination based on cultural and religious factors. The somatic appearances of race – the fact of being black – is the primary and most accessible rubric under which other forms of discrimination and prejudice are perceived (Salamon 2001).

Race and prejudice within: The upward mobility of Baryas

Historically, the ability to count back generations in order to locate one's ancestry was the basis of social organization in Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia. A body of oral knowledge determining who was barya, in other words Ethiopian Jews considered to be descendants of slaves who occupied an inferior status compared to other Ethiopian Jews, was transmitted across generations and traveled with community elders to Israel. Avi described the older generation of parents and grandparents who came of age in Ethiopia as "freaks of counting generations!" For the younger generation, however, generation counting and the barya issue are very sore points. Many young Ethiopian Israelis I spoke with operationalize race to bring their grievances to light. How can Ethiopians accuse Israeli society of racism when they themselves racialize former slaves as darker, uncivilized and inferior, and when barya continue to be treated so poorly within Ethiopian circles? In general, the Israeli public is ignorant of Ethiopians or Ethiopian culture outside of elements that have been fetishized. While the barya question is rarely publicized (see Salamon 2003), it has been the subject of some articles published within the Ethiopian Israeli community, on websites and forums. These pieces elicited numerous comments and sparked heated debate among young Ethiopian Israelis.

Every Ethiopian Israeli I interviewed knew something about the barya question. Generally, older people (age 25–35) were more informed than younger ones (age 18–25), who claimed no knowledge except that, "it has to do with the parents, not with us." Almost all interviewees, however, expressed deep discomfort with what they viewed as a contradiction undermining the claims of racism leveled against Israeli state and society by Ethiopian Jews. Aaron, a youth worker in his early thirties, describes [the barya issue] as "a black stain [a sign of shame]":

> Many Ethiopian olim. … The audacity! [Laughs.] When they came to Israel, they took the barya with them in order that she or he will continue to serve them here in Israel. It's such an audacity of the most extreme kind. […] So, many of the barya who came to Israel and saw this, they just left them and went on their own. And I know that many also progressed nicely, you know, many also married Israelis and not with Ethiopians because Ethiopians didn't want to accept them.

Ilana, a university student in her early thirties, firmly repudiates the older generations' mindset:

> Here [in Israel], a person can reach something [a certain level of education, socioeconomic status], what does it matter if his family were slaves or not? […] It's unacceptable to me. And all this I told you, again, it's with the elderly of the community because they can't change their mentality, they're like that, they had 20 cows so they think they're rich. The wealth was in cows, it's also very different from our world, you see?

These young people's objections to what they deem racism between members of their ethnic group led me to further probe the barya issue in an effort to clarify whether intra-Ethiopian prejudice stemmed from race, lineage or both. While barya are traditionally considered darker in skin tone, I was informed that not all barya descendants are necessarily so.

Ari, a young entrepreneur is his early 30s, became very excited when I inquired about the situation of baryas in his community:

> The Ethiopians, those who complain about racism, ask them! Ask them! How they treat the barya! And you know what's ironic? The so-called barya people are more successful than the Ethiopians! They get to marry white people! White people, yes!! It's ironic it's like "Murphy's Law," really! It's like the story of the "ugly duck"? It's amazing.[11]

Many Ethiopian Israelis I interviewed echoed Ari's observations, which frame baryas' marriages to 'white' Israelis as a means of circumventing and surpassing their stifling legacy vis-à-vis their former owners. All my interlocutors associated the baryas' marriages to 'whites' as evidence of upward social mobility – the ultimate symbol of success and integration into the Israeli mainstream. Ari believes that "they're successful because people were bad to them and so they worked harder. I always think to myself, what a wonderful world, "cause God said, 'vengeance is mine'." In his view, baryas' ascendancy in Israeli society exemplifies divine redemption of those who have suffered at the hands of the unjust and powerful – in this case Ethiopian Jewish who previously were slave owners.

The more I questioned friends and research participants about what the stigma of being barya specifically implied, the more I realized that my attempt to concretize this issue as an exclusively racial problem – that is to say, one of color gradation and skin tone – was misguided. To be sure, discrimination against barya has a prominent racial dimension. However, the core of the barya stigma is not rooted in skin color but rather in primordialist concepts of lineage and genealogy, expressed through race and bloodline. The race-based – as in blood-based and genealogical – classification system that determines inclusion and exclusion in this case is premised on the same dual racial logic (Jew/non-Jew) according to which Israel discriminates between potential citizens and disenfranchized outsiders. The duality of this racial logic is based not so much on the dichotomy between black/white or dark skin/light skin, but rather on

bloodline. In other words, the inner racial make-up of the individual defines the terms of inclusion and exclusion.

Shay, an Ethiopian Jewish social scientist, explained the barya phenomenon to me in the following words:

> Once I thought that it was associated only with skin color. Let's say my father can count orally, it's not written down anywhere, ten [generations back] on each side without any problems. There is something in the oral culture of actually reciting your generations. I think that on the one hand it's used as a kind of an insurance policy. Second thing is that it was an inseparable part of the group's identity. As a religious group as well, you must know where you came from and where you are going. So first of all, it had a kind of functional definition of, you know, to remember and to know. But secondly those who are called barya, originally those are people who don't belong to the Beta Israel group originally, and they also don't belong originally to the Ethiopians. It's like other groups inside Ethiopia. Ethiopians are not all Habasha. There are groups that are physically different than the Habashas, they are distinguishable, you can see and say, 'He's not a typical Habasha.' Most likely in the time period when there was the slave trade or something like that, these were people who were simply being traded. With time they say that the barya, at least in our community, entered into the Jewish community. They have already lived for several generations with the community. You were brought as a [female] slave and you have children and your children's father is a Jew, but people will remember and will count back, and then they'll say, 'But we don't know who you are. And who your father is, and in terms of your origins you aren't Ethiopian, you have no history.' So this actually is what works against you. A significant part of it is the issue of counting generations and going back. Once you don't have this [information] about your own history, it works against you. So you are detached from somewhere. This is the barya, this is the definition.

The legacy of the barya as a group without history, religion or lineage that acquired civilization through their contact with their masters is largely the concern of the older generation. It echoes ideas of inferiority and stereotypes that Jewish religious authorities had of the Beta Israel themselves. Many young Ethiopian Israelis foresee that this body of knowledge and the prejudice it advocates will die with their elders in the span of a generation. What can be summarized, based on definitions discussed during interviews, is that baryas are conceived as (1) descendants of slaves and (2) phenotypically distinguishable from Habasha Ethiopians (Amharas and Tigres, Christian or Jewish) in that they are much darker, though this is not always true. Unlike the Beta Israel, baryas, I was told, resemble African Americans in terms of their phenotype, meaning darker skin tone, a larger nose that is slightly flattened, and kinky hair. Yet darker skin tone is an inconsistent feature of the stigma imposed on the barya, because as Ariella noted, "you can be white white white [and still be barya]." Ariella brought

up skin color and tone to explain why white Israelis were, in her opinion, highly attracted to the barya's complexion:

> Oh, Israelis love them! They don't like us. [What's] my color? What am I? I'm Yemenite, I'm, what am I? I'm not black. They don't like my color, but in my mother's neighborhood, all of the barya married Ashkenazis, white, and they [the barya women] are ugly but the whites LOVE them. For Ethiopians I'm pretty, I can walk by there and they [white Israelis] won't look at me, but a barya? They will say 'She is beautiful, oooh.' It's amazing!

Q: Because for Ethiopians whenever it's darker, it's not good.
A: Yes, it's not good, but with them [with white Israelis] it's good.

My conversation with Ariella underscored two key points for understanding how race works among Jews in Israel. Firstly, according to her Ashkenazim or Mizrahim who marry dark-skinned baryas are attracted to the exotic newness the latter embodies. In other words, black is beautiful because it is exotic. The fetishized blackness of dark-skinned baryas is contrasted with the "normality" of Ariella's blackness, which she likens to the not-so-dark and not-so-new blackness of the Yemenites. On the one hand, the object of desire is determined less by gradations of skin color that would, say, differentiate a dark-skinned barya from a Yemenite but more by the novelty it represents in the landscape of Jewish Israeli blackness.

On the other hand, Ariella's account of her brother's family evidences that concerns about being the "right" color – keeping in mind that each skin color is attached to a specific position in the socioeconomic hierarchy of Israel – equally preoccupy Ethiopian parents, who would prefer their children to marry up the Israeli ethno-racial ladder, rather than down. Ariella initially defined Mizrahim as black, but this shifted when she brought up her brother's "white" Moroccan wife:

A: My brother is married to a white [female], a Moroccan.
Q: Wait, now Moroccan is white?
A: white Moroccan.
Q: But before you mentioned that Moroccans are black.
A: She was black.
Q: Ok she's black, but for your parents [she is considered white].
A: For the parents she's white, because she's white, she is white. They have children, half Moroccan and half Ethiopian, it's beautiful. And my mother doesn't eat at their place; she's in a fight with him [the brother] and they don't talk. My mother said "If you marry someone white, at least marry an Ashkenazi, why marry a black one?" Do you understand? She [the daughter in law] is black, you [Ariella's mother] are black, there's racism towards her, and there's racism towards you too. My mother said, "Marry someone from Ramat Aviv Gimel [the rich neighborhood in northern Tel Aviv], a rich man at least," do you understand?

However much Moroccans in Israel have been whitened with the advent of upward mobility and the arrival of Ethiopian Jews, in Ariella's mother's mind, they remain the blackest of "whites." Her thinking reflects the logic of Israel's social hierarchy, unambiguously tracing a linear connection between race/ethnic background and socioeconomic status whereby Askhenazis constitute the richer segment of Israeli society, and Mizrahim – the blacks/whites of Israel – form the lower echelons. Unlike Ethiopian Israelis, who cannot be mistaken for anything other than black, Mizrahim's status has been defined by racial flexibility since the arrival of Ethiopian olim.

The bulk of Mizrahim still occupy the lower echelons of Jewish Israeli society, alongside Ethiopians. Thus, in the eyes of Ariella's mother, a white Ashkenazi from one of Tel Aviv's rich neighborhoods is a better choice for marriage than a black/white Mizrahi from a poor development town. Ariella herself underscores a missed opportunity for both Ethiopians and Mizrahim to mobilize as racialized and marginal Jewish Others and confront racism with a common front.

Compared to other research participants, Daniella described herself as being very light-skinned compared to other Ethiopians, though that did not exempt her from being called a cushi. Many participants evoked incidents where they were stigmatized as cushi. These events work to reinforce the boundary of the Ethiopian Jewish community as outsiders within, and maintain the "black Jewish/white Jewish" dichotomy that defines the social world of Ethiopian Israelis.

"I have a word for you too!": Coping with racism

Many scholars successfully argue that labels such as "black" derive from the historical naturalization of logics that work to classify human beings according to color and behavior, with a view to reproduce dominant hierarchies and social relations (Smedley 2007; Harrison 1995). However, the overarching academic and historical outlook on race as a social construct does not provide tools or strategies to cope with the experience of racialization for those who are and will remain black.

The difference between the discourse of older research participants (in their twenties and thirties) and younger teenagers with regard to how they feel and appropriate blackness is striking. In their narratives, members of the older group often accentuate self-esteem about their skin color. This is the cornerstone of effective strategies that help them face the negative messages about blackness and Ethiopianness to which they are exposed on a daily basis. Flora, a youth activity coordinator in her mid-thirties, explains how she gradually came to terms with and eventually embrace her skin color:

> When I was little it influenced me more, the color thing, like, wow, I'm different. But once I integrated, it didn't influence me as much, just a little, and with time, you integrate more. It's a course [a process] and somewhere you start to accept it, to live in peace with it, and even to love it. Today it became more special, more beautiful, it depends also how you look at it. Now

> my perception has changed and I'm connected to the color, connected to everything, I flow better with it.

Shana, a hairdresser in her mid-twenties who manages her own salon, describes a similar trajectory: "Here and there it may have bothered me, but in the end you accept it, and I even feel good with it now, pleased with it and proud of it."

Moreover, coping mechanisms and comfort level about being black vary depending on one's age, experience, and outlook. Ariella's insights center personal belief in one's self-worth as the pivotal element influencing how racist messages are filtered:

> It's something that I strongly believe, that racism is also something that you can, that the way you think and feel about it can prevent or encourage racism. Because if you feel that you're a poor Ethiopian girl or boy, people would react to you in the same way [as how you feel], not that it excuses their behavior. And I believe that if you feel that you are worthy, that you are equal to whoever, no matter what his skin color is, then people will react to you in the same way. Not always, because some people are racist no matter what you do or however you feel about yourself, but it does affect [the situation].

In Ariella's narrative, the onus to counter racism and ignorance lies with the individual. Certain interviewees described how they "don't take anything personally" and put up "a mental barrier." Others came to the conclusion that "at some point in my life I realized that I'm black, I'm Ethiopian whether I like it or not, so I might as well get used to it and see the positive side of it, feel good about myself." One person stated, "I do not let this situation make me feel bad, because I know what I am, and nobody can take self-confidence away from me."

I identified four main coping strategies used by older research participants when faced with explicit racism. The first is an ability to rely on one's strong Ethiopian heritage as a source of inspiration and self-confidence. Of course, only those with a lived memory of life in Ethiopia or with positive feelings toward their Ethiopian background can apply this strategy. Orit was seven years old when she arrived to Israel in 1984:

> Let's say I'm standing in line and someone calls you cushi or says, "who brought you here [to Israel]?" Or someone […] tells me, "go back to Ethiopia where you came from." Well I know where I came from, I do have respect for the place I came from, so he can't hurt me this way.

Secondly, some purported that they no longer notice racists because they do not focus on them. As Addisa got older, she developed a means of blocking out insults about her skin tone:

> I have to tell you that if years back I used to get offended by Israelis [who made remarks] about my color, [but] now? I don't see them! I don't see them!!

> They do not exist for me; these racist people don't exist. I'm too immune [to it].

Others prefer color blindness:

> Look, I don't see unusual things, I don't see myself in front of a person and think "I'm black, you're white." I'm a human being, that's what I am […] I, myself demanded [of myself to believe] that I'm ok, and that I'm good, and that everything is fine with me and that there's no need to look at my skin color.

By adopting a color-blind approach, Aviva consciously minimizes the power that race and skin color exert over her interactions. If taken to the extreme, this approach has the potential to erase race as a primary component of the discrimination Ethiopian Israelis experience.

Thirdly, many interviewees explained their philosophy about race and racism using universalistic tropes of equality and sameness ("no matter what our skin color we are all the same"). Such an outlook is an attempt to neutralize the stigmatization of blackness. This issue may also be potentially dangerous for those who choose to ignore racism completely rather than engage with it directly:

> I prefer to ignore it, and believe me, it helps me more that I'm not [giving attention to] this, because if you look for it you'll always find it. There are always people who don't always love the one who is different, that will always be [there], I just don't give it any attention.

The fourth strategy is to answer back. Addissa describes a crafty tactic she developed to respond to people who call her "cushi." By turning the logic of the insult back on the oppressor, she empowers herself and draws on Ethiopian constructs of race:

> Sometimes if someone tells me "Hey cushit!" [cushi, feminine] I will say bula! Bula [in Amharic] it's like ashes, when it's white, not nice, like a white without color. It's not nice, it's like if I have a driver, a whitie? This person suddenly hears something that he doesn't know? And he wants to know what I called him! He's like "What? What did you say?" "I said bula!" "What's bula?" And now he forgets about cushi and he wants to know what name I called him, you know? [Smiles wryly.] This way I can show people that I also have a name for you. I don't get offended, I say this to them and I just leave.

When I asked Shana how she reacts when someone calls her cushi, she said, "I grew up like an Israeli, whoever tells me [cushit] will get smacked, that's how I behave." Yonah equally engages with the name caller, through dialogue peppered with humor and intelligence:

> When they would say to me "black, cushi," I would tell them "At least on Shabbat I rest at home and you go to get a tan to get more color," and then

he says, "Really, you're right!" [Laughing.] Me, I have responses for this issue. When someone says this [cushi] I sit and explain to them, without letting them go. Once I was at the beach and some guy called me "cushi." I told him "Do you have time to sit with me over a cup of coffee?" So I invited him for coffee, we sat, we drank, we talked about everything. At the end I asked him "Do you know what the word cushi is?" He tells me "black." I said "You're wrong. Cushi is a slave, did you ever see me as a slave?" He says "No, who even thought about it? Forget about all this, let's drink." [laughing] I explained to him and he said "Wow, I swear on my life I didn't know what it was, I just said cushi like that [without a reason]." Then I asked him, "What are you doing at the beach?" He said 'I came to tan, to get color.' I said, "You do this in order to get some color [to get darker] – and you call me names!?" He fell to the floor laughing!

Conclusion

Young Ethiopian Israelis come of age amidst the push and pull of being racialized as modern Jews, on the one hand, and racialized as blacks, on the other. Their double racialization gains traction on the ground of Israel's identity project of making Jewishness intrinsic to nationality and citizenship (Handelman 2004). Rabbi Eli's act of distancing himself from the black Muslim taxi driver in New York, and recounting this experience to a young Ethiopian Jewish audience who find it uproariously funny, is emblematic of the political and ideological vicissitudes within which this group is enmeshed in Israel. Negotiating Israeli social hierarchies entails differentiating themselves as black Jews from other blacks, particularly dark-skinned Muslims, who represent the antithesis of Jews in the Israeli national space. In Israel, Ethiopian Jewish practices of distanciation from other blacks – including non-Jewish African laborers from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and elsewhere as well as the Black Hebrews[12] – is telling of their commitment to the Jewish "race" (read as bloodline) and religion. This stance also speaks to the limits of racial solidarity based exclusively on shared blackness in the Israeli ethnonationalist context. Diverse participants in my research convey that for Ethiopian Jews, religious belonging and the political citizenship it affords seems to far outweigh fellow feeling for non-Jews who share their skin tone and experiences of discrimination.

Notes

1 Ethiopian Rabbi Eli speaking in Tel Aviv on July 6, 2008, at an event organized by the Ethiopian student association.
2 It is important to note that no other Ethiopian Israeli I was in contact with identified with the racial label "brown." It is not common to do so.
3 The Law of Return stipulates that any person who is Jewish or deemed as such by the halachic authorities automatically receives Israeli citizenship with all the political rights and obligations associated with it.

4 *How the Irish Became White* (Ignatiev 1995); *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (Brodkin 1998).
5 With regard to skin tone exclusively, Mizrahi groups, in particular Yemenite Jews, are the closest in terms of shade to Ethiopian Jews.
6 From the standpoint of older generations of Ethiopians, however, Ethiopian Jews are not all "black," but rather different shades that index social status according to an epidermic system of racial classification unfamiliar to most Israelis (Djerrahian 2014).
7 The concept of whiteness as a racialized category is highly problematic in Israel. See Djerrahian (2014).
8 However problematic, the term "the whites" or *ha levanim'* was consistently used by every Ethiopian Israeli interlocutor.
9 The symbolic weight of the word cushi can be understood by looking at how and when it is used and by studying the discourse of race it underscores. Before Ethiopians arrived in Israel, Mizrahim were considered 'cushi', in other words, a racialized reference with negative connotations indexing their inferiority to 'white' Jews. In Hebrew, the word 'cushi' is an interesting term. There are two separate but interrelated meanings associated with it. Etymologically speaking, it refers to the ancient land of Cush and its people (Cushites) mentioned in the Bible. The region loosely corresponds to current-day Ethiopia and its larger surroundings. With regard to its contemporary, popular use in Israel, Ethiopian Israelis interpret it as meaning 'nigger'. Kaplan (1999, 543) however points out that: '[…] [T]he cushi-nigger equivalence is problematic. Both in the Bible and in later Hebrew sources […], the term Cushi was a common term for Africans'. In modern Hebrew, it is also a nickname for others regardless of their origin, if they had particularly dark skin. What is important to note in this context, is that neither the Ethiopians' rejection of the term nor the Israelis' growing sensitivity regarding its usage has led to its general abandonment. Other Africans and people of African descent continue to be referred to as Cushim by Israelis in general, and by Ethiopian immigrants themselves. By and large, and without exception, every Ethiopian Israeli I asked to define the meaning of the word cushi consistently translated this term into 'nigger', and considered it a racial slur that indexes exclusion based on racial traits.
10 On January 25, 1996, an article in a daily Hebrew newspaper reported that blood donated by Ethiopian Israelis was quietly discarded by the Israeli medical establishment out of fear of HIV/AIDS contamination. Thousands of angered and discontented Ethiopians poured into the streets and mass demonstrations ensued in Jerusalem. See Seeman (1997, 1999).
11 Ari is referencing Hans Christian Anderson's nineteenth-century short story "The Ugly Duckling."
12 The Black Hebrews are African Americans who claim to be the only true Israelites. They practice a form of African American Judaism different from traditional and mainstream Judaism. Since the establishment of a Black Hebrew community in Israel in the 1970s, they have been fighting for their right to be recognized as legitimate Jews. In 2003, they were granted permanent residency status. Black Hebrew youths serve in the Israeli army.

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4 Black-Israeli lives matter

Online activism among young Ethiopian Israelis

Omer Keynan

In April 2015, CCTV footage of Israeli police officers beating Damas Pakada, a Jewish-Israeli man of Ethiopian descent and an active duty soldier in uniform, went viral on Facebook. In response, members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community organized a series of large-scale demonstrations against police brutality. By studying online interactions on Facebook pages popular with Ethiopian-Israeli users, this chapter shows how these users interpreted the video as exhibiting of social exclusion based on skin color. The protest movement's narratives were inspired by the historical and cultural struggle of the African American community, and more recently, by the political activities of the *Black Lives Matter* movement (hereafter BLM) in the United States. Adopting the narrative of "black struggle" also indicated Ethiopian-Israeli users' preference for a more proactive and uncompromising social protest, rather than conciliatory approaches that advocate for social integration efforts. Drawing upon concepts in studies of social movements, the findings of this chapterlend insight into the role of social media in the formation and ongoing conduct of contemporary social movements as a space where ideas, messages, and forms of protest are conveyed by visual, symbolic and emotional means.

The leading question of this chapter is in what ways did the cultural narrative of the African American struggle, as conveyed and distributed by means of social media, inspire the Ethiopian-Israeli community protest? The chapter shows that Ethiopian Facebook users interpreted the video of the battered soldier in terms of racism, and many of them compared discrimination against African Americans in the United States to discrimination against the Ethiopian-Israeli community in Israel. Users drew these connections and expressed solidarity with the African American protestors and the BLM in the United States, for example, by incorporating the hashtag #Black_Lives_Matter_Israel and #BlackLivesMatterIsrael in posts condemning police brutality against the Ethiopian community. Other users, as I show below, incorporated the teachings of famous black political leaders such as Malcolm X into their online discourse against police brutality. By doing so, they indicated a preference for uncompromising protest, at times translated into the explicit call for a separatist attitude.

The research used online content analysis to determine the ways in which Facebook users reacted to the symbolic and emotional image of the battered

soldier. The analysis focused on ways users incorporated visual and textual measures such as hashtags, videos, photos, and illustrations, on ten Facebook pages popular with young adult users of Ethiopian descent. These pages,whose names and descriptions are presented below, were chosen due to their large membership, and because of the broad discussion about the Ethiopian-Israeli community protest that took place within them. Additionally, these pages were selected for ethical reasons. Unlike closed groups, these fan pages are public spaces with no special expectation of privacy.

While numerous studies of social movements focus separately on the role of symbolism, emotions, and illustrative means in the formation and ongoing activity of movements, this chapter argues that all three aspects, and the dynamics between them, should be taken into consideration. By focusing specifically on the ways anti-police brutality activists used Facebook, the chapter also expands theories in the studies of social movements, which were formulated in the era preceding the emergence of social media, to take into account the role of the internet in activist organizing.

Background

Ethiopian Jews lived in Ethiopia separately from other Jewish communities around the world for about 2,000 years and are known collectively as "Beta Israel," (Hebrew: "House of Israel"). In Ethiopia, members of the community maintained their Jewish identity based on the laws of Judaism written in the Old Testament, and expressed a desire to live in Israel, which is described in the bible as the "promised land" to the Jews (Mendelson-Maoz 2012; Walsh and Tuval-Mashiach 2012).

Jewish communities in Europe first became acquainted with the Ethiopian Jewish community in the nineteenth century, and after the establishment of Israel in 1948, international Jewish organizations made efforts to enable members of the community to immigrate to Israel (Mendelson-Maoz 2012). Israel's *Law of Return*, which was passed in 1950, established a framework for Jewish *aliyah* (immigration) to Israel and inscribed the natural status of all Jews as potential Israeli citizens. This framework also designates procedures for demonstrating proof of one's Judaism according to *halakha*, Jewish religious law. The prospect of Ethiopian Jews'*aliyah* raised questions within the Israeli government and the Rabbinate, the state's official Jewish religious authority, about whether Beta Israel community members were Jewish according to *halakha*, and in turn, whether they qualified for the Law of Return. In 1973, Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef determined that Beta Israel should be recognized as a Jewish community. In this, he paved the way for an official decision to be made by the state to promote the option of Aliyah for the Beta Israel community.

Following Rabbi Yosef's declaration, many Ethiopian Jewish families embarked on a long journey to Israel from Ethiopia on foot. Thousands suffered personal trauma and hunger while walking in the desert heat, others were arrested by government officials while traveling through Sudan and were sent to refugee camps where many of them did not survive the extreme living conditions. It was only

after the Israeli government organized military airlift operations – *Operation Moses* in 1984 and later *Operation Solomon* in 1991 – that thousands of Ethiopian Jews eventually arrived at Israel (Kaplan 2005; Mashiach and Walsh 2012).

After arrival, Ethiopian immigrants faced many difficulties integrating into Israeli society (Binhas 2016). State authorities and the religious establishment did not invest the required effort to better understand the immigrants' cultural and religious background (Herzog 2007), and even though the Rabbinate previously acknowledged their Jewishness, many Ethiopians still had to undergo conversion as doubts regarding the authenticity of their Jewish identity persisted. The Rabbinate in Israel also refused to recognize the religious authority of the Kesses, who for generations served as Beta Israel's cultural, spiritual and religious leaders in Ethiopia. These official denials of Ethiopian' Jewish identity humiliated the community and made it difficult for them to integrate into Israeli society (Bar Yosef 2001; Ben-Eliezer 2008).

While the state's religious authorities cast doubt on their Jewish identity, the Ethiopian community also faced racial discrimination in Israeli society more broadly. According to Kaplan (2002), following their arrival in Israel newcomers entered a world rife with negative cultural biases and associations predicated on widely-held racialized dichotomy between "European white, enlightened and culturally progressive" Israelis versus "black, Ethiopian, disadvantaged Africans." By stigmatizing Ethiopian Jews as blacks, representation that further perpetuated by the Israeli media (Mengistu and Avraham 2015), many in Israeli society alienated themselves from the Ethiopian community and reinforced their own self-perceptions of superiority. As few scholars have noted this racial-based dichotomy also stood in stark contradiction to the community's codes of racial constructs according to which most of the members saw themselves as non-blacks (Kaplan 1999, Salamon 2003).

According to Shabtay (2001a) and Offer (2007), it was mostly the second and third generation of Ethiopian immigrants, primarily those who were born and grew up in Israel, who claim to experience racism by the side of Israeli society. According to these young people, racism based on color has only increased since the arrival of their parents. It is against this background that young Ethiopian-Israelis tend to embrace the images and discourse of blackness (Shabtay 2001b, Ratner 2019). Mizrachi and Zawdu (2012) further supported these finding by showing that whereas working class Ethiopian-Israelis tend to identify with local Jewish-Israeli identity middle class Ethiopian-Israelis tend to identify more with a global black identity. The latter saw black identity not as complementary identity but rather as an alternative to Jewish-Israeli identity.

My study thus follows this strand; it will show how young Ethiopian-Israelis use online discourse to connect themselves with narratives of African American struggle – past and present – and hence develop their overall affiliation with transnational blackness. In associating these narratives to the local situation young activists also develop a more confrontational approach in comparison to the conciliatory approach that characterizes the official leadership of the Ethiopian community in Israel.

The use of symbols, illustrations, and collective emotions

Clifford Geertz (1973) have famously argues that the study of culture should include deep analyses of texts and practices, which in turn should be understood in the context of a rich network of associations, beliefs, and shared experiences of the studied group. During the 1980s, research in sociology, anthropology, and linguisitics began to apply these ideas to the research of social movements, and identified cultural symbols as a key feature of their formation (Johnston and Klandermans 1995). Over the years, studies of the cultural dimensions of social movements expanded to also consider how members of social movements use symbols to create solidarity and mobilize support (Swidler 1986, 1995; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). Swidler (1986) analogizes culture with a 'toolkit' of rituals, symbols, narratives, and worldviews that individuals can use to define their action strategies. In the context of social movements, culture is not perceived as a system of forces that predetermines a movement's activities but rather as a repertoire on which individuals can draw selectively in the process of movement's formation. In this process, symbols, values, shared meanings, and beliefs are adopted and designed to fit the goals of the movement (Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson 2004).

Collective emotion has long been a key feature of the formation and conduct of social movements, long before the emergence of digital media, as emotions were always diffuse in all parts of social life (Jasper 1998). Theoretical studies on social movements in the digital age mostly seek to explain how new socio-technical spheres, like the internet, create new opportunities for collective emotions to lead to collective action. To that end, this literature has particularly focused on ways activists integrate visual symbols into their online activity (Bloomfield and Doolin 2013; Kharroub and Bas 2016). Activists use digital media to present visual symbols, like photos and memes that evoke collective emotions, like anger and frustration, in order to galvanize collective action (Juris 2008). Brown et al. (2017) showed, for example, how online users used the hashtag #SayHerName in order to raise awareness of injustice against black women in the United States. According to Papacharissi (2014), activists' main goals in the use of online platforms is to create "affective publics," i.e. a group unified by a feeling of belonging to an emotional experience. That is, in the digital era, social movements are not measured by the extent to which their activity leads to significant social change, but by the way they make protestors "feel their way" to a political issue. Papacharissi (2014) analyzed the *Arab Spring* protests in Cairo and showed that the protestors shared a deeply emotional experience that manifested through their use of Twitter.

As for the Ethiopian-Israeli community protest, the discussion in this chapter will show how the features of Facebook's platform allowed users to interpret and amplify the symbolism of the video of the battered soldier and to create a narrative of protest against police brutality. This narrative, as I will further demonstrate, drew inspiration from the historical struggle of the African American community and the contemporary BLM movement. Hence, the chapter argues that the encounter between visual means related to black struggle on Facebook, the symbolism of a video showing a soldier in a uniform beaten by police officers,

and the collective emotion evoked among the users who saw the video and other visual means, had a significant role in the development of the public protest.

Black lives matter in Israel

On April 30, only few days after being assaulted by police officers, Damas Pakada shared the following post on the Facebook page called *Etiopia ha-Ktana* ("Little Ethiopia"), a page that is devoted to raising awareness about racism against Ethiopian-Israelis and which has more than 110,000 followers:

> I went to a store that helps lone soldiers, I did not know there was a suspicious object, I came to ask the policeman what happened, and he said to me, "turn around, or I do not know what I'll do to you!" They told me at the police station that I was attacking a police officer, I stayed at the station all night, and today I was released. They must do their job, but not in such a disgusting way.
> (Facebook, April 30, 2015b)

The police beating of Damas Pakada was captured by a CCTV camera and posted that same day by Barak Gavriel, a user that lives nearby (Facebook, April 26, 2015). Thousands of users shared the video and it received more than 900 comments. Four days later, young Israelis of Ethiopian descent organized the first public demonstration against police brutality in Jerusalem. Two more were organized in Tel Aviv within the following month and a half. Despite the Israeli police General Commander's strong condemnation of the police officers who beat Pakada, the Department for Internal Investigations of the Israeli Police decided to close the criminal case against the officers on the basis of "lack of public interest," and transferred the case to disciplinary units in the police department. In response, young adult Israelis of Ethiopian descent argued on Facebook that because they are black citizens in Israel, they are more exposed to police brutality than others. They also noted that this was not the first case of police brutality against a member of the community that had been closed due to an official designation of a "lack of public interest."[1]

Following the emotional discourse over the video of Pakada and the formal decision to close the case, users began to share other videos of police officers beating young Ethiopian-Israelis. By sharing these videos, online users presented a narrative in which the entire Ethiopian-Israeli community is in danger of becoming victims of police brutality. These filmed incidents also expanded public exposure to the prevalence of police brutality against the Ethiopian-Israeli community. Additionally, these videos allowed the presentation of cases of police brutality as one of many symptoms of the marginalization of the Ethiopian-Israeli community in Israel. Aytaç, Schiumerini, and Stokes (2018) argue that it is hard to predict the impact of collective rage on the emergence of public protests. In the Israeli case, sharing these videos on Facebook indeed sparked public protest, but soon the demonstrations themselves helped expose the wider public to the police's aggressive behavior. Videos taken during the demonstrations, which were later

shared online, captured evidence of the police's use of violent means to disperse the protests, such as tear gas, spray trucks, and stun grenades.

As the videos are showing, some of the protestors picked up signs that said "Black Lives Matter" or "Black Lives Matter in Israel," thus presenting police brutality against them as a local case of global institutionalized racism against black subjects.[2] Like demonstrators on the streets online protest also featured content that borrowed from the African American – and more generally black – struggle. Inbar Bugla, one of the leaders of Ethiopian-Israeli protest, posted the following words on her fan page, to which she added the hashtag *#The_International_Apartheid_Regime*:

> Every neighborhood gets a group of people together to regularly keep an eye on the children with cameras. The court will not do anything but at least you will save lives. Dear mother, before your son leaves home, kiss him and hug him like it is the last day because you don't know if he will return.
>
> (Facebook, April 7, 2016)

Bugla was first propelled into the public spotlight after she gave an invited lecture at a conference held at the *Peres Center for Peace* in Tel Aviv on *International Women's Day* in 2016. She stepped on stage and read a list of the names of Israelis of Ethiopian descent who had been attacked by police officers. She then presented a letter entitled "Black Lives Matter in Israel" to the English model and actress Naomi Campbell, the guest of honor at the conference. In the post mentioned above, Bugla went on referring to the Pakada incident:

> […] A young black man in a uniform named Damas Pakada was attacked by police officers, before the eyes of a whole white country; apparently the policeman will return to his job, the case closed due to a lack of public interest. […] Black youths in Israel are victims of police brutality; most of them are walking dead, who prefer to remain silent and bury their stories with them.

Upon this description she then drew similarities between the Israel and the American case, as was revealed by BLM's demonstrations and posts on social media.

Another post on *Little Ethiopia* attempted to draw further parallels between the BLM movement and the Ethiopian-Israeli protest and featured a video titled "Our Lives Matter" (*Little Ethiopia*, February 22, 2015). The post specifically drew parallels between the situation of the black children in the United States and that of children of Ethiopian descent in Israel by showing how both are already victims of police brutality, even when they are mere children. The video showed African American children staring directly at the camera, asking why they were being followed, why they were perceived as suspicious, why the music that they listened to led to them being perceived as dangerous, and why they were victims of police brutality. The user who posted the videos added, "Many of the young people

[in Israel] are aware that they are targets, […] How many more teenagers must lose their lives, for this unnecessary violence to stop?"

Visual cues of black protest are reflected by posts in which the administrators of Facebook pages try to enlist users' emotions regarding the Pakada incident, the military, and the police. For example, administrators for the page *The Struggle against Police Brutality and Corruption* participated in organizing the demonstration that took part at the Israeli police central headquarters in Jerusalem on April 30, 2015.[3] Administrators of the page called the users to take part in two activities: the first was to attend the demonstration in Jerusalem, and the second, which took place within Facebook, called users to post photographs of themselves holding their military berets with signs saying: "a violent police officer must be behind bars" (Facebook, April 30, 2015a). An illustration of a raised fist was added to the post. The raised fist is a common symbolic gesture of solidarity with oppressed people, and black activists around the world have used the image as a symbol of resistance to oppression. One of the most iconic uses of the gesture occurred during the *Black Power Movement* era, when black athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, members of the American team to the Olympic Games in Mexico 1968, raised their gloved fist to protest against racism in the United States (Ratchford, 2012). Today the raised fist gesture is also being used in protests organized by the BLM movement in the United States.

Connections that Ethiopian-Israelis draw with the BLM movement via their social media posts can be seen as efforts to create an identity for their movement itself. By adopting the rhetorical and organizational characteristics of the most significant black protest movement in recent years, Ethiopian-Israelis argue that in order to change their social condition, they should diverge the subdued tactics of their parents' generation and take a more active approach.

Social integration or radical protest?

The BLM movement referred to historical events and leaders of the African American community, mostly during the 1960's. For example, protestors in Ferguson, Missouri compared the ratio of police to protestors during the civil rights movement in the 1960s to that in Ferguson in 2014. They used social media to show how police officers in both periods used watchdogs to threaten and even attack protestors. They posted photos of the dogs biting and barking at protestors. In doing so, they created a visual theme that linked the civil rights movement in the 1960s to the Ferguson protests in 2014, stressing that black Americans are still struggling for their lives (Everbach, Clark and Nisbett, 2018). The deliberate reference to images like the "raised fist" reveals that Ethiopian-Israeli activists strategically utilize symbols associated with the present *and* history of African American struggle. As I argue in this section, the utilization of such symbols was part of the online debate over the question of whether the Ethiopian-Israeli community continue to invest efforts in assimilation the mainstream of Israeli society or adopt more separatist approach in face of police brutality, structural racism and institutional discrimination.

One way by which Israeli-Ethiopian protestors associated their struggle with the African American one was by publishing posts and comments that invoked the political doctrine of the 1960s black leader Malcolm X. One example can be found in a post published on Inbar Bugla's page, in which she (and later some of the users commenting on to the post) applied the same terms used by Malcolm X during the famous speech he gave in 1963 at Virginia University. In his speech, Malcolm X presented two metaphorical terms borrowed from the period of slavery – the "House Negro" and "Field Negro" – to distinguish between contemporary black people who identify with the American hegemony and those who viewed themselves as oppressed by it (Mamdani, 2001). Black people who identify with white America, claimed Malcolm X, have learned to hate themselves, and to deny the validity of their own historical and cultural heritage (Morris, 2001).

The video posted by Bugla begins with an excerpt from the Malcolm X speech before it turns to an interview, conducted in the South African national television channel, with a representative of *Stand with Us*, a pro-Israel, non-profit organization based in the United States. The speaker, an Israeli of Ethiopian descent, was asked if there was racism toward the Ethiopian-Israeli community in Israel. She replied saying that Israel was not a racist country, and that incidents of racism only existed as individual events by uneducated people. In juxtaposing the two videos Bugla criticized the message conveyed by the speaker referring to her, as did other users who commented on the video, as a modern "house negro." One of the comments further invoked Malcolm X's distinction between the two kinds of slaves and added a collage photograph of white adolescents stepping on and humiliating two young black adolescents. The collage also shows a photograph of a *Black Panther* activist (as indicated by the caption on his hat) addressing Malcolm X.

By referring to Malcolm X's lecture, Bugla thus intended to make sense of the social situation of the Ethiopian-Israeli community; mostly of the need of the young generation to choose between separatist and integrationist approaches. It is worth mention, however, that not all users agreed with the message conveyed by Bugla. Among the tens who shared her post and the thousands who viewed it, some rejected the presentation of the organization's representative as a contemporary "house negro."[4] One user wrote:

> She does not sugar coat reality. There are a lot of things to do but you cannot blame the entire government (especially a government like ours that prefers not to do anything – not only in this field, but in every area). Equality for Ethiopian immigrants is the responsibility of every citizen.

Regardless of the debate it prompted Bugla's post highlights the relative simplicity with which illustrations on Facebook can assist in constructing a political narrative, and in marking the boundaries of belonging to the Ethiopian-Israeli protest movement. In this case, Facebook's features allowed users to link between historic and symbolic events, occurring in different places and times, and to deliberate the collective identity of the Ethiopian community protest movement.

A key reason why the video of Pakada generated such collective anger among users was the dissonant symbolism of a soldier in uniform being beaten by police officers. The image of police officers beating a soldier was presented as illustrative of a larger problem of racism and discrimination against black citizens in Israel, even those serving in the national forces. Against the common-held perception as if military service provides one an entry ticket to Israeli society, the incident proved that blackness of the Ethiopian soldiers is more noticeable than his uniform. As one user wrote: "At the end, he [Pakada] will be charged with assaulting police officers. Some people are equal to being soldiers like everyone else, [equal to die] for the national security but not beyond that. He is an Avesha [Ethiopian]" (Facebook, April 26, 2015).

Three years later, the local *Channel 2* Television broadcasted an article about the Pakada incident at their weekend news magazine. The article, prepared by Ethiopian-Israeli reporter Branu Tegene, was titled "The victory of Damas: the battered soldier who became an outstanding officer"; it included an interview with Pakada and a revisit to the Holon street corner where he was beaten.

Standing together at that location, Tegene asked Pakada, "If it had not been for this camera, would I now be interviewing Lieutenant Damas Pakada?" Pakada replied, "You wouldn't be interviewing Damas, no. I would have been in jail." The article go on to show Pakada and Tegene meeting a woman who live nearby and who immediately recognized Pakada as "the soldier." The woman told Tegene that she saw the violent arrest through the window of her house: "There were police here as if he [Pakada] is a terrorist. A soldier in uniform." The article then concludes with Tegene saying:

> The young man with the social values who was not supposed to find himself in a confrontation with the police. Thanks to one security camera, the plot took a turn, and Damas, despite the difficult experience, emerged stronger, more connected to his roots, determined to continue to struggle for his community and for himself.
>
> (Facebook, April 22, 2018)

The Channel 2 article was first shared by Facebook page *My Utopia* (Facebook, April 21, 2018), an Ethiopian-Israeli lifestyle magazine with more than 40,000 fans and over 51,000 followers; it was soon shared by hundreds, viewed by dozens, and received more than 170 comments. Most users who responded to the posts indicated agreement with the main message it conveyed, i.e. that Pakada emerged victorious because he became an outstanding officer in the Israeli army. As put by one user:

> Good job, Champion! It is the greatness of a courageous man, to rise above the obstacles that try to bring you down to the pit, to prove to them that you are not broken, but just the opposite.
>
> (Facebook, April 21, 2018)

While many users supported the message that social integration is the key for social improvement, some expressed disagreement. These users saw Pakada's military service as cooperation with the Israeli establishment whose representatives violently arrested him at the first place. As one user wrote: "Why salute him? […] An officer in a country that once the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ends, will put all the Ethiopians in a row and shoot them down …" (Facebook, April 21, 2018). In the spirit of this comment, some users even called for deserting the military service as a means of pressuring the Israeli establishment to change its attitude toward the Ethiopian-Israeli community. As posted three years earlier in *Little Ethiopia* shortly after the incident of the soldier's assault:

> All Ethiopian soldiers in uniform in all units must desert from the army immediately as a sign of identification with the soldier. … So, we can stop the racist phenomenon of police officers against the Ethiopians …
>
> (Facebook, April 27, 2015)

This text, which a user posted on 'little Ethiopia' (Facebook, April 27, 2015), was just one of several posts that called for collective army desertion as a way of forcing a significant change in the discriminatory and racist attitude toward the Ethiopian-Israeli community. Some users claimed that deserting the army is an extreme action that could endanger soldiers. However, even these users emphasized the need to challenge the public order in Israel, as one user wrote:

> You have to do something extreme; I do not know if desertion is the solution, but you have to think about an act that most of the community will participate in, and that will shake this country … This situation in which Ethiopians are a nothing cannot continue for many years; this is our time.
>
> (Facebook, April 27, 2015)

Whereas the modus operandi for effective protest remain undecided, it is rather clear that a growing number of young Ethiopian-Israelis share the feeling that the state failed to secure their rights, while its policing agents have become a tangible source of threat.

It seems that consumption of global pop culture through social media sites assisted the protestors in framing the experience of being black in Israeli society. Facebook pages popular with Israeli-Ethiopians served as a means of sharing images and disseminating concepts and discourse that created a collective emotional experience, resulting in a shift from an assimilation approach to separatist politics. It is worth to mention that the online discourse reveals that the protestors understand the meaning of adopting a more assertive approach, as the non-Ethiopian-Israelis will find it difficult to continue to support their public protest.

Conclusion

The analysis of the online discourse and activity of Ethiopian-Israeli protestors reveals an encounter between, and a mutual construction of, Facebook's measures

of illustration, the symbolism embodied in the Pakada video, and the collective emotion it galvanized. In this chapter I argued that this encounter played a significant role in the crystallization of the Ethiopian-Israeli community protest movement, a protest that was inspired by the BLM movement and the broader context of the historical struggle of African Americans.

The online reaction on Facebook pages popular with young adults of Ethiopian descent showed that, for these users, the video encapsulated decades of racism, discrimination, and police brutality against black citizens in Israel. For them, it became symbolic of the ineffectiveness of assimilation and more particularly of military service as a path for social integration. The video itself and Facebook's platform for sharing it, along with other visual and textual means connected with the "black struggle" narrative, enabled users from the Ethiopian-Israeli community to simplify and communicate their experiences of discrimination in Israeli society. By incorporating content borrowed from the historical struggle of the African American community, alongside the contemporary discourse and conduct of BLM movement, participants in the Ethiopian-Israeli protest in Israel indicated preferences for a more proactive and uncompromising social protest, rather than conciliatory approaches that advocated social integration efforts in Israel society.

The findings of this chapter lend insight into the role of digital technology in social movements as a space where ideas, messages, and forms of protest are conveyed by visual, symbolic and emotional means. This development in online activism stands in stark contrasts to other historical public protests and campaigns that rallied around prominent leaders, such as the civil rights movement in the United States led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Indian independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi.

By studying the characteristics of the online protest culture of the Ethiopian-Israeli community, and how it drew inspiration from the BLM movement and the historical African American struggle more broadly, the chapter shows the ways in which local social-political concepts become global and cross-cultural. It also shows how protest cultures may be expressed similarly across regional, national, and religious communities and social groups.

Notes

1 This Facebook user's complaint is supported by a report of the Ministry of Justice's *Team to Eradicate Racism against the Ethiopian Community* (2016: 20, 50, 85).

2 See, for example, YouTube, March 3, 2017.

3 The page has more than 24,000 fans and followers and its activities are aimed at police brutality in large, and not just in relation to the Ethiopian-Israeli community. However, during the days following the publication of the incident, the activity on the page was dedicated to the Ethiopian-Israeli community protest.

4 Unsurprisingly, posts characterized by more conciliatory approaches tended to mention Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., leader of the civil rights movement during the 1960s, as their preferred source of inspiration. And yet, it seems that the overall orientation shows steady preference for "Malcolm over Martin" (cf. Facebook May 4, 2015; May 19, 2015; June 19, 2015).

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5 Blackness in translation

The Israeli Black Panthers, 1971

Oz Frankel

Out of the impoverished neighborhood of Musrara in Jerusalem, the Israeli Black Panthers emerged in the early months of 1971 with a jolt. Led by a small core of activists, the movement launched a series of unprecedented demonstrations and rallies, staged media stunts, and circulated belligerent proclamations that featured mostly veiled but sometimes rather explicit threats of violence. Only a few years after their improbable rise, the Panthers fractured and lost their grip on Israeli public attention. Nevertheless, their rebellion left an important legacy, reshaping public discussions over social disparities, solidifying ethnic identities, and inspiring new welfare policies. Together with appropriating the name of a globally notorious radical organization, the Panthers claimed the color line as the signifier of the primary social division among Israeli Jews. In the process they linked the condition of poor Jews from the Middle East and North Africa with the experience of blackness as perceived through the historical plight and the intensifying struggle of African Americans during the 1960s.

The Panthers were not the first to suggest that Israeli society is structured as a pigmentocracy or, more specifically, to point to the parallels between the Black/White divide and the Ashkenazi/Mizrahi split. The analogy originated in early 1950s social critiques and, as we shall see, reappeared throughout the next two decades, especially in moments of social tension, most famously during the Wadi Salib riots of 1959. By selecting to become the Black Panthers of Israel the youth from Musrara both confirmed the racial analogy but also bypassed it, forging a decidedly political identity in which the intersection of ethnicity and class – conceived relationally in terms of the prosperous versus the oppressed who are perpetually "screwed over" (*dfukim*) – propped the figure of the defiant, socially awakened warrior, the Black Panther. Blackness was thus weaponized through the figure of the fierce feline. This identity moved beyond conventional modes of ethnic organization in Israel that typically had been aligned with countries or regions of origin. It also departed from the sentimental folklorist and highly commercialized ethnicism that saturated Israeli popular culture at the time.

The Israeli iteration of the Black Panthers was only one among globally dispersed groups that borrowed liberally from the rhetoric and militant symbols

of African American politics at the turn of the 1970s. Black Panther movements sprouted up in Britain, India, New Zealand, and elsewhere. Historian Nico Slate observes, "As Black Power moved abroad, the meaning of blackness within the movement changed. The transnational history of Black Power reveals the ability of racially based resistance to racism to cross not just national but also racial boundaries" (2012: 5). In the Israeli case, the appropriation of the name as well as a few of the icons – the raised fist, the silhouette of the panther about to pounce, even the phrase "by any means necessary" – were not based on any direct contact or explicit alliance between the two movements.

Embracing American racial militancy in the "Global Sixties" afforded the youngsters from Musrara a set of *readymade* radical symbols and a defiant public style. Neither needed extensive explication. The Panthers used their borrowed avatar inventively, at times deploying it as a threat of an impending upheaval, at other times dismissing it as merely an instrument for capturing attention; and enormous attention they indeed received, rattling the Israeli mainstream that was anxious about potential ties between poor Mizrahi Jews and the extreme Left either in Israel or abroad. Lingering ambiguities about the meaning of having a Black Power movement in Israel, the boundaries of its militancy, and its relationship to Zionism and the state – were made in the hands of the Musrara group a source of power rather than a liability.

Beyond their protests and specific demands for equality and social welfare the Panthers threatened the well-guarded mental borders that, in additional to actual borders, sequestered Israel from the rest of the world. By connecting themselves symbolically with a worldwide conflict pitched over the color line, and by shaming Israel globally, publicizing the plight of the Mizrahi among Jews and gentiles alike – they brought the outside in and exposed Israel's interior life for the world to see. Their rise made mockery of the Israeli conviction that social cohesion and common purpose inoculated it from the convulsive social conflicts of the 1960s it had observed from its Middle East perch.

The purpose of this chapter is not to adjudicate the validity of the analogy between racial strife in the United States and ethno-racial prejudice in Israel but instead to explore the social and cultural circumstances that rendered this comparison credible, and, more importantly, politically potent, even if not universally or even widely accepted. For that purpose, it is essential to follow not just the meaning the Panthers assigned to blackness but also the manner in which Israeli society in general comprehended the color line either in the United States or in the decolonizing world. I therefore set the following discussion in motion with an overview of three interlocking narratives that preceded the Panthers' arrival: the early elaboration of the Mizrahi/Black, Ashkenazi/White comparison, the initially strong empathy in Israel toward the African American Civil Rights movement, and, in the second half of the 1960s, the growing concerns and anxieties over the rise of Black Power and its alleged anti-Semitism. Black Power altered Israeli transnational sympathies, rendering Jewish Israel *whiter*. It then empowered the youth from Musrara seeking to challenge ethno-social disparities.

Screwing over the "Blacks"!

In October 1953, the weekly *Ha'olam Hazé* popularized the coarse expression *dofkim et ha-shchorim* ("screwing over the Blacks"). The magazine's front cover declared:

> A cloud of silence surrounds one problem that will decide the fate of Israeli society. It cuts the flesh of two out of five Israeli citizens. They see themselves as victims of discrimination, deprivation, and seclusion. In their hearts lingers the worst feeling of all, "[They are] screwing over the Blacks!" Decent society does not mention this issue. The entire public ignores it. But meanwhile the toxin of ethnic identity rises in the nation's arteries…[1]

Iraqi-born Shalom Cohen, the magazine's deputy editor, authored the cover article highlighting the sharp contrast between official rhetoric and social reality that was persistently denied. Unlike in Cicero, Illinois, he wrote, (referring to the 1951 race riots outside Chicago) in Israel a building would not be burned down because a Black family moved in. There were no "Whites Only!" benches as in South Africa. But Israel had established an invisible social hierarchy that marks its subordinates "Black."

Graphically striking, the article is comprised of six horizontal strips each with an image, a caption, and a prejudicial quotation: "The Blacks are merely animals," "They are used to low living conditions," "They are not capable of studying," "We need to keep the divide." "White" and "Black" appeared in quotations. The article specified categories of discrimination: housing, labor, bureaucracy, and human relations. The ethnic divide, maintained Shalom, was most acutely felt as social segregation. A "white" person would educate his children to see Mizrahi Jews as equal until his daughter brings home a "Black" boyfriend. Then he will talk to her about "cultural standards," "tradition," and "lifestyle." The adjoining image is of a young woman walking on the promenade in Tel Aviv being ogled by a group of four young men leaning on the rail. It is reminiscent of Ruth Orkin's iconic image, "An American Girl in Italy" taken just two years earlier. The guys whistle or make remarks, Cohen explained, because they know she is entirely unavailable to them. For her they are merely, "Black animals" (a translation of the derogatory Yiddish expression, "*schwarze hayes*").

Ha'olam Hazé claimed it had interviewed hundreds of individuals and collected additional evidence. Anecdotes include a Tel Aviv walkup where residents wrote into their contract that they would not sell or rent to Iraqis (a few of the examples are specifically of Iraqi immigrants) or other "Blacks." A patient preferred to wait a whole hour for a "white" physician instead of visiting an Iraqi-born doctor next door.

The magazine employed the tools of racial exposés in the United States. Cohen published an ad about a young journalist seeking a room for rent. Within three days there were 13 offers. An Ashkenazi staff member visited the apartments and reached preliminary agreements with all property owners. The following day,

another staff member, presenting himself as an Egypt-born, frequented the same addresses. He told the proprietors that his friend found another arrangement and asked to replace him. They inquired where he came from and whether he spoke German or Yiddish. His application was rejected in all cases.[2]

The "screwing over the Blacks" series increased *Ha'olam Hazê*'s popularity but earned it the scorn of politicians and the mainstream press that accused the irreverent magazine of inciting hatred, cultivating an ethnic "inferiority complex,"[3] and capitalizing on social divisions and a pornographic style to increase circulation.[4] *Davar* compared the magazine to a person who screams fire in a packed movie theater.[5]

In subsequent years, the Black/Mizrahi analogy occasionally resurfaced. During the 1959 Wadi Salib events a man brought before a judge in Beer Sheva declared, "I am a burglar, hardened criminal, and a pimp – you made me so; because you screw the Blacks!"[6] David Ben Harush the most important leader of the Haifa riots said in his testimony to the state commission investigating the event that he encountered discrimination against "Blacks" as early as his stay in a Cyprus transition camp before he arrived in Israel in 1948.[7] Political leaders were concerned that the ethnic strife had turned into "a quasi-racial question" through pinning the term "Black" on these immigrant communities.[8] The tiny communist party blamed the ruling coalition for promoting ethnic hostility in order to prevent workers' unity. Not "whites" are depriving the "Blacks," but capital and its servants exploit both "white" and "Black" laborers.[9] The party's organ *Kol Ha'am* published a children story in which a girl says, "The Blacks are a danger to the wellbeing of the country. … They just want everything, nice apartments, easy labor, everything without toil." A boy then reproaches her, "You are a fascist. Be ashamed of yourself; go to America, to Little Rock, where they are used to talk like that. I won't allow you to say 'Blacks' in Israel."[10] That summer, *Al Hamishamar* daily reported on two "Black" children who a school principle in north Tel Aviv refused to register "for their own good" under the pretext that they would feel deprived because they would not have access to the same leisure activities and toys as the other kids.[11]

One of the sharpest commentary in the aftermath of Wadi Salib came from the pen of author Moshe Shamir, "The fact, the cruel and cutting fact is that even in our country and among our people passes a line that divides the entire globe, the line whose signifier is skin color." Shamir maintained that what united disparate global conflicts was not the similarity among communities marked "Black" as much as the way their "white" enemy is perceived to have all they wish for and do not possess: security, health, power, technology, fast cars. "Can we deny that the ethnic problem in Israel is fundamentally the same issue?" he wrote.

> A wave from far away storm, that stirred up emotions, still does, and will continue to stir the annals of peoples, arrived at our shores. The hungry against the well-fed, yes. Homeless against the villa-dwellers, yes. The subjugated against their subjugators, yes. Africa against Europe, yes.[12]

Five years later Arieh Pincus the Jewish Agency's treasurer (and future chairman) maintained that Israel was comprised of two Jewish nations, a thriving prosperous Israel and a "second Israel." Eventually a critical mass of jealousy and hostility nourished by a deep sense of deprivation would explode, he predicted, and then he warned, "There will be here, God forbid, an ethnic explosion like the eruption of the Negroes in the United States. Then we will find ourselves wondering, confused and miserable, asking ourselves how could this happen?!"[13]

Black and White in the Theater

The comparison of race relations and the "ethnic gap" – a term that became more prevalent in the second half of the 1950s – also registered in the cultural field, for instance in responses theatrical plays on race relations – all the way back to Habima's staging of Alan Paton's *Cry, Beloved Country* (1953).[14] Ephraim Kishon's allegorical satire on ethnic rivalry, *Black on White* (1956) juxtaposed white and grey families of mice. The upstairs whites pepper their speech with Yiddish expressions. The greys below speak with recognizable Middle Eastern accents. Whites regard themselves progressive and refer to their grey neighbors not by their color but instead as "the ground ethnicities." They speak of the value of bi-color marriages, but are terribly shocked by the possibility of such pairing in their own family. The greys however tend to overreact to any perceived insult and are pessimistic about future harmony, "love passes, my son, and you remain grey."[15]

In 1961, producer Giora Godik brought to Tel Aviv an English-language production of *West Side Story* a Romeo and Juliet–inspired musical set in a Manhattan slum and featuring white and Puerto Rican gangs. He intimated he wanted to bring the show to Israel because the prejudice and conflict it grappled with were relatable to those back home. He said, "Sixty-nine countries are represented in Israel and the problem is close."[16] One commentator also identified the local resonance of the story, "Despite the thousands miles difference between Tel Aviv and New York, this topic is so familiar to us, to the residents of north Tel Aviv, [and the inner city neighborhoods of] Kerem Hateimanim, and Shchunat Hatikva."[17] In contrast, Haim Gamzu in *Ha'aretz* saw a different analogy: the white Jets reminded him of the Nazis.[18]

Mainstream theatrical productions continued to tie the fate of African Americans and Mizrahi Jews throughout the early 1970s. In 1965, Lyricist Dan Almagor visited in New York City the documentary play Martin Duberman's *In White America* (1964), which wove a tapestry of songs and snippets of historical documents and testimonies on Black history and life. The show shaped his approach to his revue, *Don't Call Me Black* (1972) dedicated to the African American experience. In addition to songs such as "The Slave," "Snow White," and "Black and Beautiful" the show presented a gospel-infused Black version of the biblical narrative. Almagor hinted that he was also thinking about current affairs in Israel. The song that began with, "Until when we will live among shaky walls?/and in one room ten children?/The country is thriving, the money flows/Only here the Ghetto barely breathes…" could be easily sung about the Jerusalem slums as well.[19]

The Me Nobody Know, a documentary musical play about children in the American inner city, also received an Israeli makeover in 1972. Director Miri Magnus retained the skeleton of the original script and the music but spent four months in Musrara and other Jerusalem slums where she taped testimonies about criminality, prostitution, violent teachers, and hopeless menial jobs – a memorable one was volunteered by a Black Panthers leader – that were then rewritten by Dahn Ben Amotz.[20] Lyricist Ehud Manor had one song warning, "I am the sum of your mistakes, I am the gunpowder on which you sit." One critic wrote, "It is curious how it is possible to pour the life of a deprived community from one vessel to another, from one country to another, from one culture to another."[21] A few critics dismissed *The Me that Nobody Knows* and *Don't Call Me Black* as too polished or inauthentic. However, their success evidenced that the African American/Mizrahi analogy was already entrenched in the Israeli mind.

Social science and the politics of comparison

The racial discord in the United States was also connected and rendered commensurable with the ethnic gap at home through the tools and the comparative imagination of the academic social sciences. The major late 1960s social policy innovation was the massive educational reform that introduced middle schools to Israel was justified, in part, by the agenda of social integration (*integratzia*) and was strongly influenced by the American approach to addressing school segregation (Resnik 2007). The academic field most pertinent to the Black Panthers moment in Jerusalem was Social Work. In the mid-1960s, faculty members of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work at the Hebrew University were among the first Israeli academics to document social inequality, economic poverty, housing congestion, and social marginality – all made worse by lack of an encompassing social policy.[22] They further alleged that the values of work and productivity promoted by the Labor Party hegemony ignored or were employed to shame welfare recipients, undermining their sense of honor. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that social workers were mostly Ashkenazi and the needy largely Mizrahi.

Social work academic leaders spoke of the need to democratize welfare. In 1970, American-born Dr. Eliezer Jaffe assumed the leadership of Jerusalem's welfare agency, renamed Department of Family and Community Services, with an experimental agenda in mind. In Jaffe's view welfare recipients should organize, demand their rights, and participate in shaping social policy. This radical shift in approach to social welfare reflected "War On Poverty"–era efforts in the United States to empower the poor. Largely comprised of African American women, The National Welfare Rights Organization launched the Poor People's March in June 30, 1966, throughout 16 cities, demanding economic and welfare rights including guaranteed income for welfare recipients.[23]

A few social workers in Jerusalem embraced a new ethos, regarding their loyalty as lying predominantly with welfare recipients rather than the state or the municipal organizations that employed them. The social worker most involved with the Panthers was Avner Amiel who had received his MA in the United States.

He established and ran the Department for Community Work and beginning in 1966, he organized the elderly poor to fight for their rights. Amiel orchestrated a demonstration in front of Mayor Teddy Kollek's office with 600 men and women demanding medical services as a right not philanthropy (Kaufman 2019). More than a conventional social worker Amiel operated as a "community organizer," a term popularized in 1960s America.

Empathy replaced by fear

The perception of Black/Mizrahi affinity coexisted in some tension with the much older notion that African Americans and Jews share a common history of persecution. David Ben-Gurion claimed he became a socialist after reading Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a young boy.

> *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stirred me … I was taken aback by the idea of slavery, that a man could exploit other men so crudely. Tom's innate nobility impressed me deeply. … It was easy to draw the parallel between his tale and the story of Moses who repudiated slavery for the first time in recorded history.
>
> (Ben-Gurion 1970: 38)

During the Civil Rights era, Israeli commentators regularly expressed sympathy toward or even empathy with the Black fight for equality. When the play, *A Raisin in the Sun* was performed in 1959 one critic drew parallels between the racial problems in the United States and the lingering precarity of Jews even in the "civilized-liberal world." Some saw in *A Raisin in the Sun* a form of "Negro-Zionism" that called for returning to origins and considered the possibility of establishing a homeland in Africa.[24]

In 1965, the Hayarkon Bridge Trio performed the song "Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama" by the composer/lyricist Naomi Shemer, in which she ties in stark imagery the history of abuse of African Americans with the story of Othello and Desdemona. It opens, "Georgia Alabama Mississippi, the red loam soil that carries me, against stars and a cold sky, covered my blood's affront, affront ancient and cruel." Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech inspired two Israeli popular songs. Yoram Gaon sang, "I Have a Dream" (lyrics Yehiel Mohar, music Moshe Vilensky) in 1969. For the 1972 *Don't Call Me Black* Dan Almagor wrote, "A Day Will Come" (music, Benny Nagari).

In the 1950s, Israeli concerns about anti-Semitism in the United States often focused on the Jewish involvement with Civil Rights. At the beginning of the 1960s, however, a trickle of reports began about African Americans targeting Jewish businesses and properties in their neighborhoods and anti-Jewish sentiments voiced by Black Muslims and other politicos. In a few years this concern solidified. In a period that witnessed the removal of the last anti-Jewish barriers in academia and other corners of American public life, a period in which the story of the Jewish diaspora – *Fiddler on the Roof* – and other forms of Yiddishkeit acquired cultural currency, *Ha'olam Hazé* described American Jews as living between the white

rock and the Black hard place. The magazine's front cover screamed, "Pogroms of American Jews! Is a Holocaust Possible in the United States? Will the Jews Flee to Israel."[25]

The specter of Black anti-Semitism became ever more menacing after 1967 with the rise of Black Power and its sympathy toward the Palestinians, flirtation with anti-Jewish themes and imagery, and the seeming deterioration of the Black-Jewish alliance during and in the aftermath of the Ocean Hill/Brownsville clashes in the fall of 1968. Israeli newspapers detailed various provocations, such as SNCC's James Forman demanding that Jews pay reparations for slavery, activist Julius Lester reading an anti-Semitic poem over the radio, or Stokely Carmichael citing Adolph Hitler as the white person he admired the most.[26] The rise of the Black Panthers Party (BPP) enhanced these fears.[27] Panthers' Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver found refuge in Algiers where he appeared together with Yasser Arafat. A BPP delegation was present in the emergency meeting of the Palestinian National Council in Amman in 1970. One delegate maintained, "There are important parallels between the condition of Blacks in America and the Palestinians. The Palestinians represent the forefront of the Middle Eastern nations in their struggle against imperialism and racism."[28] The daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* defined the Panthers as, "an extreme organization, with an anti-Semitic character, that has strong ties with Arab terror organizations and preaches armed revolution in the United States to undermine the current regime which it deems rotten."[29] Israeli responses reflected, and to a certain extent amplified, the anxieties of American Jews which were met with great receptivity by a society that, on the one hand, felt more isolated internationally, threatened by the rise of the New Left in Europe and the United States, and on the other hand, saw in the perceived rise of anti-Semitism confirmation of its Zionist ideology.

Shifting attitudes toward the African American struggle is, once again, evident through the cultural field. When James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner* was staged with an all-Black cast during the 1965 Israel Festival it met with enthusiasm. Baldwin himself showed up for a short visit. The audience melted when at the end of the performance actress Claudia McNeil (who played the mother role in the cinematic version of *Raisin in the Sun*) recounted how she was adopted and raised by a Jewish couple. She even spoke a little Yiddish.[30] However, earlier that year the critical responses to the Habima Theater's staging of another Baldwin play, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, were rather hostile. Director Abraham Ninio maintained that play described a human problem of the first order and that "we as Jews" are experienced with suffering.[31] The press reviews, however, betrayed deep unease with the play, the animosity it exhibited toward whites, and what seemed to be excessive bragging about Black sexual prowess.[32] Critics argued *Blues* was too angry, too noisy, too preachy, two dimensional, superficial, propagandist, banal, and sensationalist, a "scream from a torrid throat."[33] One critic intoned that the whites vs. Black conflict is indeed relevant to Israel where "the gathering of the diasporas" is one of the most vital and disturbing topics. But Baldwin's play, "does not wake among us an associative echo."[34] In *Ha'aretz*, Gamzu alluded to Black

anti-Semitism and wondered why there were no redeeming white characters in Baldwin's play.[35]

Israeli commentators were seemingly offended by Baldwin's portrayal of whites. The rise of Black Power politics and rhetoric therefore marked American as well as Israeli Jews whiter. Baldwin repeatedly stated that Blacks hate Jews because they are white.[36] By the conclusion of the 1960s, the Israeli middle classes seemed ever closer to American and European elites. They became engrossed by consumer modernity. The June 1967 war and the occupation further entrenched its global position and alienated the African nations with whom it sought to develop special relations at the beginning of the decade. As cultural critic Eitan Bar-Yosef (2013) argues, despite its seemingly benevolent aspirations the Israeli presence in 1960s Africa also rendered it whiter.

Musrara, 1971

No wonder mainstream Israel reacted with such trepidations to the early reports about a street gang in Jerusalem that raised the Black Panthers banner. The small group consisted of men in their early twenties, who were born to immigrants from Morocco or came to Israel as young children. With a history of petty crimes and terms in juvenile delinquency institutions, most received only a few years of formal education. Many had not been called for military service, which made available jobs scarce. They also found constant police harassment unbearably humiliating. Sa'dia Marciano, one of the emerging leaders, lived with eight siblings and other family members in a decrepit two-bedroom apartment. In a youth club, the Cellar, run by the municipality's social services, they were strongly encouraged to discuss their discontent and to organize with the view of improving their lot. One frustration was the international campaign launched for Jews wishing to leave the Soviet Union as well as the privileges these newcomers received in Israel in terms of housing and the purchase of cars and appliances. In contrast, the residents of Musrara felt entirely abandoned. To add insult to injury, Yemin Moshe, another neighborhood on the former Jordanian border – now a prime piece of real estate – was evacuated of its poor residents to make room for a fancy district billed as an artist colony.

In the post-1967 era, the sleepy Israeli capital turned into a vibrant cosmopolitan city, attracting university students, hippies, kibbutz volunteers, tourists, and other young westerners in search of meaning. Musrara was minutes away from downtown coffee shops and Bohemian hangouts. A few members of the group, especially Marciano and Charlie Bitton cultivated ties with progressive Ashkenazi youngsters involved with the radical New Left group Matzpen. Encounters involved the selling and consumption of hashish, but conversations soon gravitated toward politics. The two groups, one observer noticed, began imitating each other.[37]

It is unclear who came up with the "Black Panthers" appellation.[38] In early January 1971, social workers, seeking greater public awareness – and additional funds – for ambitious new programs alerted journalists to a street group forming against the establishment, "We will be like the Black Panthers in the United States

because we are Black and screwed over."[39] The youngsters further explained, "We want everyone to know that we are here, and that something is going to happen. There are two kinds of people in this country – a superior one and an inferior one. Enough! If our parents were quiet all the time – we are not going to keep quiet."[40] The mayor of Jerusalem and the local chief of police deemed the very idea of a Black Panthers–like agitation in the streets of Jerusalem preposterous. A few weeks later the police denied the group's application for a demonstration permit and further exploited the rare and undemocratic measure of "preventive arrests" to detain the group's leaders and a few Matzpen activists. From the police's perspective, the Panthers were nothing but a motley crew of small-time criminals manipulated by the leftwing Matzpen. Police top brass anticipated violence that might ignite tension throughout the country.[41]

The decision to prohibit the demonstration, which gave the Panthers major public exposure – was made by Prime Minister Golda Meir together with the Minister of Police, the Chief of Police and the Mayor of Jerusalem. In retrospect, the incongruity between the actual threat and official overreaction, which Tali Lev and Yehuda Shenhav (2010) labeled "moral panic," rested on fears about an alliance between poor Mizrahi Jews and anti-Zionist movements, whether the tiny and much maligned Matzpen or, worse, anti-Israeli forces abroad. Seeming to confirm these fears, in May, a PLO stockperson would declare that the organization regards the Israeli Panthers an integral part of its war in the occupied territories.[42]

In their first year of operation, the Panthers initiated roughly a dozen, mostly small demonstrations in the capital and elsewhere. Occasional protests would continue for several years including acts of social justice vigilantism such as stealing bottles of milk in an affluent Jerusalem neighborhood to distribute among the poor. Activists and leaders were often detained by police eager to vilify them as criminals or Matzpen puppets. Their repertoire of contention was diverse, but the main instrument was dramatic demonstrations that often turned into marches. On May 18, 1971, the group led a large demonstration known as the "Night of the Panthers" in downtown Jerusalem. Clashes with the police soon flared up when a police water-cannon sprayed rioters with jets of water dyed green. More than 100 people were arrested, many just bystanders. Several instances of police brutality were recorded. Close to midnight, demonstrators threw three Molotov cocktails. By morning Zion Square looked like the aftermath of battle, littered with broken bottles, stones, sticks, crushed trash bins, and puddles of water.[43] The largest public event, in August 1971, featured roughly 7,000 participants. Marchers carried and then burned Black coffins as well as a caricature of Golda Meir with a pair of wings on her back. It was one of the largest demonstrations the city had ever witnessed. The police's attempt to disperse the crowd by force met with a barrage of stones hurled toward them. Many were injured, including 21 officers.

Weaponizing blackness

The Panthers were not the first to employ the Black/white dyad to characterize fissures and prejudice within Jewish Israeli society but prior to 1971 comparisons

with global battles over the color line were largely the material of occasional commentary, expressions such as "screwing over the Black," which were scoffed at and a tad too coarse for polite conversation, or conversely, university-ensconced academic discussion. The Panthers removed the scare quotes that previously surrounded the racially evocative "Black" and "White" in the Israeli conversation about disparities. Ostensibly, it was no longer a term enforced on Mizrahi Jews but one the Panthers appeared to embrace.

By 1971, blackness acquired a different resonance. The racial struggle in the United States was no longer the moderate, liberal campaign for inclusion but a defiant, irreverent, and uncompromising challenge to the fundamental structure of American society. The radical analogy they declared with the BPP more intimately coupled the Israeli and the American social hierarchies, equating the armed and much larger BPP with its Jerusalem namesake, and forcing recurrent comparisons (Frankel 2012). Thus, for example, Meir told the Knesset Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee that the United States is stronger than Israel and has powerful law and order organization – and yet, "look what happened there. Would it be difficult to turn our country into hell?"[44]

Blackness reappeared frequently in Panthers speeches and publications. Their first bulletin announced that, the "Black Panthers are the children of the Black workers of the state of Israel – who grew up in the jungle of discrimination and deprivation, the fruit of the labor of an ethnic establishment."[45] Another leaflet railed, "against a government that sustains a Black and White state" (Lev and Shenhav 2009: 144). They labeled the Iraqi-born Minster of Police Hillel a "Black traitor." What right do you have, they asked, to deny members of you own ethnic community to demonstrate for rights that you already received because of your "Ashkenazicization." Panthers complained bitterly that when "Black Jews" were hanged in Baghdad [as spies] the year before the Ashkenazim kept quiet, but now when "white Jews" were about to be hanged – a reference to Soviet Jews – there was a public outcry. Another printed circular colored Mizrahim, "Children of the Black Diaspora."[46]

But blackness was arguably both radicalized and eclipsed by the image of the menacing feline, the panther. For the group and their supporters, the beast denoted a combative attitude, agility, stealth, and, yes, regained masculinity. For foes, "Pantherism" became a term of derision that invoked lawlessness. A judge reportedly told a female defendant who spoke out of turn, I won't allow you to "pantherize" in this courtroom. In another instance, Pantherism was used in a Knesset debate to describe succor riots in Tel Aviv that took place shortly after the "Night of the Panthers."[47]

Becoming the Panthers allowed the Musrara group to import a whole set of signs and assumptions: in addition to the racial marker, black, the idea of the inner city, the Black ghetto (a term initially borrowed from Jewish history), even slavery (again a form of subjugation that brought together both Jewish and African American pasts). A "Night of the Panthers" placard declared, "Where Half the People are Kings and the Other Half Exploited Slaves." The name "Black Panthers" communicated rage. It broke a double taboo – the employment of a foreign name that had no roots in Jewish or Zionist culture and the implied

approval, even celebration, of an anti-Israeli organization. Whereas the Jerusalem group was captivated by the aura and the iconography of the BPP, the American Panthers found particularly alluring the figure of the Palestinian guerilla fighter toting his AK-47. It contributed to the BPP's visual lexicon, reinforcing its self-image as a heavily armed revolutionary vanguard (Fischbach 2019).

Interpellation and identity play

The Jerusalem Panthers emerged in a short and tumultuous period at the outset of which the small core group received its initial political education and elaborated the content and form of its struggle. It was a work always in progress. The story of the Israeli Black Panthers is arguably an example of the forging of political subjectivities at the cauldron of multiple and often contradictory acts of hailing or interpellation – to borrow a critical term first proposed by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (2001).[48] In other words, they were assigned differing roles and identities by competing authorities and interlocutors, among them the police that regarded them as hardened criminals, progressive social workers who encouraged them to organize and express their discontent, leftwing politicos who imagined they would carry their radical politics to the disaffected Mizrahi masses, political parties, right and left, that sought to maneuver them to serve their own aspirations, official Israel that sought to either crush them or disarm them by offering them jobs and other privileges, foreign and domestic journalists who saw them as a titillating news-worthy story, as well as tales exchanged in coffeehouse chatter about foreign rebellions, from the Uruguay's Tupamaros to Oakland California's Black Panthers. The Panthers were sought after by and engaged with a large number of civic organizations, kibbutzim, and other audiences. They generated enormous curiosity and inspired efforts to make them legible, to domesticate or alternatively appease their fury.

This is not to rob the Panthers of their agency. The opposite is true. Like their American counterparts, they assembled a pastiche of symbols and ideas with great fanfare and inventiveness and to great effect. The most powerful assignation was probably the public alarmed response to the idea of the Israeli Black Panthers, the terror, the indignation, the manner in which it was dismissed as "grating on the ear," "off- key," or provoking "terrible associations."[49] Some, including Menachem Begin, proposed they change their name. He suggested, Black Jewish Lions instead.[50] An influential commentator argued there was no credible analogy between the original Panthers and the extreme racial discrimination in America and the Jerusalem version, "which artificially assigns itself this distorted tag."[51] The group's political consciousness was awakened before they adopted their moniker but these anxious reactions convinced them that they were indeed, the Black Panthers.

The vexed question of their identity was at the core of a famous episode, still alive in Israeli collective memory, when a few days after a raucous "Night of the Panthers," Shaul Ben Simhon a leader of the mainstream Alliance of Moroccan immigrants suggested in public to Premier Meir that, all in all, the Panthers were a

bunch of nice youths. Meir's retort, "They are not nice!" usually remembered out of its immediate context would define her public image in the decades to come as an aloof and arrogant leader.[52]

Identity play continued to characterize the Panthers' phenomenon. They employed their name in a teasing and sometimes instrumental way. When Prime Minister Meir inquired in their April 1971 meeting how they got the BPP moniker, Reubem Aberjil said somewhat evasively, "It could be the case that we have forty percent of their ideology, that they also have been deprived, 'screwed over,' and the fact is that they are violent – we are not" (Lev 2008: 201). Marciano conceded they knew the American Panthers supported the Fatah and "are against Jews" (ibid.). In their demonstrations, however, participants continued to chant, "We are all Panthers, We are all Panthers." They admitted that the name is indeed "unpleasant and frightening" or even offensive but without it no one would have listened. "But the truth is that we are not prey animals but human beings. And the truth is that we are mostly white and not Black. But we are being screwed over. Deeply."[53] Even Teddy Kollek opined that Madison Avenue could not have picked a better name.[54]

They were similarly elusive when it came to their links with the Left or their willingness the engage with violence. The Marxist Matzpen and other leftist factions had a lasting impact in shaping their rhetoric and ideological stance. A few leaders, most notably Bitton and Marciano, would later find political homes on the left side of the political spectrum. But in turn of the 1970s Israel Matzpen was a political liability, especially among the Panthers' rank and file, and while the leading cohort received support from Ashkenazi politicos, the Jerusalemites were weary of being patronized. Publicly, the Panthers often denied their links with the Left, claiming to represent only the poor and to shun political partisanship altogether. In their publications, they even mocked Matzpen and other miniscule Left organizations. In one incident, Matzpen activists were kicked out of a Panthers' meeting. A few Panthers went further and asked the Minister of the Police to help them remove Matzpen activists from their demonstrations. He refused.[55]

Some of the Panthers' schemes seemed to challenge Zionist consensus. Fifteen men returned their military reservist cards, declaring they were not willing to be killed for the state until the state helped them live properly. Other schemes that never materialized included queuing up in front of the Jewish Agency to demand air tickets back to their countries of origin, or traveling abroad to talk on Soviet radio and TV (Bernstein 1976: 193).[56] They even toyed with the idea of kidnapping the Minister of Housing Ze'ev Scherf.[57] Eddi Malka left in July 1971 because of another plan that never came to fruition but prompted public outrage to dispatch a delegation to the United States.[58] A few, most notably Kockavi Shemesh, envisioned a revolutionary transformation of Israeli society and an alliance between Jews and Arabs. He claimed the Mizrahim to be fundamentally alienated from the state.

Nevertheless, the Panthers offered numerous declarations of loyalty to the state. In their first publication they wrote, "We don't want to dismantle the state but to save it. We are … perhaps … the only Zionist party."[59] In a letter to Minister Hillel

they sought to reassure him: "We are a popular movement for the unification of the people of Israel and the fulfillment of Zionism."[60] Its radicalism and disruptive edge aside, by representing the oppressed as the screwed over the Panthers were the movement of forgotten Israelis seeking recognition and full integration in society rather than a revolution.

Ethnicity and class

Pushed and pulled from different political directions, enduring occasional infighting and splintering, lacking organizational knowhow, and being abused by the police, which not only harassed them but infiltrated their ranks – were all a hindrance to a lasting form of organization and a coherent ideological stance. Still, they all spoke of resistance and rebellion and shared their fundamental bitterness about ethnic hierarchies and deepening social inequalities. By the turn of the 1970s, the Ashkenazi/Mizrahi chasm manifested itself less in questions of the guess-who-is-coming-for-dinner kind. However, the economical gap between the rich and the poor increased significantly in the intervening years between the Wadi Salib events and the time of the Panthers. In 1959, consumption per capita for a multi-children family – 90% of which came from Asia and North Africa – was 68% in comparison with an average size, by 1969 it decreased to 47% (Avneri 2013).

Their concrete demands called for an enormous expansion of welfare policies, for instance the elimination of slums, free education for those in need, from kindergarten to university, free housing for destitute families, and increased salaries for those supporting large families. All underscored economical deprivation. Nevertheless, the Panthers were also greatly agitated over the matter of *representation*, the low numbers of Mizrahim in the Knesset and other state institutions, or among university students. And then there was the issue of day-to-day disrespect. Bitton told the journalist Baruch Nadel, "[In the United States] the discrimination is between whites and Blacks and we felt almost like them. Everyplace we enter, every office we turn, we are treated differently."[61]

Demands made on the basis of class and destitute were more palatable for the Israeli mainstream habitually concerned with the potential releasing of the "ethnic genie" or even Left sympathizers weary that an ethno-racial vocabulary would supersede class. The rift between Sephardim and Ashkenazim was ultimately conceived to be one between the underdogs and the prosperous through the term "the screwed over." Shalom Cohen, who in 1973 aligned himself with a faction of the movement to establish the party Enough: Black Panthers-Israeli Democrats understood that the Black Panthers tag constituted an ideological shortcut. "Other parties need to explain their platform and make promises, to fight with their rivals, attack, slander. For us the name Black Panthers says everything." Right, Left, or Center – old political tags lost their meaning, Shalom further explained. He defined the party as class based, claiming that the party included a number of Ashkenazi activists among local leaders. "Our platform does not say that in Israel there are two peoples or two ethnicities but two classes, the well-fed

and the screwed over. But then he equivocated, admitting that the screwed over were largely Mizrahi Jews.[62] At this point Cohen was politically circumspect – previous Sephardic based parties had failed and he was vying for votes from poor Israelis who regularly voted for the Right. Moreover, his longtime partner and now bitter rival Uri Aveneri was accusing him of pushing the Panthers to embrace an extreme and hateful ethno-racial politics.[63]

But regardless of political maneuvering the *screwed over* was a term that aptly defined the manner in which the Panthers enmeshed ideas about ethnicity and class when conventional ethnic differences led to endless fragmentation and the traditional vocabulary of class was monopolized by the ruling Labor Party. Furthermore, class language that worshipped the value of labor was quite foreign to the life stories and way of thinking of the Panthers. Theirs was arguably the *lumpen* revolution. The screwed or the screwed over was an irreverent expression, subverting rules of decorum. For its 1973/4 election campaign the party selected the letter *zayn*, which in Israeli slang stands for the male organ. Voters were asked to put *zayn* in the ballot. Some warned that the letter is too vulgar, but it proved popular. A psychologist told Cohen that those who do not identify with your ideas identify with your letter. The party placed three representatives into the Histadrut governing body but failed in the 1974 Knesset elections – that took place immediately after the Yom Kippur War – in which it ran against another Panthers splinter.

As a designator of social identity in Israel, Blackness remained ambiguous. Whether embraced, employed in commentary, or deployed in disparagement, it seemed to racialize ethnic differences. Admittedly, the line separating race from ethnicity were always porous. The racial terminology in the United States was itself in great flux at the time (Martin 1991). Also consider that the Panthers or Mizrahi Jews in general were not labeled – and this applies to the longer history of thinking in terms of pigmentocracy in Israel – *kushim*, the biblical term for Africans, which was also used for African Americans. (By the late 1960s *kushi* was associated with the term Negro and incrementally excised from common language as an expression of racism.) The Panthers were in fact offended by the popular reference to military recruits enlisted in the month of May cycle – most of whom were poor and without high school degree – as Mau Mau, the anti-British Kenyan resistance. And while "white" occasionally appeared in their rhetoric, more often the Mizrahim were juxtaposed to Ashkenazim or referred to by the older category, Sephardim.

Ethnicism, culture, and geography

Later in the 1970s, Mizrahi resistance would assume clearer cultural forms and expressions, but the Panthers refused to hark back to religiosity or ethnic folklore. One of the Panthers' cultural artifacts was their own Passover Hagaddah, which substituted the traditional "four sons" with the rich, the poor, the Ashkenazi, and the Sephardic. Their narrative had the poor complain, "I am not asking for any favors and I have not risen against the government, and as I don't speak Yiddish–I get kicked out" (Bernstein 1976: 390). However, their notion of ethnic identity

should be understood *in situ*. It was not conceived in cultural terms. What they at times referred to as "spiritual deprivation" constituted an affront to their sense of honor. In fact one leader Eddi Malka maintained that it was the Ashkenazim who admired oriental culture. They claim it is a magnificent and beautiful often keeping an oriental corner in their plush homes where they put ancient samovars and trays. "They so admire oriental culture that they prevent us from getting modern education. They may even one day call for 'Sephardic autonomy' in Israel."[64] Elsewhere, he admitted that the banner, "Golda Teach Us Yiddish!" they raised in their demonstrations could possibly be understood as an invitation, not just a sneer. Malka was ready, he claimed, to acquaint himself with Yiddish if it would lead to social mobility.[65]

Moreover, turn of the 1970s Israel was inundated with folklorist ethnicism. The trend began a few years earlier with the great success of Yitzik Manger's *Hammegila* (1965) and the Tel Aviv production of the American musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (1965), as well as with the film *Sallah Shabati* (1964). Cultural nostalgia led to a revival of interest in Yiddishism and Hassidic lore, with blockbuster films such as the *Shnei Koni Lemel* (1966) and shows such as *Ish Hassid Haya* (1968). Conversely, *Salah* inaugurated the genre of *burekas* films (named after a famous Balkan pastry) while *Ish Hassid* beget the Sephardic "response" *Bustan Sfaradi* (Sephardic Orchard) a review penned by future president Yitzhak Navon. By the time of the Panthers, popular culture was awash with ethnic (Hassidic, Yiddish, Mizrahi) song festivals, Hassidic rock music, and such.

On all sides of the ethnic divide commercialized ethnicism was written, directed, and produced mostly by Ashkenazim often featuring plotlines and themes from Yiddish literature (Kimchi 2012). Yiddish also functioned as the lynchpin of cultural exchanges with the Soviet Jewry. Taunting Meir about Yiddish (in part because of a statement erroneously attributed to her by which one can't be a whole Jew without speaking Yiddish) exemplified the Mizrahi rejection of Yiddish revival. Such a gesture would have seemed meaningless some 20 years earlier during Ben-Gurion's tenure as prime minister when Yiddish was officially repressed.

The Panthers were sensitive to their representation in popular culture. One anecdote has them contemplating to destroy a movie theater that screened the Israeli film *Malkat Hakvish* (Queen of the Road) in which actress Gila Almagor is portraying a streetwalker. A police informant reported that the Panthers intend to stop the screening of the movie in Ron movie theater because it "slanders the Moroccans in particular and represents the ethnic problem in a disgraceful manner" (Lev and Shenhav 2010: 147).

But the relationship between the Panthers' eruption and ethnicized popular culture were complicated. In recent decades *burekas* films and musicals such as *Kazablan* (1966) were often disparaged for purveying cultural stereotypes and prejudices. True enough. But even Kazablan, originally an 1950s play refashioned as the Israeli version of the musical *West Side Story*, bringing the tale of ethnic tension and delinquency to the backyards of Jaffa, served as a vehicle for the articulation of ethnic dissent. For instance, the song "Democracy" declares,

> The Sephardim are the majority but those who are well positioned are the Ashkenazim and this is not a laughing matter since they wrote the law. … Democracy is an office a nice clerk occupies, whoever enters he always says, perhaps, buddy, come back tomorrow.

In another number, "Get Off My Back Kazablan," the protagonist laments,

> Everyone says there is no one like you, Kazablan, but they spit in my face, Kazablan, from the day you entered this world, they say you are not a human being, always goes for the knife, curses, blows, and blood, Kazablan.

It was the first major theatrical show built around the struggles of a Moroccan Jew who ultimately has the upper hand. Kazablan also gets the girl. Actor Shlomo Bar Shavit who portrayed the slimy Ashkenazi character "Goulash" would tell that in some performances the audience's hostility toward him was so palpable that he had to be taken home in a police car.[66] The film adaptation (1973) inserted allusions to the Black Panthers. The movie also exemplified repulsion against the symbol of Ashkenazi cuisine, gefilte fish. It is so inedible Kazablan feeds it to a cat under the table.

Ultimately, *Kazablan* and the *burekas* genre in general ignited ethnic hostility in order to immediately extinguish it, to propose a sentimental and rather chauvinistic resolution. *Kazablan* ends with a coming together celebration, a paean to Jewish self-satisfaction. After all, the character Kazablan is an unrecognized, gold-hearted war hero who is wrongfully accused of theft, a story of misrecognition righted. Most of the youth from Musrara had police records, did not serve in the military, and were not "nice" in other ways as well. They could not be folded into any redeeming national narrative.

Herein lies the key to the Panthers' alterity and capacity to disrupt. Beyond ethnicity it emanated from their origins in the lowest stratum of Jewish society in Israel, the manner in which they catapulted into intense public view from abject poverty. Accordingly, some of their demands, for instance erasing police records for prior offences, addressed their specific life circumstances. Segregation from the Israeli mainstream endowed their struggle with a symbolic and material spatial dimension. While they sought to establish a national movement their Musrara origin was tied up with their identity. In their rhetoric and publications, they affixed *black* and *white* to the cartography of poverty. For example, one leaflet protested that the downtrodden occupying Black ghettos were scattered in the whiteness of the big cities. Now that the cities are thriving, the slums are repossessed for the purpose of urban renewal.

> Poor must stay poor, we need to give a chance to American investors and their Israeli partners, to attract *aliya*. Ultimately the ghetto dwellers are not like us, they were not weaned on Yiddish culture from childhood, they terribly remind us of the Arabs. We will compensate them, build a new ghetto.[67]

This geographical segmentation pointing to inner city neighborhoods such as Hatikva (sometimes known as "Tel Aviv's Harlem") or remote development towns resonates with the center/periphery split that is often alluded to today.

The Panthers' spectacles capitalized on a national culture preoccupied with news and a more energetic media that with the advent of television (1968) and the proliferation of magazines and weekend supplements turned more conducive to visual representations. A celebrity culture, still in its nascent stage, was also at play. In addition, the Panthers tapped into already existing faultlines in Israeli society including those among elites, as demonstrated by the support they received from social workers, politicos, artists, writers, and journalists, even Israel Katz who headed of the Social Security Institute and was appointed by the Prime Minister to the chair the Committee for Youth in Distress. One tension was decidedly generational, and it targeted the elderly leadership of the state not only from the perspective of the Israeli 1968 generation but from that of the 1948 generation as well. Another was political in nature, as the animosity toward the ruling Labor/Alignment party, accused of incubating a heartless, nepotistic, inefficient, and self-serving bureaucracy, encompassed substantial swaths across the political spectrum. Otherwise, as the first part of this discussion demonstrates, Israeli elites were concurrently and paradoxically both utterly surprised by and yet profoundly ready for the Panthers.

A public opinion poll conducted in the summer of 1971 revealed that a substantial 41.4% of the Jewish public supported their demands. Support was higher among Mizrahi Israelis but also among the young generally and among those with higher levels of education. Otherwise, the country was split, 43.6% objected to their demands and there was some talk of a "white backlash" American-style reaction.[68] The most vitriolic Ashkenazi response was published in the Hebrew University student paper *Pi Ha'aton* (the Mare's Mouth) under the title, "The Screwed Over Ashkenazi." Its subtitle said it all, "Father Panthers Copulates – and I have to pay the Price." Histadrut Secretary Yitzhak Ben Aaron protested the publication of the offensive piece comparing it to KKK propaganda.[69]

Conclusion

The Panthers' short-lived resurgence prompted public conversation over social disparities. In a series of visits to impoverished neighborhoods the press discovered poverty in Israel. New budgets were allocated and social programs were set in place (Hofnong 2006).[70] The crux of the Panthers' achievement was arguably consciousness-raising among Mizrahi Jews and Israelis in general. Marciano said, "The important thing is that we woke them up. We showed them they have a right to speak out. Before, people used to say, it's all from heaven. Now – they know they have a right to speak out and shout" (Bernstein 1976: 205).

Politically, the Panthers contributed to the processes of alienating Mizrahi constituencies from the ruling Labor/Alignment party. It then took Menachem Begin's political acumen to displace the "well-fed" side of the prosperous/screwed over binary onto the institutions of the old Labor hegemony, kibbutzim and other,

most memorably during the 1981 elections. Ultimately, many poor Mizrahim found a place in Israeli society through the nationalism of the populist right or the ultra-religious Sephardic party Shas. As for blackness, with the demise of Black Power in the United States the concrete comparison between Mizrahi Jews and the African Americans has lost much of its immediacy and political appeal. Lingering ethnic tensions are more often coded East/West than Black/White. And as for the term "screwing the Blacks," it is occasionally used without clear ethnic reference to protest how some are victimized again and again.

Notes

1 *Ha'olam Hazé*, October 7, 1953.
2 *Ha'olam Hazé*, October 15, 1953.
3 *Ma'ariv*, October 22, 1954.
4 *Ha'aretz*, May 28, 1954. See also, *Lamerchav*, March 14, 1955.
5 *Davar*, June 17, 1960.
6 *Haboker*, July 22, 1959.
7 *Davar*, July 31, 1959. Rabi Yaacov Goldman confirmed that visiting the camps in Cyprus in 1947 he heard North African Jews referred to in Yiddish as Blacks, *Herut*, August 7, 1959.
8 *Ha'aretz*, July 30, 1959; see also *Haboker*, July 24, 1959; and *Al Hamishmar*, July 24, 1959.
9 *Ma'ariv*, July 14, 1959; *Kol Ha'am*, July, 17, August 21, 28, 1959. This approach foreshadowed the Israeli New Left's early 1970s concerns that ethnicity supplanted class in Black Panthers' rhetoric (Lev and Shenhav 2009).
10 *Kol Ha'am*, August 28, 1959.
11 *Al Hamishmar*, August 2, 1959.
12 *Ma'ariv*, July 17, 1959.
13 *Ma'ariv* October 14, 1964
14 Eitan Bar-Yosef, 2013: 72–76.
15 *Ma'ariv*, December 20, 30, 1956.
16 Julia L. Foulkes, *A Place for Us: West Side Story and New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 163.
17 *Ma'ariv*, February 17, 1961.
18 *Ha'aretz*, February 15, 1961.
19 *Al Hamishmar*, September 13, 1972.
20 *Ha'aretz*, June 30, 1971.
21 *Al Hamishmar*, July 27, 1972. See also, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, August 29, 1972.
22 Lotte Salzberger and Y. M. Rosenfeld, "Israeli Society is Lacking a Comprehensive Social Policy." *Davar*, May 23, 1966.
23 *Ma'ariv*, Jan. 26, 1971. On welfare recipients organizations, see Nadasen 2005, Kornbluh 2007.
24 *Ma'ariv*, April 23, 1962; *Lamerchav*, September 16, 1960; *Davar*, September 16, 1960.
25 *Ha'olam Hazé*, July 29, 1964.
26 On Jews and Blacks in 1960s America, see, for example, Greenberg 2010 and Sundquist 2009.
27 Nathan Yellin-Mor interviewed David Hilliard the Chief of Staff of the BPP who vociferously denied accusations of anti-Semitism. *Ha'aretz*, Weekly Supplement, September 11, 1970, 17.

28 *Ma'ariv*, Yamim Veleilot, September 4, 1970, 13.
29 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, June 1, 1971.
30 *Davar*, August 20, 1965.
31 *Herut*, January 8, 1965; *Haboker*, January 11, 1965.
32 *Hatzofe* January 22, 1965.
33 *Ha'aretz*, January 18, 1965; *Haboker*, January 18, 22, 1965; *Laisha* no. 929; *Ma'ariv Lanoar*, January 26, 1965.
34 *Ma'ariv*, January 19, 1965.
35 *Ha'aretz*, January 22, 1965.
36 *New York Times*, April 9, 1967.
37 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 5, 1971.
38 On the Israeli Black Panthers, see Chetrit 2010 Ch. 3, Frankel 2008: 9–26.
39 *Al Hamishmar*, January 13, 1971.
40 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 20, 1971.
41 Police Document Black Panthers March 3, 1971 Jerusalem Police R 6 79 412/9.
42 *Al Hamishmar* May 11, 1971
43 *Davar*, May 19, 1971.
44 Israel Knesset. Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Protocol. June 8, 1971.
45 "Dvar Hapanterim Hashchorim" (The Black Panthers Bulletin) June 1971, 6. The Israeli Left Archives. *International Institute of Social History* https://search.iisg.amsterdam/Record/COLL00308
46 Flyer for the August 3, 1971, White and Blue Panthers Demonstration. The Israeli Left Archives.
47 Knesset Debates, Seventh Knesset, Second Session, Volume 61, p. 2734.
48 See also Judith Butler 1997.
49 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 5, 1971; *Lamerhav*, May 5, 1971.
50 *Ma'ariv*, May 26, 1971.
51 Shalom Rosenfeld, "On Panthers and Hyenas," *Ma'ariv*, March 5, 1971.
52 Meir said, "How can a hand be raised in the state of Israel to throw a Molotov cocktail at a Jew? *Ma'ariv*, May 20, 1971.
53 "Dvar Hapanterim Hashchorim," June 1971.
54 "Israel's Other War," *Time Magazine*, June 21, 1971.
55 Summary of the Meeting of the Minister of Police with "Black Panthers" Representatives, May 28, 1971. *Israel State Archives*.
56 *Ma'ariv*, January 20, 1971.
57 Avneri, *Social Welfare Pioneer*, 336.
58 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, July 16, 1971.
59 "Dvar Hapanterim Hashchorim," June 1971.
60 Panthers to Shlomo Hillel, July 5, 1971 Police Intelligence Report: Jerusalem, May 10, 1971, Report 238/71. *Israel State Archive.*
61 Baruch Nadel, "Screwed for Life," *Yedioth Arhtonoth*, 7 Days, ND, 11.
62 *Ha'aretz*, Weekly Supplement, "The Screwed-Over at the Gate," September 21, 1973, 43.
63 *Ha'olam Hazé*, June 13, 1973, 11–13.
64 Flyer for the August 3, 1971, White and Blue Panthers Demonstration. Israeli Left Archives.
65 "We Do Not Support Violence," A Conversation with Yaacov Elbaz, Reuven Aberjil, Eddi Malka and Miriam Malka, Moderating Geula Cohen, *Ma'ariv*, Yamim Veilelot, July 2, 1971, 23–24.

66 *Waiting for Godik*, dir. Ari Davidovich, prods. Amir Harel and Ayelet Kait. LAMA Films. Tel Aviv. 2007.
67 Leaflet, ND. Israeli Left Archives.
68 *Davar*, September 8, 1971; on "white backlash," see *Davar* May 28, 1971.
69 *Pi Ha'aton*, May 24, June 7, 1972.
70 Menachem Hofnong, *Protest and Butter: The Black Panthers Demonstrations and Allocations for Social Needs* (Jerusalem: Nevo, 2006). [Hebrew]

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6 Blackness, Mizrahi identity and ethnic shifting in contemporary Israeli popular music

Miranda L. Crowdus

Introduction

The past thirty years in Israeli musical life have witnessed a significant trend: artists and musicians of many ethnicities have made many efforts to reclaim Middle Eastern heritage. This turn is noticeable in many musical practices, and other artistic productions, such as art installations and literature. In the words of Mizrahi author and activist Almog Behar, such initiatives take "this [Jewish Middle Eastern] culture back to the centre from the periphery" (cited in Beaumont, 2017). Such initiatives appear in various forms of Israeli popular music, which are often enacted through an affiliation with Mizrahi identity.[1] Performers of contemporary Israeli popular music emphasize Middle Eastern influences in their work to such an extent that "*mizrachiyut*" ("mizrachiness") has become to some degree normalized, at least, on the surface. Despite the normalization of *mizrachiyut* in musical influence, Mizrahim continue to face socioeconomic discrimination on the state level. Kozlowska and other scholars consider this turn to Middle Eastern influences to be a response to a former, hegemonic "unrealistic vision of one single Israeli identity," which has prompted the image of Israeliness to shift from a single identity to a pluralistic and diverse one (Kozlowska 2014, 48).

This chapter considers the deployment of the concept of "blackness" in recent popular music in Israel in the music of artists with, or affiliated in some way with, a Mizrahi identity. This discussion focuses on how this concept is used musically and visually for specific musical, political and marketing purposes, as well as the specific social and political circumstances in the contemporary Israeli social and cultural framework that prompts its emergence. The category "Mizrahi" is complex when used as a lens to view the concept of "blackness." On the one hand, it can be viewed as a category of identity through which references to blackness are enacted. On the other hand, the category "Mizrahi" and references to it in Israeli popular music denote a concept of blackness in the sense of the subaltern. In particular, the term implies "otherness" in relation to Ashkenazi hegemonic identities. In a more global context, I contend that Mizrahim are doubly "othered," both from Ashkenazi identities within Israel itself and in relation to the dominantly Muslim societies in the MENA area from which they, or their ancestors, were alienated as Jews (Basri 2002; Stillman 1979, 2003).[2]

Currently, one of the ways in which Mizrahi artists have reinvented their music is through the strategic mobilization of blackness. This is often manifested by identification with African or African American struggles, but is most generally achieved through various representations of the subaltern.[3] The analysis of musical performance and production falling under this umbrella reveals that the motivation of these artists is often influenced by the socially complex position of Mizrahim in contemporary Israel. The polyvalent categories of "blackness" used in this music arguably allow artists to bypass stigmatization, both inside and outside of Israel, in a way that sometimes elides nuances and hierarchies of gender and power. Overall, blackness (or "alterity") is used to performatively enact and to authenticate social inclusion and to confront prejudices, facilitating the potential acceptance of this music to transnational markets and audiences.

History of Mizrahi music

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jews who immigrated to Israel from the Arab world from the 1950s onward have "represented the most marginalized ethno-classes in Israeli Jewish society and [historically were] relegated to peripheral areas of the country" (Daniele 2019, 203). Mizrahi music developed in the 1950s and onwards in a broader context in which Zionist ideologies and Israeli social practices encouraged a homogeneous, distinctive non-Arab-Israeli identity, musical and otherwise. Yet, despite the pressure for a new "Israeli" music in the early years of the state, Israeli popular musical culture encompassed many diverse musical idioms. Mizrahi music has unambiguously Middle Eastern origins and influences. As such, it was originally considered contentious because of its closeness to Christian and/or Muslim Arab music and culture (Seroussi 1989).

Today, Mizrahi Music (*Muzika Mizrahit*) is a well-established genre in Israel. In recent years, Mizrahi music has changed from the fairly well delimited musical genre that it constituted in the 1970s and 1980s and therefore must be defined according to new parameters. Indeed, even in the 1970s and 1980s, "*mizrachiyut*" could arguably be enacted in music in various ways, both overlapping and differing from the "*Muzika Mizrahit*" genre discussed above, which is also the case today. In a sense, the category Mizrahi can be seen as a conscious positioning enacted by performers. Khen Elmaleh, DJ and an activist of Mizrahi origin, summarizes this contemporary categorization, differentiating it from the "*Muzika Mizrahit*" that emerged in earlier years:

> When I am asked what Mizrahi music is today, I say that this is music that is produced by Mizrahim and consumed by Mizrahim, with no stylistic limitations and with no adherence to traditional musical doctrines. It is the audience that defines Mizrahi music, just as the term "Mizrahi music" was originally coined to define its target audience. For me, this is the most valid definition, because this genre has developed away from its musical roots in the Arab countries, and it's a genre that now reacts to world musical trends in the most innovative and up-to-date way in Israel – so that musical definitions and

> frameworks are irrelevant to it; The only way to capture its elusive essence is to define it in sociological terms, according to the identity of those who create it, and the identity of their audience.
>
> (Elmaleh 2018)

In other words, "*Muzika Mizrahit*" no longer describes a single musical genre, but rather it is defined by the identities and motivations of those practicing and producing it. Listening to music performed by Mizrahim or defined as "Mizrahi" by either its performers or audiences reveals that it spans several musical genres. Thus, the label "Mizrahi" no longer refers to the ethnic origins of the performers, nor to a specific musical genre, but rather to a perception of "Mizrachiness" embedded in the music and in its performance and production.

What is "blackness" and how is it deployed in Mizrahi Music?

Bar-Yosef argues that in the twentieth-century "national imagination" of Israel, blackness (2013) represented by Africa and Africans provided Israelis with an "essentially unthreatening dark Other" in contrast with Middle Eastern people and lands. Sarah Hankins notes that this positive representation existed before there was a sizeable African population in Israel (2015, 13). Hankins accurately summarizes the different forms of "blackness" prevalent in modern Israeli society today:

> In an ethnically diverse country such as Israel, which is also a self-defined Jewish state, the meaning of "blackness" is complex. While blackness in the United States and Europe means to have roots in sub-Saharan Africa, blackness in Israel could mean, in sociological terms, being Palestinian, Mizrahi, Ethiopian, or being an asylum seeker and migrant from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, or other sub-Saharan countries. … All of the groups are black, though Palestinians and Mizrahim are Middle Eastern black.
>
> (Hankins cited in Ben Ari 2016)

Categorizations of "blackness" are further complicated because the Hebrew term "*schachorut*" ("blackness") is used differently from the term "blackness" in other contexts and has a variety of meanings in Israel in both formal and informal contexts. Thus, scholarship isolates different types of blackness in Israeli society that are distinct but can converge in certain instances or contexts. Horowitz points out that the convergence between different forms of blackness is rooted in the historical rapprochement of Mizrahi groups with the Black Panthers in the 1960s, ideological correspondences between African/diasporic and Mizrahi "*shachorut*," which were reflected in other domains such as musical practice and production (Horowitz 2010).

I argue that from the point of view of the construction of a Mizrahi identity, these convergences of the concept of "blackness" are ideologically integral to the process of differentiation of Mizrahim from the "white" Ashkenazi

social and ideological hegemony. Connections to blackness have been important to the construction of Mizrahi identity in Israel on both individual and social levels. Historically and politically, affinity with "blackness" is embedded in the actual social and political ties to African and African American movements. As mentioned above, the most significant political empowerment initiated both for and by Mizrahim was the protest movement called the Black Panthers (1971–1977), inspired by the US movement of the same name. In "the field," Mizrahim often speak about themselves and their music and musical influences as "black" ("*shachor*") and make explicit analogies between themselves and African and African American struggles. Thus, in this instance, blackness has a specific rhetorical function to give voice to the marginalization within the State of Israel.[4]

Focus and analytical approach

Cultural products in contemporary Israel, such as popular musics, are often investigated through frameworks that map musical performance and production onto large-scale negotiations in Israeli society (Regev and Seroussi 2004; Marks 2008; Shelleg 2014; Seroussi 2014). In fact, music practitioners are influenced by many factors large-scale and small-scale, both within and beyond the Israeli state. A focus on "blackness" compliments these "large-scale" analyses, by encouraging a theoretical approach that reveals the multiple nuances governing motivations, restrictions and individual agency of performers. The frame of blackness highlights how the production and performance of popular music in Israel operates in a complex social-political, musical reality that is shaped by many factors on several levels of identity and belonging, as well as financial and social concerns.[5] In the interest of examining a variety of ways in which blackness is embodied and represented, the following examples are considered in this chapter:

1. **Mizrahi identity as a musical-aesthetic counter narrative.** In recent years, a "new wave" of "art music" fused with elements of *Muzika Mizrahit* has been developed by both musically trained and amateur Israeli musicians. These initiatives are categorized by "alterity," as they use Mizrahi identity as a counter narrative to hegemonic musical identities, which the practitioners perceive to have European and Russian origins in contrast with their own musical identities in the Middle East.
2. **Africans and African Americans represented in Hip Hop produced by Mizrahim.** Following the Second Intifada (2001), Israeli politics shifted significantly to the right; at this time, a group of Hip Hop artists released songs with lyrics expressing collective Jewish pride and nationalism. Most significantly, this music was chiefly performed by practitioners of Mizrahi origin. In later years (post-2010), Mizrahi identity began to be more emphasized either with direct references to the artists' Middle Eastern roots or through references to African and African diaspora identities.

3. **Blackness as an experience of "shared alterity."** In "Muzika Etnit Yisraelit" ("Israeli ethnic music"), a genre that gained prominence in the 1990s, blackness is often used to strengthen intercultural musical collaborations between subaltern groups (Mizrahim, Bedouin). Brinner argues that Muzika Etnit embodies music as a unifying force that transcends cultural identity and that encourages intercultural dialogue. (Brinner 2008: 41; Dardashti 2009).

All three categories show how "*mizrachiyut*" both intersects with and diverges from categories of "blackness" in Israeli society, revealing the complex patterns through which individuals express themselves, their musical identities and their aesthetic.

Mizrahi identity as a musical-aesthetic counter narrative

The Mizrahi musical-aesthetic is often blended with Western art music as a sort of return to diaspora identity, made anew. The group Ecoute is an example of this phenomenon. A husband and wife Jerusalem-based duo, Inbal and Gilad have worked for seven years with their many musician-partners. The couple form the core of the group, with a flexible ensemble comprised of several musician-partners. In their own words, their style of music is "*muzika Mizrahit achshavit mekorit*" (contemporary, original Mizrahi music). One of their goals, they state, is to introduce children and adults to, not only "music that is perceived as Israeli," but also to contemporary music hailing from their Middle Eastern roots. Inbal explains that much contemporary Israeli music, particularly for children, comes from Western and Russian influences, particularly in folk songs. Thus, they seek to offer a musical alternative based on Middle Eastern musical sources, which they interpret with their own creativity and individual aesthetic.

An interesting performance example is a musical tableau that Ecoute put together with Almog Behar's poem "*Dibarnu Maspik al Ahava*" ("We have spoken enough of love"). Behar is a contemporary poet, critic and a self-professed activist, with a Mizrahi identity, which lies at the root of all his work. His work focuses on Judeo-Arabic identity in Israel and more broadly, the history of Jewish minorities in the Middle East. As an adult, Behar chose to learn Arabic, the language of his grandparents, and some of his work has been translated into Arabic. Owing to their training and connection with Mizrahi music and culture, the group Ecoute and Behar are a perfect literary and musical match.[6] The piece in question reflects the thoughts of Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum (c.1898–1975) as she speaks to Ahmed Ramy (1892–1981), a poet who wrote songs for her. It was said that he was completely in love with her, but that his love was unrequited. Thus, the songs that he composed for her musical performances were a way of expressing his love. In Behar's words, the poem is about: "thinking of their movement between closed rooms and the concert halls, as love is concealed and revealed, and between the concert hall and coffee shops at night, and waiting for the waking of dawn" (Almog Behar, personal communication June 6, 2019).

The piece starts with a repeated chord, strummed on a solo guitar. The first chord acts as a trigger for Almog to begin reciting his poem:

> We have spoken enough of love
> in darkened rooms, she said,
> and now the world has also darkened,
> we have said enough, and there is nothing to say now.
> Now she just holds
> my hand, breathing
> the last breaths of night
> like the harbinger of sleep and
> acts of love, and the expanse
> until morning's awakening in the black east.[7]

On the words "the last breaths of night," the solo trumpet line enters, like the "last breaths of night" themselves. As Behar recites his poem, a melancholic jazz-influenced trumpet solo plays in the background. When Inbar sings the opening of the vocal part, the musical ensemble responds in a heterophonic echo of the singer's words, in a manner similar to the call-response of a classic Oum Kalthoum piece. This reference to the style of Oum Kalthoum avoids parody; rather, it evokes a sense of tribute to a classic Middle Eastern style. In Behar's words: "the idea is to take the principles of the music of Oum Kalthoum and bring it to where we are now: Jerusalem in 2016" (Interview on Ecoute Muzika Channel 2017). These poetic and musical choices are active expressions of the artists' Middle Eastern roots and present affinities. They show individual and ensemble-based agency the creative decision to draw on particular, non-Jewish, Middle Eastern musical personae. The poem itself expresses blackness, reflected in the dark melancholy of the music and the darkness of the origins of its characters. The words of the poem's protagonists emanate from dark places, "*chederim kodrim*" ("darkened rooms"); the couple await the morning coming from "the black East," even as they are surrounded by the "heavy panting of the Nile" and the "dark movements that sweep up our streets." The work itself is "dark," but not in a negative sense; rather, the emotions represented are vague, open to interpretation. Blackness here refers to the indefinable, the complexity, or "darkened rooms," which simultaneously contain it and allow it to emerge "into the open." The poetic motif of blackness or obscurity becomes a creative agent, rather than a static binary. Thus, it is an intimate piece that prompts reflection and introspection. Within the poem, blackness is embodied spatially, used as a tool to express the complexity of Judeo-Arab identity, which evidences both seemingly contradictory affinities with Pan-Arabism as well as Jewish-Israeli identity. Hence, Ecoute's members made aesthetic and compositional decisions, through which they negotiate their current identity in alluding to that of their grandparents, many of whom came from Middle Eastern countries. In the final analysis, this music redefines the political notion of "Pan-Arabism" to include Jewish experience in the Middle Eastern diasporas of the past, and, most significantly, present-day Israel.

When the Jews fled different Middle Eastern nations, from the 1950s onwards, the subsequent tensions produced by discrimination in Israel resulted in an ideological projection of Mizrahim as a homogeneous group. In reality, however, Mizrahim came from different places and cultures, albeit in the Middle East and in North African countries. Ironically, perhaps, by reaching out to the cultures of their grandparents, not only is their "own" cultural past as individuals able to be accessed, but also they are symbolically able to access the cultures of the former homelands of their grandparents in a global way. Scholars have documented how elderly residents of Ramat Gan once showed a strong affinity for the music of Oum Kalthoum (Dardashti 2008); but this affinity has not typically been demonstrated by the younger generations. The renewal of this interest suggests a desire to engage with a broader Pan-Arab cultural identity beyond the realm of the strictly political (e.g. demonstrations). While a nuanced engagement with creative musical invention that builds musical connections with the "Arab world," these artists can be seen as offering a "black" vision of Israeli identity, counter to that of the "white" Jew, which according to Bar-Yosef was prevalent in Zionist tropes and ideologies "the fantasy of Jewish whiteness both shaped, and was shaped by the specific claims and contours of the Zionist nation-building project" (2013, 118).

Africans and African Americans represented in Hip Hop produced by Mizrahim

Hip Hop emerged in Israel in the early 1990s. Despite the fact that Hip Hop has never been a major musical genre in Israel, many individuals and groups in both formal and informal contexts perform it. Hip Hop in Israel is relatively fragmented in terms of the identities, lyrics and music of those who practice it (Dorchin 2013a,b). One of the main sub-groups is "Zionist Hip Hop" or "Rap Tsioni," a term used by practitioners and audiences alike (Crowdus 2018). Following the Second Intifada (2001), Israeli politics shifted significantly to the right; at this time, a group of Hip Hop artists released songs with lyrics expressing Jewish pride and nationalism. While certain young audiences in Israel embraced this music, others marginalized it owing to its being too overtly "Zionist" or "patriotic." Today, the music of these artists is less about Jewish pride and more about universal, liberal values. I argue that the new songs produced by these artists tend to use blackness for two reasons: (1) in a local context where the representation of Mizrahi identity is considered crass and unsophisticated, references to blackness provide a surrogate "other" identity, possibly reflecting struggles faced by Mizrahim; and (2) a way to transcend a global environment in which Israel and Israeli identity is often singled out for critique and censure.

Representations of blackness are often used by the artist Subliminal, head of the TACT crew.[8] A rapprochement with Africa and African artists that contributes to carefree or positive thinking is typical of Subliminal's recent work, exemplified in such songs as "*Afrika: Ten L'Muzika Ledaber*" ("Africa: Let the Music Talk"). The genre is designated as "Afro Trap," and described as a "refreshing mix of

dancehall, rap, grime, and afrobeats sounds can be heard across playlists, charts, radio, festival stages, and more" (Renshaw 2017). Thus, the categorization of this song as "Afro Trap" positions it in a global music context.

The music video opens with a bird's eye view of a large, impoverished shanty town, the houses of which spread as far as the eye can see. As the camera pans closer, we can see the inhabitants: African, men, women and children. The specific place is never identified, instead the daily lives of the inhabitants are highlighted. African people of all ages go about their daily pursuits looking neutrally at the camera. Although it is clear that the people depicted are poor, they remain cheerful and smiling. A repeated four-chord phrase on synthesizers opens the song (I–IV–V–I), which is played twice before a synthesized melody in the high tessitura is added, as well as another middle layer in the mixing process. After this musical introduction, the song opens properly: the title appears with the backdrop of a fairly well-to-do marina, and we hear vocalizations modified by auto-tune. Then the scene goes back to the slum where most of the song is filmed. This immediate panning from the relatively deserted marina, back to the slum, full of impoverished black people, creates a concertina effect in which place, identity, and power relations are collapsed in performance and in the representation through technology. Returning to the slum for the main part of the song, a local African man sings vocalizations, modified stylishly with auto-tune and accompanied by local traditional instruments, such as a wooden xylophone. Many locals, young and old are showcased, their names appearing in the song credits. Many perform agile dance moves. Subliminal, the only non-African in the video, leads a group of locals in song and dance in Hebrew about success, justice and equality, regardless of the color of one's skin.

The song and music video are catchy and uplifting in the latest style of Afro Trap, reinterpreted in a Hebrew-language vibe. Although the video is obviously about blackness, given its explicit African setting and content, it takes place in an imprecise location: never is there any indication where in Africa the scene takes place. To an ethnomusicologist attempting to analyze it and unpack all the references to blackness, it leaves much open to personal interpretation. Clearly, the song reflects a class struggle of oppressed or impoverished people; however, it is their everyday activities and relative good humor that are the focus of the music video rather than political action. Optimistically, struggles can be overcome with hard work, or that at least can be tolerated if one maintains a positive attitude. The ambiguity of the video enables it to be interpreted as a representation of a Mizrahi class struggle, although it takes place in an African context. If so, Mizrahi activism is presented in a way that is palatable to liberal international audiences. Mizrahi identity is one that in Israel has been repressed in practice "[I]n 2013, the *Mizrahi* identity collective identity is arguably still the forbidden identity in Israel" (Grinberg 2014, 153). Thus, through an African representation, performers like Subliminal are able to represent the invisibility of Mizrahim, both in Israeli society and abroad, while simultaneously maintaining identity as part of a greater Jewish-Israeli collective.

Subliminal's "*Ose Ma She Ba Li*" ("I do what I feel like") features the artist in "blackface" as the chief of an African tribe. The tribe is present, performing a blend of traditional and modern dance and playing traditional percussion instruments. There is a general black-and-gold visual aesthetic contrast. A kind of reversed "black face" is achieved by Subliminal whose normally brown eyes stick out in stark luminous blue in his black painted face, embodying Jacobsen's idea that "by donning blackface the Hebrew becomes Caucasian" (Jacobsen 1998, 120; cited in Bar-Yosef 2013, 119). The video opens with two male members of the tribe playing traditional drums, but the actual audible beat is synthesized and synchronized with their movements. Subliminal raps that he is playing music with people who have music "running in their genes" (presumably the African tribe members). Subliminal's stereotyped reference to the naturally-gifted African musicians reflects Radano's observation about blackness in music representing "good taste" in global popular musics: "African musicality, in its many transatlantic iterations, has already won the cultural wars … The way we hear and what we tend to like musically are deeply informed by unintended legacies of African involvement in the West – the result of the displacement of Africans to North America and the subsequent dissemination of their musical practices within the newly capitalized, global markets of modern entertainment" (Radano 2018, 13).

A "Caucasian" Subliminal also appears in the video dressed in white robes. He lies on a table, apparently deceased and then ascends upwards during the course of the video. This character has a martyr-like, messianic appearance, dressed in white robes, in stark contrast with the "primitive" chieftain who sits on a throne and wears a golden crown; however, it is obvious that they are the same person. Subliminal's use of "blackface" is clearly politically incorrect according to Western liberal norms; yet, arguably complicates and challenges the nature of stereotypes. The use of blackface may be ironically self-referential, showing how the artist himself is pigeon-holed by observers according to stereotypes about Mizrahim or, more generally, Jewish-Israelis, when the reality of Mizrahi, Jewish-Israeli musical aesthetics are far more complex than essential. Commenting on Daniel Itzkovitz notion of Jews' "chameleonic blood," Bar-Yosef observes that "blackface performance does not simply whitewash the Jews; rather, it highlights their fraught position as a "racial conundrum" (2013, 119). Although Bar-Yosef comments on Jews in the history of American musical performance, this point is equally applicable here.

Overall, Subliminal's pieces arguably feature selective uses of "blackness" by a Mizrahi artist. Generally speaking, Subliminal's new rapprochement with Africanness and blackness has multiple functions. It allows for (1) a new musical-aesthetic, in a move from more traditional "Hip Hop" to "Afro Trap"; (2) the expression of genuine concerns over social class discrimination removed from pro- or anti-Israel prejudices; (3) the use of blackness as a medium for self-expression; and (4) the opportunity to showcase the local performers themselves who are featured and credited in the video. While one could argue that this rapprochement between Subliminal and the African performers is staged and not enacted in actual daily

life, this is arguably the case with most musical performances. Moreover, identification with "otherness" must operate outside everyday frameworks in order to be effective: it is precisely the confrontation with "otherness" that enables the dismantling of stereotypes.

While Horowitz and others have argued that Mizrahi music has the rhizomatic overtones of Middle Eastern musical traditions, in Hip Hop these overtones are largely absent. Hip Hop with Hebrew-language lyrics in Israel is connected with a Jewish-Israeli, not a Middle Eastern, identity.[9] The genre generates a symbolic connection to African or African American struggles. However, connections with blackness are not limited to the origins of rap in the Bronx and its identity as an African American resistance genre. Recently, in the music videos themselves are representations of "black" people, Africans and African Americans, which communicate nuanced messages regarding music and subaltern identities. It is noteworthy that in Hip Hop in Israel, attention is almost always drawn, whether by performers, audiences or scholars, to the ethnic origins of the performers (Palestinian, Ethiopian, Eritrean). Mizrahim are one of the only exceptions to this rule. That is, Hip Hop performed by Mizrahim until recently rarely makes the explicit to the performers as Mizrahim. Thus, the references to blackness in Subliminal's work are a way in which Jewish-Israelis of Mizrahi heritage, whose disempowered status in Israel and the greater Middle East tends to be ignored or subsumed, are able to define both their place in the State of Israel as well as their participation in a global musical world/market (Crowdus 2018).

Blackness as an experience of shared alterity

Muzika Etnit has been largely analyzed through the lens of transnational conflict transformation (Urbain 2008; Brinner 2009; O'Connell 2010). Currently, the number of groups that present themselves with a collaborative positioning is dwindling.[10] These collaborations, past and present, are/were often constructed through "shared alterity," the critical term I use to describe when authenticity is perceived to have authoritative credence due to the merging of historically and ethnically/religiously distinct, arguably sometimes inimical, identities. Indeed, *Muzika Etnit* has been as much a political as a musical movement, promoting coexistence between Jews and Arabs, and exemplifying music as a unifying force that transcends cultural identity and that encourages intercultural dialogue. (Brinner 2009: 41; Dardashti 2009). However, although these collaborations are often prompted by a desire for "bridge-building" and enacting peace initiatives, in order to be possible at all, they must conform by producing a marketable musical product, perceived as desirable by a certain audience. The representation of "blackness" plays a pivotal role in the construction of "shared alterity" in musical performance. In this case, blackness functions as a "shared non-whiteness, rather than as a trait of a particular ethnicity" (Hankins 2015, 20).

One of the pioneers of *Muzika Etnit*, Yair Dalal (of Jewish-Iraqi origin), has performed and conducted workshops in Israel and internationally. Dalal advocates peace between Israelis and Palestinians and equality for Mizrahim, particularly

Iraqi Jews. Although journalism has emphasized the "Arab-Israeli" dynamic of his musical collaborations, in fact, these can be viewed but as one type of a diverse series of musical initiatives enacted between individuals of a variety of ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. A perceived shared heritage and ethnic and cultural coexistence is often enacted between Mizrahi Jews and Arab Muslims and/or Arab Christians through these musical performances. This notion of "shared alterity" in Dalal's self-presentation, collaborations and music sound-product allows the performing musicians to "come together" through ideological similarity and also encourages a transnational audience to accept them for the same reason.

Through this embodiment of shared alterity, Dalal's music-product presents Western-framed "oriental" exoticism, a shared Arab-Jewish musical-cultural heritage, the blurring of modern land-borders, and nonthreatening new age spirituality. All of these elements are attractive to Western audiences and circumvent polarized Western perceptions of the Arab-Israeli political conflict. Dalal's performance persona projects an "alterity" in direct opposition to the contemporary, secular Israeli norm, while projecting an imagined romantic past in which Jews and Arabs lived together in peace. This is achieved, in part, through his performance persona, including his costume.

> Yair tends to appear in a loose white robe or long jacket, sometimes topped by cloth draped over his shoulders like a prayer shawl. With this constructed assemblage he evokes aspects of his heritage that many Israelis of a similar age repressed in the face of the hegemony of Western norms of dress and a general Israeli tendency to view traditional Middle Eastern manners of dress as "backward" and associated with the Arab enemy.
>
> (Brinner 2009, 156)

Arguably, Dalal's traditional costume authenticates his collaborations with "Palestinians and other Arab minorities" (Brinner 2009, 155). However, the image created by his costume also accords with Western stereotypes of new age "eastern" spirituality. Thus, this image is both quintessentially Israeli and also marketable in the West. Dalal's costume resembles the traditional attire of the Bedouin, the iconic nomads of the desert who, in Western art and media have historically been cast as the romantic 'other': thus, within Dalal's oeuvre the Bedouin become a symbol for shared alterity.

Yair Dalal's collaboration with the Bedouin Azazme tribe

Dalal's musical collaboration with the Bedouin Azazme tribe, "Azazme" (1998), is an apt example of "shared alterity." The album deconstructs stereotypes about "Arabs" and "Jews" through identification with the "other." However, here the "other" is neither the Palestinian, the quintessential "other" of the overarching political conflict, nor is it the "other" in the sense of Middle Eastern roots of the practitioners. The Bedouin, both in Israel, Egypt and elsewhere in the Levant often constitute the population in the lowest socioeconomic rungs of society; yet,

scholarship has largely neglected their situation, particularly in contexts outside of Israel. Dalal's collaboration with the Azazme was personal as well as musical. He first encountered the Bedouin tribe in the 1970s when teaching high school on Kibbutz Samar in the Arava desert, in the South of Israel. This encounter was very influential, causing him to give up all his material wealth, much to his father's chagrin, he notes, and live with the Bedouin, in his words "playing violin on camelback" (personal communication, May 2012). Later, in 1998, he performed and recorded an album with tribe members and his *Al Ol* ensemble. Entitled "Azazme" in honor of the Bedouin tribe, and produced by the Magda label, the album's website description epitomizes the aura of romantic exoticism embedded in the collaboration:

> This album was recorded live during few sessions at the Azazme Bedouin tribe's encampment in the Israeli desert, the Negev. Yair Dalal and members of his regular ensemble "Al Ol" play here alongside Bedouin musicians and singers and try to follow the original musical spirit of the desert … A truly expressive album, Azazme captures the essence of desert music, a unique experience that records the sound of a vanishing culture.
>
> (Dalal 2006)

Traditionally, Bedouin music is expressed in an exclusively oral tradition. For example, the Bedouin practice of *t'alīlah* to greet visitors: "[this] implies offering and receiving hospitality, including partaking in the coffee ritual [drinking coffee in the communal tent] and listening to *sāwalif* [singing]" (Racy 1996, 408). Significantly, the Jurun, the actual coffee grinder, is one of the main instruments used in performance: hence, music and ritual hospitality to visitors in this context intrinsically interconnected. The instruments used in the album are traditionally Bedouin, the nei, rababa and simsimyya, and last but not least, the Jurun-the coffee grinder-played by the Bedouin ensemble leader Heleil al-Awiwi. In the video footage of performance takes, the Bedouin take ritualistic performance stances, including sanguine expressions, hunched, cross-legged positions, meshing nicely with Dalal's own "zen," reserved performativity, and contrasting highly with percussionist Avi Agababa's outgoing, exuberant drumming.

Dalal's collaboration with the Bedouin Azazme tribe embodies his message of coexistence through mutual exclusion and suffering. Historically, the Bedouin in Israel, Jordan and Egypt have evidenced tribal, rather than nationalist, allegiances, and recently, their distinctive culture, including their tribal affiliations, have been overlooked by the world at large, or included in general appellations, such as "Palestinian" or "Egyptian." Thus, the culturally and politically distinctive voice of tribal identity is often rendered invisible, when, in fact, historically the Bedouin were regarded as a "pure people" distinct from the "fellahin" and the people residing in the cities "townspeople") (Assi 2018). This tendency to overlook the distinctive identity of the Bedouin was effected for various reasons. First, the nineteenth century evolutionist ideological stance of early Zionist settlers often labeled the entire Arab population as "savage," and hence, often depicted the

Bedouin as representative of all Arabs in the region.[11] Second, the homogenization of the Bedouin has also been effected to create an impression of nationalistic Palestinian unity by both Palestinians and international supporters of Palestinian nationalism. Fieldwork, however, suggests that despite their rapidly disappearing culture and forced sedentarization, the Bedouin self-identify as the "true people of the desert," distinguishing themselves clearly from both Jewish-Israelis and the Palestinian community and others.

Dalal's performance collaborations and musical syncretism problematizes conflicting nationalist narratives of homeland and Arab identity in the Middle East. Moreover, the traditionally nomadic Bedouin, even in current days of semi-sedentarization, tend not to recognize political boundaries in a conventional way. Indeed, the theme of ambiguous, open borders dominates Dalal's oeuvre and is an integral part of his vision of peace. This theme is particularly prevalent in his CD *The Perfumed Road*, which depicts a small camel caravan in a vast expanse of open desert. The title and artwork refer to a past time, a romantic historical reality that pre-figures modern boundaries, a Levant unbounded by modern nation-states. It also evokes medieval routes from India to Gaza Port along which precious and exotic perfumes and incenses were transported for Western consumption. By implication, this imagery metaphorically equates the precious perfumes with contemporary Middle Eastern music, Dalal's own "merchandise," his own musical caravan opens up the music of the East to Western audiences, highlighting a musical idiom that transcends delimited ethnicities. Ultimately, whatever the success of the transformative function of Yair Dalal's musical collaborations, his syncretistic fusion of different musics and "othered" cultures allows minority musicians to perform their cultural roots in Israel, and potentially achieving international renown since this music is attractive to Western markets.

Overall, my analysis of Yair's collaborations provocatively positions the commercial Western music market as a progressive agent of social change for Mizrahi Jews and non-Jewish Middle Eastern musicians. In this genre, the emphasis Mizrahi musicians place on their Middle Eastern identity, arguable is necessary to overcome certain prejudices. Also, it possibly diminishes local stigmas in the Israeli (local) context owing to the international recognition achieved. Effectively, the Western liberal perception of Israelis, and the Israeli perception of Mizrahi culture and Middle Eastern culture, creates an ideological hierarchy, in which non-Jewish Middle Eastern collaboration in Israeli musical performance (or Israeli collaboration in non-Jewish Middle Eastern musical performance) has a particular symbolic, ideological function for the liberal West and for its musical markets.

Conclusion

References to blackness or alterity in *Mizrahi* music (or music by *Mizrahim*) are motivated by multiple factors, such as (1) the social and political circumstances that influence musical performance and production, for instance, conflict and the transformation of the welfare state into a neoliberal market; (2) the music

industry, including mainstream markets, as well as individual financial concerns; (3) musical-aesthetic choices; and (4) the persona of the performer(s) or ensemble, that is, the identity they seek to represent, and the identity to which they actually belong. Whether these factors act together or in isolation, they are important focal motivators, both national and international, that motivate musical production and representation. Thus, these musical choices embody what Bhabha call "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" through which "the inter subjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 1994, 1–2).

This investigation of different examples of Mizrahi musical genres reveals that the selective use of blackness in music by Mizrahi practitioners or audiences is complex and occurs on many levels for different reasons. However, this cannot be interpreted only as an example of cosmopolitanism or "discrepant cosmopolitanism," a logic that "misrepresents the power differential between cosmopolitan groups" often for political purposes (Webster-Kogen 2014, 28). The lens of cosmopolitanism is important; however, it tends to undermine the fact that this selective use of blackness is formed by very specific, yet wide-ranging and varied, desires, needs and responses of the artists, which therefore cannot be easily mapped onto large-scale political movements and ideologies.

Arguably, the use of "blackness," in the non-mainstream music examined here, allows Mizrahi artists to perform "ethnic shifting" (Galaty 1982) through which they can enact their own agency in response to various factors including discrimination "at home" and internationally. Thus, the term "Mizrahi" has become polyvalent in that its "sense and reference vary across ethnosocial context" (Galatay 1982, 17). In musical practices, one or many elements conveyed by this polyvalent, symbolic ethnic label can be utilized for different purposes. One can view this use of blackness as a process through which musicians enact the idea of ethnic relativism (Jacobsen 2009, 57) by using images or ideas of blackness to shift their representation in response to a potentially stigmatizing status quo. This process allows their music to be disseminated successfully while stimulating an original musical sound. In particular, references to blackness allow artists to overcome the "double stigmatization" of, on the one hand, being stigmatized "at home" for being too "Arab" and, on the other hand, being stigmatized internationally for being considered part of "hegemonic" Jewish-Israeli society, even as in daily life in Israel Mizrahim continue to be "excluded from major positions of power" (Daniele 2019, 203). Thus, representations of blackness legitimate their own identities, which are often dismissed by Western liberal culture as being "white," even though most of the artists claim a Middle Eastern heritage. Finally, by drawing on black performers from Africa, rather than from actual African performers residing in Israel, performers create a rapprochement with blackness without the "baggage" that comes with the Israeli context.

Overall, the three examples examined in this chapter use representations of blackness in conjunction with musical production and performance to access the potentially inaccessible, whether the inaccessible is perceived to be: a prejudice-free environment for music-making and musical innovation; a Pan-Arab-Jewish

identity; peace between minorities and majority populations in the Middle East, or unprejudiced, un-stereotyped recognition of their identity. Generally speaking, many uses of blackness are also drawn on to express marginalization and unfair distribution of resources within the Israeli nation-state. In the context of musical performance and production, this use of blackness responds to and resists ideological and economic restrictions occurring both inside the nation-state and in the international music market of which these artists are a part.

Notes

1 Generally speaking, the term "Mizrahi" refers to Jews whose origins are in Middle Eastern or North African countries. However, the term has complex social and historical implications, which will be explored further on in this chapter.
2 The human rights violations experienced by Jewish populations in Middle Eastern lands who later became refugees is a complex and multifaceted one. Basri argues that this topic is critical to the success of peace discussions and negotiations (Basri 657, 2002).
3 Here I am differentiating between music by artists of "Mizrahi" origin or artists who use the label "Mizrahi" from the designation "Mizrahi" music.
4 See Sami Chetrit's *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, black Jews* (2010).
5 Seroussi describes this complexity in relation to quantitative scholarship on Israeli popular music (2014, 38).
6 Behar's poem may well be referencing Ehud Manor's well-known song "Lo Dibarnu od al Ahava" ("we have not yet talked about love").
7 Behar, Almog (ongoing) "We have Spoken enough of Love" in *Take This Poem and Copy It*, pp. 110–111. Translated by Alexandra Berger-Polsky.
8 TACT (Tel Aviv City) is a music label founded by Subliminal (Ya'akov Shimoni, b.1979).
9 It should be noted that not all Hip Hop in Israel is in Hebrew; it is a notoriously multilingual genre even in works by artists that are seen as representing a Jewish-Israeli collective.
10 "Collaborative positioning" is a term used to describe collaboration as an emphasis on intercultural group, rather than a reflection of the actual identities of the musicians performing together (Brinner 2009).
11 For instance, this portrayal occurs in the 1950 *kibbutznik* novel *Land Without Shade* by Yonat and Alexander Sened. See also Ibn Khaldun, quoted in Racy 1996, 405.

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7 A different hue of blackness

The Haredi case

Nissim Leon

Introduction

The catalog of Jerusalem's 'Art Shelter Gallery' is extensively engaged with the Haredi sector to which the Gallery's founders belong. The contents of the Gallery's exhibits, and the vivid colors of its publications, bespeak a longtime effort to highlight the kaleidoscopic nature of Haredi society. Gallery artists and curators are encouraged to use color as a means of attracting the general public, and also as a reflective tool for digging beneath the world of images – self-image and external image – that frame perceptions of the Haredi community. Another goal is to turn art into a bridge between cultures. Directing our gaze toward the colorful side of Haredi life essentially causes us to repress the judgmental impulse elicited by the Hebrew word *shakhor*, which both denotes the color "black" and is a collective descriptor for Israel's Haredi sector.

The term "blackness" is generally discussed when racializing social and political contexts are being subjected to critical assessment. There are no "black people," contemporary sociologists argue; there are those who use the skin color of people referred to as "black" to make them "other" in relation to the light skin of those referred to as "white," and to make that otherness hierarchical. "Blacks" are subjugated to "whites" and pay a heavy price for their skin color – from lack of freedom to restricted social mobility to actual physical danger (Coates, 2015). Regarding the sociology of Israel's Jewish majority group, the term *shkhorut*-blackness is bound up with the ethnic and stereotypical marking of Israeli society's non-hegemonic sectors, those that did not originate in Eastern or Central Europe (i.e., not "Ashkenazi"), and those whose skin color is generally dark – "Mizrachim" (Sasson-Levy and Shoshana, 2013). In recent decades' blackness in Israel refers also to Jewish Ethiopians and non-Jewish Africans immigrants (Dorchin, 2018; Sabar, 2013).

However, while analytical use of the terms "blackness" and "blacks" is confined to the field of Israeli ethnic studies, these markers have a broader practical, and no less meaningful, usage in the Israeli public space, one stereotypically linked to a religious, mainly Ashkenazi minority group – the "Haredim" (ultra-Orthodox Jews).

In what sense can the Haredi case be placed under the rubric of blackness at the first place? The Hebrew word "Haredim" comes from a root meaning

"anxiety" or "fear." The Haredim, and Harediness, emerged and developed during the nineteenth century within the world of Central and Eastern European Jewry, as an ultra-conservative reaction to the fear of modernizing and secularizing influences experienced by some segments of traditionally observant Jewish society. An important feature of this Haredi reaction is its religious segregation from the Jewish majority, through (among other things) strict adherence to a traditional dress code.

Sociologically, the Haredim are split between Hassidim, who are organized in separate communities and led by genealogically dynastic figures, and non-Hassidim, whose communities are based on affiliation with *yeshivot* (Torah-study institutes) rooted in the world of Lithuanian Jewry and who, accordingly, are referred to as "Lithuanians" or *Litvishe*. Haredim are also ethnically split between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, the latter being Jews with familial roots in the Islamic countries. Another, fundamentally ideological, split is that between the Haredi "mainstream," those open to negotiation regarding the Haredi community's place as a sector within the Zionist state, and those referred to as *kana'im* ("zealots" or "extremists"), who reject the idea of Zionist sovereignty. Demographically speaking, there are two major Haredi population centers – the United States and Israel; but Israel, the Holy Land, is the more prominent community. Israel's Haredi sector, the subject of this article, amounts to 15% of the country's Jewish population. Haredim comprise a mainly urban population that, where possible, prefers separate residential spaces (Cahaner, 2017). Israel's Haredi community can be distinguished from its counterparts elsewhere by its ability to realize the Haredi ideal of males focused exclusively on Torah study (i.e., Talmud and halacha – Jewish law) – the "society of learners" described by sociologist Menachem Friedman (Friedman, 1991; Heilman and Friedman, 1991). The "society of learners" is a model that depends on an intra-Haredi gender contract, in which men are supposed to learn Torah and women are expected to support the family. This model is anchored in state budgets and civil legislation, obtained thanks to the effective bargaining position attained by the Haredi parties over many years in the Israeli political system. At the time of writing, the "society of learners" was still the dominant model in the Israeli Haredi community. Over the past decade, however, the poverty resulting from this model, and the neoliberal erosion of the Israeli welfare state, have forced more and more Haredi men to enter the labor market and to acquire vocations. Thus, although Israel's Haredi community seemed, until recently, to be a closed, segregated and historically split space, matters now appear to be somewhat more fluid.

The changing picture of Israeli Haredi insularity was wittily encapsulated in the title of a recent popular work: *Black Blue-White: A Journey into Haredi Society in Israel* (Zicherman, 2014). The choice of "black" and "blue-white" was not self-evident. "Black" is a reference to the common designation of Israeli Haredim as "blacks," and points up the tension between Haredi society and the broader Israeli community denoted by "blue-white," the colors of the Israeli flag. Here, too, color serves to depict reality. In this instance, it helps frame a generalized view of Haredi society, whose substance is what the present article aims to explore. However, it

is not surprising that one of the questions at issue in much research on Haredi society is that of change – will "the Haredim" continue to be "Haredim" will they stay "black" in the face of potential processes fostering assimilation in broader Israeli society? This is not merely the kind of analytical question with which nearly all scholarship on minority groups is engaged. In this instance, and in the context of the relationship between Harediness and Israeliness, it is a question freighted with an imagined modernist struggle between "black" and "white" – between darkness and light. To discuss this, I will first present the meaning attached by the Haredim themselves to their designation as "blacks" (Part 1); then I will explain the external meaning that non-Haredi Israelis ascribe to the term (Part 2). I will conclude by asking whether it is possible to see this "blackening" as a racialization of Haredi society (Part 3).

Blacks

One of the most significant and visible manifestations of Haredi insularity is Haredi men's strict adherence to a dress code mandating dark colors. From an early age, Haredi males wear a specific set of clothes that are mostly black: a black coat, jacket, pants, and hat, complemented by a white button-down shirt. These are the regular articles of clothing worn by Haredi males – Hassidim, Sephardim, and Lithuanians alike. By contrast, women are allowed to wear colorful clothes. However, here as well the color range and design are relatively conservative and non-conspicuous; Haredi women avoid wearing red, which, according to one Haredi commentator, "stimulates and agitates the nerves."[1] We can find certain nuances in the male Haredi dress code which, though they may not add much chromatic variety, nevertheless constitute expressions of subdued individuality. Such, for example, are the colored, sometimes name-brand, ties that Lithuanian and Sephardic men wear on Shabbat and holidays (Hassidim do not wear ties). There are also certain ornaments and accessories associated with holiday dress, such as gold and silver-colored cuff links, expensive watches, stylish eyeglasses, patent-leather shoes, or subtle stripes in an otherwise black garment. This festiveness, again, is practiced only on Shabbat and holidays, or on special occasions, particularly weddings. On regular weekdays the tendency is for men to stick with their customary black, conservative, simple, and somewhat uniform code of dress.

Dark clothes are intended as markers of Haredi maleness. The aim is to minimize undesirable interaction with general society, which is perceived as tempting and inviting (Sivan, 1995). It is not a matter of fashion. The code reflects adherence to an ideology and to the insular Haredi way of life. Deviating from the dress code effectively signals subversion of the collective order. Of interest here is the subgroup known as the "new" (or "modern") Haredim (Zicherman and Cahaner, 2012). The latter are choosing to depart from the confines of the society of learners, to pursue academic education, and to integrate, from a relatively early age, in the middle-class employment world. The new Haredim are sometimes referred to in Haredi society as "blue shirts." The term does not refer to blue-collar labor but, rather, to the replacement of the typical Haredi button-down

white dress shirt with a button-down blue dress shirt. The clothing-based marker effectively signals a deviation from the prevailing order. On Shabbat, the new Haredim also return to their customarily dark attire. Shabbat, the day that is holy to religiously-observant Jews and on which Jewish separateness is demonstrated through traditional practice, virtually mandates a culturally-structured return to the traditional dress code, to which even the "blue shirts" were accustomed from an early age.

The male Haredi dress code is a matter of no small interest to the non-Haredi public. This is not just because Haredi dress is conspicuous and confers the ability to be perceived as aberrant by those whose everyday clothes are relatively colorful. The interest is cultural-ideological, and a matter of curiosity. On the cultural-ideological plane, we can cite historian Anat Helman on the history of Israeli dress. In *A Coat of Many Colors: Dress Culture in the Young State of Israel*, Helman discusses how, in the early years of the state, the dark-hued Haredi attire attracted negative comments. One article that she cites, which appeared in a publication of the dominant political party, Mapai, describes the Haredim as:

> living in the Dark Ages: most of them are illiterate fanatics who go around in black clothes, the same clothes the Jews were forced to wear in the Middle Ages, so they can be distinguished from other people, so they'll stand out and be condemned.
>
> (Helman, 2011, 176)

These are harsh words, but it should be noted that, at least from the Haredi perspective, they are no less common now than they were then; we can find similar statements in Israeli public discourse today.

On the public-curiosity plane, there is considerable discussion of the Haredi dress code's unsuitability for Israel's climate. Israel is located in the Middle East, at the junction of the Asian and African continents. The weather is hot nearly two-thirds of the year; in summer it is sometimes both exceptionally hot and exceptionally humid. Non-Haredi Israelis tend to wear relatively light, revealing clothes that are comfortable and suited to the weather. In Israel, people do not normally wear suits on weekdays, even to office jobs. Some attribute this to the informality for which Israelis are known – a characteristic rooted in culture and ideology. Ultimately, however, dark, traditional, layered clothes attract comments. This fact makes the Haredim stand out to an exceptional degree. Throughout Israel's short winters and long, hot summers Haredi men wear black suits, dark pants, and black hats. Helman explains the Haredi dress code as one that "is meant to preserve, reinforce, and demonstrate the religious discipline of the Haredi community vis-à-vis the secular alternative" (ibid., 178). But many Israelis view adherence to this code not only as an indication of collective discipline, but also, and primarily, as a manifestation of religious extremism.

The black dress code's origins and inappropriateness for Israel's hot climate are also present in Israeli Haredi public discourse. There are those who like to cite a well-known midrash according to which, as recounted in the Book of Exodus,

the Jews preserved their distinctive identity in Egypt by retaining their names, their language, and their clothing. This idea is framed as a Haredi manifesto. The Haredi community not only presents itself as a counterculture vis-à-vis society at large, but also as the true successor to the ancient Israelite community, descendants of the Hebrews in Egypt who did not change their names, language or attire. Anthropologists Nissan Rubin and Admiel Kosman explain this view in a comprehensive article about Haredi dress (Rubin and Kosman, 2008). According to them, the black-clothed Haredi Jew cuts himself off from a world that is perceived, first and foremost, as colorful and variegated, and, through dress, situates himself elsewhere: in the Europe of his forefathers, in a Jewry segregated from society at large. He opposes a world of transient fashion with a dress code that symbolizes stability, permanence, and continuity.

Other reasons commonly cited in Haredi discourse for the black clothes worn by Haredi men is that this dress code symbolizes submissiveness to God and promotes modesty, that is, vigilance regarding gender separation. In this context it is worth noting the preference for black apparel that deeply devout and professional clerics in Catholicism, ultra-Orthodox and Shi'ite Islam seem to exhibit. In the latter instance, the black clothes are actually a means of embedding religious sadness as a cultural element of everyday Shi'ite life (Pinault, 2001). Regarding Haredim, the term I would use is "seriousness" rather than "sadness." The adherence to uniform blackness also seems to demonstrate the seriousness that the Haredim attach to their religious outlook. Boys in Haredi society are not required to wear black until they reach the age of religious maturity (13). Until that age they are allowed to wear colorful clothes that essentially identify them as "children," i.e., not yet fully steeped in the seriousness demanded by the pious way of life. The transition from colorful to black dress is inextricable from the other rites of passage undergone by Haredi boys. As they join the ranks of the black-clothed, they become eligible for membership in the peer group whose image of earnest religiosity is reflected in the dress code.

An ethnographic example of the relationship between piety and black dress emerged from my research on Sephardim in Haredi society. Some segments of this sector are referred to, in Hebrew as *mitchazkim*– those in the process of "strengthening" or "intensifying" their religious observance. The fact that they are considering full adoption of the Haredi way of life places them at an intermediate point between traditional (i.e., partly-observant) or *masorti* Jews, and Jews who meticulously observe the commandments – the Haredim. In my fieldwork I learned that crocheted skullcaps, which are usually colorful and are favored by Israel's Religious Zionist community, signal compromised or apathetic religiosity in the eyes of the *mitchazkim* – even the larger crocheted skullcaps ones worn by the more devout Religious Zionist men. By contrast, wearing a black skullcap, as mandated by the Haredi dress code, denotes uncompromising piety. Advancing along the road to "strengthened" religious observance often entails a symbolic transition from the crocheted to the black skullcap, which serves as a public declaration of one's chosen religious affiliation.

The traditionally dark dress code has also made "black" a synonym, in the Israeli lexicon, for those moving toward greater piety, greater seriousness, and greater extremism in their religious outlook. The Hebrew verb form *lehashkhir* denotes a process of becoming more religious, more traditional (observant of tradition), more orthodox (meticulous in fulfilling religious commandments) or a move from non-ultra-Orthodoxy to ultra-Orthodoxy (Haredism). Such, for example, is the case with regard to Lithuanian-sector Haredi girls, both Ashkenazi and Sephardic, who are sent to study at a Haredi *midrasha* (Jewish studies institute for girls) in the town of Ofakim, located in Israel's geographic periphery. The *midrasha* is meant to reinforce the girls' faith and adherence to the meticulously observant lifestyle before they marry. The girls call the place the *misrafa*, or "incinerator," of Ofakim. The word also happens to be a synonym for "crematorium," a term that, in the Jewish Israeli mind, recalls the Nazi death camps. In Haredi slang, *misrafa* is not unconnected from that meaning, in the sense that it denotes a place of extremity, though what the Ofakim location exterminates is doubt – *bilbulim* or "confusion" in Haredi terminology. At the same time, the Ofakim *misrafa* revives the religious impulse – in the piquant Haredi phrase, it "blackens" (*mashkhira*) the young women sent there to study. The same term is used for institutions that "convert" graduates of Israeli Religious Zionist schools to the Haredi way of life. In regular Haredi parlance, these are institutions whose purpose is to "blacken" the Religious Zionist graduates and integrate them into the "society-of-learners" system.

Hashkhara – blackening

The color black is a meaningful tool in the symbolic effort undertaken by Haredi males to set them apart from non-Haredim; but in non-Haredi public discourse, and in the Israeli academic world, it is a driver of what may be termed "Haredophobia."

The dark hue of men's clothing in Haredi society gives the Israeli Haredi community an overall image of singularity and uniformity. Israeli media and content providers customarily illustrate their products and writings on Haredim with pictures of the mass gatherings that Israeli Haredim have organized over the years. These include such well-known occasions as the demonstration held in Jerusalem on February 14, 1999, against the Supreme Court, and the funerals of Haredi spiritual leaders, most notably that of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef on October 7, 2013. These demonstration and funeral images fill newspaper front pages and the homepages of online news sites, and the picture they present is that of a large, solid bloc of blackness. When this bloc moves forward or sideways, it gives the appearance of a great dark river of people, faceless and without individual consciousness, that transfixes those who view it (Guzmen-Carmeli, 2013).

The color black is also put to interesting use by those who design the covers of scholarly books intended to present a different, more complex and diverse picture. One example is *The Ultra-Orthodox*, published in 1988 (Levy, 1988). This was one of the first works written about Haredi society in Israel, and deserves much

of the credit for bringing the story of this minority group, which the Israeli political system of the 1980s made increasingly dependent on the decisions of its spiritual leadership, to the forefront of Israeli public awareness. The author of *The Ultra-Orthodox* is Amnon Levy, then a journalist with the newspaper *Hadashot*, and today a leading Israeli media figure. The book's cover features a black frame surrounding the figure of a young Haredi man whose specific subgroup affiliation is not obvious, but whose black garb and slender forward-moving body stand out against a background of demonstrators enveloped in a mist of teargas. The designers of another seminal work, an academic study entitled *Haredi Ultra-Orthodox Society: Sources, Trends, and Processes*, also decided on a black "frame" for the book's front cover. Within the frame, we see an image of two Haredi men whose dark silhouettes and clothes are striking (Friedman, 1991). The author of this work is Professor Menachem Friedman, a leading scholar of Haredi society who has advanced a number of important theses in the field. This design trend has persisted to the present day, as exemplified by yet another comprehensive work on the Haredi community, entitled *The Haredim: a Guide to Their Beliefs and Sectors* (Brown, 2017). The author of this work is Professor Benjamin Brown of the Department of Jewish Thought in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This book aims to provide an updated look at ideological trends in contemporary Haredi society. All of the aforementioned works became best-sellers. Those referred to in Israeli public life as *shkhorim*, "blacks," have turned out to be a source of enduring fascination for the Israeli reading public.

Black Haredi attire has also become a key signifier in academic research on the community. The color effectively accentuates perceptions of the Haredim as a "black hole" in current Israeli social scholarship, and as a minority group requiring special expertise. Almost without exception, scholars have employed a "decoding" terminology. Nearly every book or article title conveys the author's aspiration to solve the Haredi riddle, and to present the Haredim not simply as a great bloc of blackness, but as a complex reality – a reality with a secret at its heart, as reflected in the Hebrew title of yet another essential and oft-cited work in the field – *Sod HaSiach HaHaredi* (literally: "The Secret of Haredi Discourse"; English title: *Internal Popular Discourse in Israeli Haredi Society*) (Caplan, 2007). A recent doctoral dissertation offers a critical perspective on how Haredi society is decoded (Kranzler, 2016). Following in the footsteps of Michel Foucault and Edward Said, Malachi Kranzler explains how research on Haredi society transformed over the years from a relatively marginal field in Israeli social scholarship to one of the discipline's more highly-developed branches.[2] According to Kranzler, the cause of this change lies not only in the Israeli Haredi community's political and democratic presence, an issue I will address later on, but also in the challenge the Haredim pose to the Israeli ethos cultivated by the country's founding elite. This ethos is embedded in the archetype of the "New Jew" – the Jew who rebels against tradition, negates the Exile, develops his productive capabilities, and knows how to defend himself. Harediness is portrayed as the negation of Israeliness, making its survival over time and, no less importantly, its growth and invigoration, a challenge to the prevailing Israeli ethos and a riddle for researchers. The result,

Kranzler explains, is what he refers to as "Harediology": a stand-alone field in Israeli social scholarship that requires special expertise of its practitioners. The researcher's role is to solve the Haredi riddle, to provide tools for classifying and cataloguing the Haredi subgroups, and to devise possible methods for intervening in the Haredi social patterns.

The color black as associated with the Haredim both within the community and outside it, fuels not merely curiosity about the Haredi community, but also the rationale that guides public discussion of it. The color bolsters the image of the Haredim as an engaged community uniformly subservient to its spiritual leadership. It also supports perceptions of the community's political power and the associated threat to Israeli society's democratic and secular image. The blackening of the Haredim is inextricably intertwined with the politics of Haredophobia – fear of Haredim.

Haredophobia sells books and art; it also buys enormous amounts of political capital. This is exemplified by, for example, the Yesh Atid party's swift ascent under the leadership of Yair Lapid. Yesh Atid was founded on a political platform of assertive secularism. The party was represented as a force for keeping the Haredim in check, with the Haredim portrayed as enemies of the middle class – noncontributors to Israeli civic life who nevertheless aspire to control the state's financial resources and political agenda. One reason for Yesh Atid's popularity was the widespread alarm that erupted in the wake of the Sephardic Haredi party's Shas' outstanding electoral success during the latter half of the 1990s. If, in 1977, the Haredi representation in the Israeli parliament – the Knesset – amounted to only 5 members out of 120, by 1999 Shas had achieved an unprecedented 17 Knesset members out of 120, raising the total Haredi representation (including that of the Ashkenazi Haredi party) to 22 MKs. It was Shas' ability to attract the votes of tens of thousands of non-Haredi Mizrachim (Israeli Jews of Sephardic extraction) that gave rise to this new situation which, though not particularly long-lived, was nevertheless effectively summed up at the time by a term coined by *Haaretz* journalist Neri Livneh: "Shasophobia." Shasophobia was a particularly stark manifestation of Haredophobia among middle-class Israelis and the secular Israeli elite. It combined the political fear of dark-skinned people – the Mizrachim – with the ideological fear of dark-clothed people – the Haredim (Helman and Levy, 2001). By linking this harsh message with the anxieties that then gripped the Israeli middle class, especially the upper middle class, Yesh Atid garnered considerable political success.

Along with concerns about a Haredi blackening of Israeli society, the passing years witnessed a variety of Haredophobic predictions. The academic world, especially those branches of it that are active on the practical plane, was a major purveyor of such forecasts. Non-university academic research institutes were particularly active in this sphere. An ever-increasing number of policy papers issued by such institutes declared the Zionist state's demographic, economic, and ideological future to be subject to the impact of high Haredi fertility rates. Experts were divided over whether Haredi demographic growth would be moderate or rapid. While a major governmental body – the Central Bureau of Statistics – predicted

that, by 2059, Israeli Haredim would account for 35% of the country's total population, an esteemed public academic research institute backtracked on a similar prediction of its own, reducing the anticipated Haredi population share to only 25%. This is not the place to explain the fundamental difference between these forecasts. What matters for our purposes here is the awareness that such forecasts fueled, and continue to fuel, Haredophobia in Israel to the present day. They effectively persuaded the Israeli public, especially readers of newspaper columns and op-eds, that the potential for Haredi political domination is not merely a matter of benefits obtained through a specific constellation of political circumstances, spanning left and right. Rather, the predictions highlighted demographic trends of long-term sociological import, both for the overall character of Israeli society and for the Western modernization model that guides the nation's leaders. Thus, for example, economist Dan Ben-David, head of the Shoresh Institute for Socioeconomic Research and one of Israel's foremost policy researchers, has explained that:

> Most Haredi children – who account for nearly a fifth of Israeli first-graders – do not participate in the international exams, which keeps the already-low national average from dropping even farther, to a level that would accurately reflect the true state of Israeli education.

Almost no Haredi boys continue studying core subjects after Grade 8, and what they are taught up to then is by no means the full core curriculum. According to Ben-David:

> The population groups with the highest fertility rates in Israel receive an education that will not allow them to sustain a developed economy in the future, with all that that implies for national security and the ability to survive in the most violent region on the face of the earth.[3]

In the view of Ben-David and others, perpetuating the Haredi way of life, based on the insular society-of-learners model that keeps large swathes of Haredim, especially working-age males, from participating in the modern labor market, will plunge the Israeli economy and Israeli society as a whole into a state of irreversible crisis. The country's working middle class will be overburdened with taxes and levies, the gross domestic product will be at risk, and Israelis' quality of life will suffer. Haredi demographics may be expected to turn Israel from a country aspiring to inclusion in first-world, modern partnership frameworks such as the OECD, to a nation of growing poverty, entangled with an ultra-traditional population with a Third-World orientation. This view of things has become so prominent that it is now a major factor in the effort to change Israel's legislation on mandatory military service. To put it in a way that reflects both Israeli slang and the demographic charts displayed at academic conferences: the "black" streaks marring the "white" modern future of Israel's economy have become a

commonplace of Israeli scholarship, and may also be an indirect manifestation of the racialization of Israel's Haredim.

Racialization?

When I look at my lecture notes on Sephardic Haredim, I am reminded of two questions that would always be posed by my audiences: "How many mandates (parliamentary representatives) do you think Shas will get in the next elections?" and "Why do Mizrachim wear the black clothes of Ashkenazi Haredim?" The latter question embodies the uneasiness that Haredi black dress arouses within Israel's non-Haredi Jewish public. This uneasiness is tinged with Haredophobia. Can Haredophobia be seen as a source of racialization?

Some would argue, with a degree of justification, that the language of color, in the Haredi instance, does not refer to a person's skin color – which would differentiate our discussion here from other scholarly explorations of blackness. According to this view, the blackness attributed to Haredim is not a racializing label denoting skin color but, rather, a term for the dark attire that distinguishes the Haredim culturally. Blackness is not an act devoid of choice but, rather, one that appears, at least on the surface, to be a *matter* of choice. One can, ultimately remove one's clothes, adopt a different dress code, acclimate to majority practice, and be reborn as a "colorful," "normative," middle-class, mainstream person. By contrast, one would naturally have trouble shedding one's skin. The distinction is not far from what we see in reality. Haredim who choose to abandon the Haredi way of life and discard the Haredi dress code, do not report difficulty integrating in society at large, aside from culture gaps that can be addressed through appropriate guidance and instruction (though the educational disparities that characterize Haredim may make the acclimatization process a lengthy one). Nevertheless, it seems to me that the use of "black" in reference to Haredim can still be discussed not only in a sociology-of-religion framework, relating primarily to the issue of religious separatism, but also in terms of a critical sociology theory that is sensitive to the marking of minority groups – the Haredim being both a religious and a cultural minority.

"Racialization," argue Israeli sociologists Yehouda Shenhav and Yossi Yonah, is the transformation of the noun "race" into a sociological act (Shenhav and Yonah, 2008). At the heart of such acts is a distinction between groups based on race, or based on cultural concepts corresponding to race, such as gender, country of origin, place of residence, or family name. In the case of Haredim, we can speak of a distinct religious community or group whose differentiation is formulated in social language. Some would argue that the separatism originates in Israeli society itself, and that the social language that the Haredim employ is itself marked by the racialization of all those who do not conform to the Haredi way of life. And indeed we can find stereotypical statements in Haredi society, as in any segregated society, regarding the outside world. However, in the Israeli context we cannot disregard the fact that the Haredim are a minority group subject to stereotyping

and even demonization on the part of a majority that enjoys cultural and political hegemony. Because the issue at hand is not, on the face of it, one of race, but rather of cultural preference based on a distinct religious-ideological outlook, journalists, politicians and, sometimes, Israeli and non-Israeli Jewish academics feel authorized to generalize about, and stereotype, the Haredim. Nor is the stereotyping confined to discourse about the Haredim. Crimes in which Haredim are involved are reported in Israel in language intimating a "Haredi" presence. The fact that the person committed the crime not because he or she was Haredi, or even despite being Haredi, would seem to provide classifying cultural information that is not always relevant but definitely corresponds to the generalizing label assigned to the Haredim, with its derived stereotypical meaning.

Another element of the social racialization process is what Shenhav and Yonah identify as the construction of the inferiority of those who are racialized. Racialized groups, Shenhav and Yonah explain, are those that undergo devaluation while being defined in terms of basic attributes that may be perceived as "essential." On the surface, the Haredim are not devalued – perhaps the opposite. They – the Haredim – attach high cultural and religious value to themselves relative to the outside world, and have an elitist view of themselves. However, from the perspective of non-Haredi society this is not the case. Firstly, the "black" image of the Haredim – the perception of them as unenlightened, fundamentalist, threatening – effectively distinguishes them from the "white" world which, in contrast, is perceived as enlightening/enlightened and progressive. Evidence of this can be found in the progressive language that is often used to characterize efforts to integrate the Haredim in Israeli society as a whole – to pull them out of the darkness and into the light. We can also see devaluation in public discourse regarding secular fears of Haredi domination.[4] Another indication of devaluation has to do with the essentialist construction of the Haredi identity. Traces of this essentialist approach can be seen in organized tours for non-Haredim in Haredi strongholds, aimed at giving the participants a sense of who the Haredim are, what they eat, what their everyday life is like, how they maintain Jewish authenticity in an environment of antiquated tradition – the Haredi ghetto. These tours seem to project cultural empathy and a desire to shorten social distances, yet they actually intensify the sense of distance and the sense of unchanging identity attributed to Harediness and to Haredim.

The Haredi press and Haredi journalists are sensitive to the Israeli majority's attitude toward the Haredim.[5] From time to time they publish reports, which also find their way into the non-Haredi press, about inappropriate and insulting treatment of Haredim in Israel society at large. One problem that is fairly common to racialized groups and that the Haredi media have covered is that of over-policing. The fact that Haredi life is one of ideological intensity and strict maintenance of the boundaries of the Haredi enclave, as well as the fact that Haredi demonstrations and protest activities are portrayed, by outsiders, as events in which a large, uniform, and agitated bloc undermines the rule of law – "It's hard to tell them apart," I once heard a police officer say at a Haredi rally – sometimes leads the police to take draconian measures, whether in the form of arrests

or in the form of physical violence.[6] Another example is that of the caricatures of Haredim in the general press, which often have anti-Semitic overtones and portray Haredim as hagglers trying to wring money out of the state. Haredim are subjected, in the public realm, to comments about smell and hygiene; they are also criminalized, by both regular Israelis and senior politicians, as shirkers of compulsory military service who undermine the solidarity of the Jewish Israeli public. Yet another example is the press coverage of religious criminal cases in which Haredim are involved – with a preference for cases featuring well-known rabbis. The tension between Haredi religious "purity" – a quality often ascribed to the community by its own emissaries to society at large – and the public disclosure of Haredi "criminality" serves, not always deliberately, as an instrument of social racialization of the Haredim.

How does the Haredi community cope with manifestations of social racialization? That is an interesting question requiring closer study and more in-depth research. Here I will merely make a start at some answers. First, we must take into account that, despite the strong political bargaining position enjoyed over the years by the Haredi parties, Haredi politicians have not tried to address this worrisome picture. Haredi Knesset members do sometimes cite, in their speeches, instances of labeling of Haredim; but as a rule the issue is not on their agenda. Ultimately, Haredophobia and "dark" Haredi distinctiveness serve the cause of separatism. The external attacks on Haredi society promote the construction of a sense of marginality and oppression that are crucial to the Haredi ghetto strategy. At the same time, we cannot ignore the case with which we opened this article, that of the Art Shelter Gallery. The Gallery, located on the margins of a Jerusalem Haredi neighborhood, is one of many creative efforts that have arisen in recent years to introduce the Haredim to non-Haredim. Other efforts that have had an impact feed into mass-media endeavors – television series that depict the Haredim as a human cultural group, however distinct, and subject to the same tensions, emotions, temptations, and decisions as other people. Similarly, there are journalists of Haredi background who are integrated in the state and national media and who try to offer a complex and sometimes even critical picture of the society from which they come. All of these efforts are meant to counter the generalizing blackness with a colorful, diverse, and complex picture of Haredi society. They may not figure in the information collected for "Haredologic" scholarship driven by Haredophobia; but they do reflect an attempt to see the Haredim and Harediness in a less gloomy light.

Notes

1 "Why Haredim Wear Black and White." *Mynet*, January 29, 2017, http://mynetbatyam.co.il/%D7%99%D7%94%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA/3288.

2 Kranzler, 2016. [Hebrew]

3 Shahar Ilan, "Professor Ben-David: We Must Stop Giving Benefits Designed to Encourage People to Have Large Families." *Calcalist*, November 14, 2018. www.calcalist.co.il/local/articles/0,7340,L-3749854,00.html.

4 Example: Ofer Ashtoker, "Is Ashdod Becoming Haredi?" *Ashdod Net*, December 30, 2011.
5 See, for example: Avital Ganet Keshet, "Under the Microscope: the Haredim May Not Be Perfect, but Neither Are You." *Ynet*, June 7, 2016, www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4813093,00.html.
6 Yishai Porat and Kobi Nachsoni, "Documented: Police Knocked Haredim Down and Kicked Them." *Ynet*, September 17, 2017.

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Part III

Contested blackness

8 "I am blacker than you"

Mizrahiness and Ethiopianess in an educational boarding school in Israel

Avihu Shoshana

Three major research questions reside at the foundation of this article: How does an educational organization populated by students defined as "black" (phenotypic and symbolic) construct the blackness of those students? How does the organization construct the relationship between different black subjects? How do students respond to these organizational constructions?

In order to achieve these research objectives, I conducted two-year ethnographies in the north of the country at an educational boarding school designated for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In light of the long-standing correlation between class and ethnicity in Israel (Grosswirth Kachtan 2017), most of the students that populate boarding schools in Israel are Mizrahim (Orientals or Jews originating from Arab countries) and Ethiopians. The ethnographies were conducted at boarding school staff meetings, school lessons, afternoon enrichment activities, various events such as annual field trips, workshops and empowerment groups. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with staff members, parents, Mizrahi students and Ethiopian students.

This article offers several research contributions to various fields of knowledge: the invention of new social problems (Hein 2016); the construction of new social categories as a means of population management (Shoshana 2012); the study of blackness (Ferguson 2001); blackness and resistance (Wingfield 2013); exploring educational boarding schools as spaces determined by class, ethnicity and race (Shoshana 2016); and investigating relationships between state authorities and marginalized citizens (Gazit and Perry-Hazan 2020).

Social classifications and ethnic hierarchies in Israel

The social construction of reality, which suggests dissociation from the epistemology of universalism and essentialism and exposes historical, local and arbitrary understandings of reality, provides us with insights into the mechanisms that regulate individuals, groups, and cultural orders. The conversion of knowledge or worldviews into "natural," taken for granted and essential qualities, is, for example, one of the most significant instruments of control (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The invention of social classifications and categories plays a central role in these processes of constructing reality (Young 1995). These classifications and categories

are not only described as referential-intellectual distributions, but as divisions by which individuals are emotionally and ethically embodied. As Schwartz put it, "This 'cathetic' component is an important feature of classification" (Schwartz 1981, 14). Foucault's poststructuralist approach to classifications and his archeological method were intended to reveal the discursive sources of social categories, which in turn have an impact on what he calls the "constitution of subjects" (1973). In *Madness and Civilization* (1973]) for instance, Foucault demonstrates how classifications serve as a means for policing the social and subjective construction of meaning by making citizens classifiable, and thus visible. Hence, the sovereignty of the modern institutional order (above all, the state) is not sustained only because it has the power to create identities, but also because it weaves a tapestry of organizing classifications and schemas that themselves create modes of social reporting, which in turn make their way back to the state's authorities (see also Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

These phenomenological and social gazes, which involve classifications, are also reflected through color classifications, especially in the distinctions between blackness and whiteness. While blackness is a stigmatic category, whiteness is a transparent category or as Fanon (1952, 33) put it: "Do the whites boast like that about theirs [color]?." White transparency privilege is expressed by the fact that white individuals do not perceive themselves as socially marked and do not experience the oppressive social view of their color (Zerubavel 2018). Black individuals, on the other hand, according to the description of Du Bois (1903, 25), experience "double consciousness": "this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

This social construction of blackness and whiteness takes place in Israel through the main, intra-Jewish ethnic distinction between Mizrahim (Jews from Arab countries) and Ashkenazim (Jews of Euro-American origin). While the former are constructed as blacks (and even referred to in the first decades of the state as "black beasts" or "Schwartze haya" in Yiddish), the latter are constructed as whites. The blackness of the Mizrahim is not necessarily phenotypic but symbolic. In other words, some of the Mizrahi people are as light-skinned as some of the Ashkenazim in Israel. The stereotypical constructions of blackness and Mizrahiness, like that of whiteness and Ashkenazism, are pertinently worded by Shohat (1988, 2), following her application of the thesis of Orientalism to the field of Israeli cultural and ethnic hierarchies: "the process by which one pole of the East/West dichotomy is produced and reproduced as rational, developed, superior, and human, and the other as aberrant, underdeveloped, and inferior, but in those cases as it affects Oriental Jews."

Thus, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi labels are essentially population management tools (or governmentality in Foucauldian terms, 2007) through the invention of pan-ethnic homogeneity. All Jews that arrived from different Arab countries (in

the Middle East and North Africa) were placed under one Mizrahi umbrella identity, and all Jews from Euro-American countries under a second umbrella identity, Ashkenazi. Reducing the differences within the groups at the expense of increasing the differences between the groups helped state authorities to construct an ideal cultural-ethnic order in Israel and produced subjective identifications accordingly.

The waves of immigration of Jewish Ethiopian immigrants to Israel (starting in 1980) have complicated the link between color and ethnicity in Israel. The dialectic between phenotypic blackness and symbolic blackness, or the comparison of the "lighter" phenotypic blackness of some Mizrahim with that of Ethiopians, has created classification complexity (Djerrahian 2018). This classification complexity appeared, first and foremost, among the heads of the Ministry of Religion in Israel, who were disturbed by the connection between blackness and Jewishness and engaged a great deal with issues of Ethiopian conversion (Weil 1997) and solutions to prove their Jewishness, even through specific practices such as sending Ethiopian students to religious-state schools. Maintaining Jewish identity and embracing the performance of Judaism (through a yarmulke on the head, for example) have also been proposed as solutions to the classification complexity within Ethiopian immigration to Israel, or the connection – perceived as "unnatural" – between blackness and Judaism (Weil 1997).

Recent studies also indicate the relationship between class and ethnic identities among Ethiopians in Israel. Working-class Ethiopians, for example, report fewer experiences of everyday racism, their dissociation from critical ethnic consciousness (Mizrachi and Herzog 2012), and their desires to "be ordinary" (Mula 2018). These choices are described as helping Ethiopians increase their cultural assimilation and reduce their sense of exclusion from the Jewish-Israeli collective.

One of the issues that has not been studied in Israel is the relationship between Mizrahim and Ethiopians. Given that these two ethnic groups are marked and labeled in comparison to Ashkenazism or whiteness, and in light of the fact that members of both of these groups reside in low-socioeconomic class cities and neighborhoods, are educated in joint schools, and experience a high proportion of out-of-home placement (such as educational boarding schools), and are defined as "children at risk," it is very important to examine the relationship between them in specific arenas. Moreover, it is crucial to examine how specific authorities (such as teachers, therapists, and educational counselors) construct these relationships. Finally, given the widespread social construction of Ethiopian blackness as phenotypic and Mizrahi blackness as symbolic (or at least for some Mizrahi people defined as "less black"), it would be interesting to clarify the organizational-social relation to types of blackness and the degree of similarity and contrast between them. This article attempts to address these research lacunae. These examinations are critical in light of the fact that many of the boarding school students at the foundation of this article defined themselves as "black" and even used it as a resistance identity. Maor, a 17-year-old boarding school student, spat at the boarding school principal: "You put all the blacks in one place. What did you expect to happen? That we all play the violin and say amen to all your racism?"

Research design

This ethnographic study is based on observations and interviews conducted over two years at an educational boarding school located in northern Israel. This boarding school was established in 1968, 20 years after the establishment of the State of Israel and was mainly populated in its early decades by Mizrahi students from low socioeconomic class families. Since the 2000s, Ethiopian students from similar socioeconomic situations have also begun attending the boarding school. In recent years, there has also been a relatively small percentage of students who immigrated from the former Soviet Union attending the school. The boarding school has about 300 students in total. Its staff does not collect official statistics on the ethnic identities of the students, but according to their reports, about 60 percent of the students are Mizrahim, 30 percent are Ethiopian, and 10 percent are students who have recently immigrated from the former Soviet Union.

The boarding school exists as a total institution (Goffman 1968), reflected in the fact that students visit their family homes only once every three weeks and that they live with a strict agenda that includes morning study and afternoon activities. The stated educational purpose of the boarding school, funded by state authorities, is to offer students a more normative lifestyle than that offered to them in their familial homes and/or in the cities where their families reside. The boarding school authorities believe that this boarding school education (and exposure to appropriate cultural models) may improve the life prospects of the students. A relatively large proportion of students (approximately 70 percent, according to informal reports by various boarding school employees) who complete 12th grade do not obtain matriculation diplomas.

The ethnographies included observations at various staff meetings, different morning classes at the school, afternoon enrichment activities (e.g., current affairs groups, experiential English studies), and various events (such as annual field trips, attending theatrical performances, and empowerment groups). In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with most of the school's staff members: principal, vice principal, three social workers, two counselors, and six instructors. The interviews included questions about educational and therapeutic ideologies, job characteristics, student characteristics, main difficulties at work, job satisfaction, and students' perceptions of the future.

I also conducted interviews with 40 Mizrahi students and 20 Ethiopian students of high school age (16 to 18). The interviews included questions about their life stories before coming to the boarding school, the decision to attend the boarding school, becoming acclimated at the boarding school, their educational agendas and ethnic identities, the benefits of boarding school life, the difficulties related to boarding school life, the connection with their families, and their future aspirations.

Each interview, which lasted from one to three hours, was recorded and transcribed. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis and the methodological logic suggested by grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1997). After

two open (as much as possible) readings of the interviews, readings were based on predetermined issues (educational ideology, boarding school life characteristics, family ties, accounts of ethnic identities) and inductively identifying unplanned issues. These issues mainly included defining the relationship between Ethiopian and Mizrahi students as a problem, engaging in "Mizrahi language," discerning between Mizrahi blackness and Ethiopian blackness, and the students' use of black identity as a means of daily resistance.

Organizational construction of Mizrahiness, Ethiopianess, and blackness: "Black in the bad sense of the word"

Mizrahiness, Ethiopianess and blackness are common words in the daily discourse of the boarding school. These words, explicitly spoken by both the educational staff and the students, rely on familiar stereotypical content in Israel (Lamont et al. 2016) but also receive unique content. The unique category of "*Mizrahi Ethiopians*," for example, is not recognized in the everyday Hebrew language but appears in the daily life of the boarding school. It is a unique social invention of the educational team to describe the identity of Ethiopian students, Mizrahiness, and the hierarchy of blackness.

When I asked Omri, an instructor, why he calls Ethiopian students "Mizrahi Ethiopians," he replied:

> Did you see how they talk, walk, dress? That's exactly what characterizes Mizrahim. Even the music they listen to is Mizrahi. They don't listen to black music, for example. They don't know black music at all. I tried to play Bob Marley for them. Not only did they not know who he was, they also said that it is bad music and that they prefer Matan Galilov, a Mizrahi singer that only Mizrahim know.

When I asked Omri, "They are very young, why do you expect them to know Bob Marley?" He replied:

> Because I want them to have good role models for their black identity. I worry about them. Mizrahiness is a bad influence for them. That is, not Mizrahiness like yours [points at me], but rather Mizrahiness of *arsim* [a derogatory term for Mizrahim from a low socioeconomic class]. The fact that they are Mizrahi Ethiopians is a distortion that places the emotional well-being of Ethiopians in danger, as well as their prospects for progressing in the future. Unfortunately they are too heavily influenced by the Mizrahi students. They [the Ethiopians] learned from the Mizrahim to be black in the bad sense of the word.

The conversation with Omri demonstrates a number of characteristics that are common in the boarding school with regard to the language of Mizrahiness, Ethiopianess, Mizrahi Ethiopianess, and blackness:

(1) Omri makes a distinction between good and bad Mizrahiness. Middle-class and upper-class Mizrahiness is considered good to him. He considers Mizrahiness of the low socioeconomic class, such as that of the boarding school students, to be bad.
(2) Omri connects blackness and Mizrahiness and argues that Mizrahi blackness is not a positive role model for the blackness of Ethiopian students. In other words, Omri also distinguishes between good blackness and bad blackness.
(3) Good blackness, for Omri and many other staff members of the educational boarding school, is specifically African American blackness like Bob Marley (who was Jamaican singer) or Barack Obama. It is important to note that this American blackness has nothing to do with Ethiopian blackness or the fact that all the Ethiopian students in the boarding school were born and raised in Israel.
(4) Omri emphasizes that being "Mizrahi-Ethiopian" is a subjectivity of deviance that does not benefit the emotional well-being of Ethiopian students and may be detrimental to their futures.

When the connection between Mizrahiness and blackness also disturbed Tali, an instructor, I asked her why the connection between Mizrahim and Ethiopians was so disconcerting to her. She replied, "For several reasons." To point out these reasons, I will break down Tali's description into six rationales:

> [1] Because there is a social problem here, not just a personal one, that is going to spread like wildfire and endanger the entire country. This is a catastrophe that we will pay a heavy price for; [2] I am surprised that there are other young Mizrahim who speak like the Black Panthers [a Mizrahi protest movement established in 1971]; [3] That Mizrahim teach Ethiopians problematic blackness that is unrelated to them; [4] And that dissociates them from their beautiful blackness in Ethiopia. My dream is to arrange a trip for them to Ethiopia so that they know what beautiful blackness is; [5] Because talking about blackness makes them stuck and does not help them in life … [6] this anti-state talk or "burn the house down" on behalf of all blacks is indicative of the psychological problem, they are in complete denial that we are in another era for anyone who wants to succeed. You don't need a black identity today to move forward, you need internal strengths.

In an attempt to expose the students to positive black role models, the instructors decided to hold a workshop on the lives of two "successful black leaders": Barack Obama and Rosa Parks. This purpose was not made publicly available to the Ethiopian students. The stated goal was "empowerment activity for Ethiopian students." The instructors' original plan was to offer this workshop to Ethiopian students only, but the program went awry very quickly. The Ethiopian students entered the classroom and immediately expressed discomfort that only they were present and wondered where the other students were. The instructors replied that the workshop was intended for Ethiopian students only. The Ethiopian students

verbally protested, but after about 15 minutes of exchange of words with the instructors, they settled into the classroom. However, as soon as they sat down, they began sending messages to their colleagues through their mobile phones. Their friends arrived within minutes and said: "We heard there was an activity for blacks, so we came." All the students burst out laughing. The instructors initially tried to prevent these late arrivals (most of them Mizrahim) from entering, but both the Ethiopian and the Mizrahi students objected and declared that they intended to leave, and that if the workshop was intended for Ethiopians only then they all intended to leave. Ofek, a Mizrahi boy, aged 17, even hurled at the instructors, "Aside from that, we're the real blacks here. Even the Ethiopians know that we are blacker than them and that they are only black from the outside. In reality, they act like *dead Friedmans* [derogatory nickname for Ashkenazim]. They are too good. We teach them how to be black." All of the students joked for a long time about this description and agreed with it. The next day, in my interview with one of the instructors, he mentioned what Ofek said as one of the main reasons they wanted to conduct the workshop for Ethiopian students only, and cited it as proof of the negative influence of the Mizrahim on the Ethiopians.

The workshop began with a presentation that included several images of Barack Obama in various contexts. The photos featured Obama in the White House, spending time with his family, giving lectures to various audiences, as well as photos from his time as a student. In the next stage, the instructors declared that they wanted to describe Obama's life story. Even before they did, Roei, a Mizrahi boy, aged 18, asked them, "Is it true that Obama has a white mother?" The instructors replied yes. Roei retorted, "In that case he is not black. He is half and half. That is something else. And I also heard that his mother is drowning in money, so he is not black at all." The instructors asked Roei to be more polite and not to interfere with the lecture. Tomer, a 17-year-old Ethiopian male student, immediately intervened and said, "But Roei is right. If his mother is white and has loads of money, then he is not black. It's like I have a friend whose father is Ethiopian and whose mother is white. He is not Ethiopian like me. He is mixed. That is something else." One of the instructors wanted to respond, but Roei interrupted him, saying, "Besides, he also looks too soft, like a gay. He doesn't look black to me. Blacks are more masculine." The two instructors replied to Roei that he was condemning all possible groups in one sentence, gay and black, and that he was using stereotypes and should stop immediately. Timor, a Mizrahi boy, aged 17, stood up in Roei's defense and said,

> But it is true. Obama is too gentle. He is not like ordinary blacks. He is not such a good president either. He is just a nerd. If he was a true black man, he would burn the entire country to make the situation of blacks better. He is a high-society black; he is not a true black, he is *mistaknez* [becoming Ashkenazi] and should be ashamed of himself.

Eran, one of the instructors, asked Matan, an Ethiopian student, what he thought of Timor's words. Matan replied, "I don't know, I don't get it, I don't

know Obama at all." Timor immediately replied, "Dude, I'm blacker than you, huh? You don't know Obama? Tell them that real blacks burn the house down, that blacks suffer from racism, and only violence will help here." Immediately afterwards, Timor addressed the instructors and the other Ethiopian students,

> This is your problem, that you are quiet, not making noise like the black Mizrahim. You know that many years ago there were Black Panthers here, Mizrahim that burned the country because they were treated with racism like the Ethiopians are treated today. That's what we need to do. Mizrahim and Ethiopians together. Israel's Niggers. You want us quiet and white bread [derogatory nickname for Ashkenazim], but that's not the solution.

Eran, the instructor, replied to Timor, "But you're not black. You're white. Look at the color of your skin." Timor replied,

> Don't make me laugh, I'm white on the outside but black on the inside and that's what matters. Everyone in this country knows that Mizrahim are black. It's not about skin color. Look at this gay Obama. What good has he done for blacks?

At this point, a commotion developed around the question of who is white and who is black in the classroom. Most of the Mizrahi students said they were not black in skin color, but they were blacker than Ethiopians. Some even explained to the instructors that "black is character" or, as Shir, a Mizrahi female student, said,

> If you are silent when you are treated with racism then you are not black. This is what I am trying to explain to my Ethiopian friends here. I am worried about them. I want them to hit anyone who treats them with racism. Why do I hit when someone treats me or them with racism? If they join in, there might be a change here.

The two instructors asked for quiet, explaining that they would not tolerate violence, neither physical nor verbal violence, and that for them there were boundaries being crossed. Liran, one of the instructors, added: "The fact that you are connecting blackness to violence is a problem we must work on. Violence does not have to be used to be black or to respond to racism. Sometimes silence is the most powerful weapon." Yoni, a Mizrahi male student, replied immediately, "It's not about violence. It's about understanding life. You can't make any difference if you sit quietly. Maybe quiet is a weapon for Ashkenazi gays. Not for us. We're real men."

At this point, Liran, the instructor, began to talk about Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat for whites on a bus in the 1950s when the law required blacks to give up their seat. Even before Liran finished his description, Eden, a Mizrahi female student, interrupted and said,

> She's completely fucked up. That's not the way to react. Nothing is achieved quietly. And here's the proof – that even today there is racism towards Mizrahim and blacks and Ethiopians. If we all, all the blacks, burn tires on all the roads and block them for a month, things will change.

Liran, the instructor, asked Eden to stop her violence and she immediately replied, "I am teaching the Ethiopians here how to be black. Don't disturb me." All the students laughed out loud for quite a while because of this statement. The students then started leaving the classroom, asked to stop the activity, and refused to respond to the instructor's request to return to the classroom.

These ethnographies indicate a number of issues that have characterized my other notable observations about constructing blackness in the boarding school: the hierarchical construction between bad and good blackness by the educational staff and the creation of real blackness and unreal blackness by the students, ("becoming Ashkenazi," "not real black"); the construction of Ethiopianess as quiet and nonviolent blackness; students' connection between types of blackness and masculinity – upper socioeconomic blacks' identity, actually experienced as those who adopted white, higher class habitus ("high society") and as more feminine ("gay," "nerdy"), and low socioeconomic class blacks (as more masculine); the desire of the Mizrahi students for a black brotherhood with Ethiopian students to create social change; engaging in definitions of blackness (phenotypic versus "character"); distinction between types of resistance (silent resistance versus violent resistance).

Mizrahi students: "We are the niggers of the state of Israel"

All of the Mizrahi students interviewed identified themselves as Mizrahim and used the words black and Niggers as describing Mizrahim in Israel. This is how Noam, male, aged 17, described it:

> I am Mizrahi, and like all Mizrahim we are the Niggers of the State of Israel, we are the blacks of the U.S. … [In what way?] First, this is what they say about us, that we are violent blacks like the blacks in America. Secondly, we are not rich and rule this country like the Ashkenazim. We are poorer than the blacks in America.

This boundary work (Lamont 2000) between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, and the similarity to blacks in the United States, was described by many Mizrahi students. Furthermore, the Mizrahi consciousness, as opposed, for instance, to mobile Mizrahim or Mizrahim from the upper socioeconomic class in Israel (Shoshana 2016), was described in terms of pride and moral value ("We are more honest than cold Ashkenazim who think only of themselves"), and included positive traits such as generosity and loyalty to family and friends.

The vast majority of Mizrahi students also reported experiences of discrimination and everyday racism (selection when trying to enter nightclubs; stigmas toward Mizrahi family names and cities located in the geographical periphery of Israel and identified as Mizrahi). The Mizrahi consciousness of the students was also expressed by way of criticism toward state authorities and the boarding school. Coral, female, aged 16, expressed a surprisingly critical stance toward the social fact that the majority of students in boarding schools are Mizrahi and Ethiopian:

> It bothers me that everyone who is in boarding school, and not just here, are Mizrahim and Ethiopian. It is no accident. You will not find rich Ashkenazi here. Why? Because the social worker does not come to them. She comes just to us and then they remove us from our home without a problem. It's cruel. It's a racist country that hates Mizrahim.

The critical consciousness of many Mizrahi students was also expressed in their refusal to accept the psychological diagnoses of the clinical and educational staff. This is how Nofar, female, aged 17, describes it:

> I'm tired of her [the educational counselor] telling me that I need to take care of my nerves and outbursts of anger. "Excuse me?," I said to her. "I'm angry?" I told her if they treated you with racism you wouldn't be angry? I explained to her that it is not my fault, the problem is not with me, the problem is with her and this country that treats us badly just because we were born to a family without money and my parents are not high society like her.

Nofar not only opposes these psychological attributions but also prefers structural-political explanations for her life, including her personal and social behavior. This finding resonates with other findings that describe how upper-class subjects favor psychological attributions (also known as solipsism) and low-class subjects favor structural-critical attributions (Kraus et al. 2012).

It is important to emphasize that all the Mizrahi students described their boarding school experiences as negative, offered metaphors of suffering ("prison"; "war") and even defined the boarding school as a "white place" or "a place for whites." This is how Aviel, male, aged 17, depicts it:

> This boarding school is white, it's a place for whites [Why?] … There are Mizrahim and Ethiopians here. All the Niggers in one place [laughs] and also because they always fight with us, "Don't listen to Mizrahi music," "Don't talk Mizrahi" [i.e.]…It's a place of whites. They want us to be puppets, nerdy Ashkenazim, who speak like Ashkenazim born in Europe. But we are different, with a different culture.

Another issue that repeatedly surfaced among many Mizrahi students was their concern for the Ethiopian students and their sense of camaraderie with them.

This issue was raised when I asked the question, "What do you like at boarding school?" Or "What are your positive experiences in boarding school?" Hodaya, female, aged 18, responded as follows:

> My relationship with Ethiopians. They are our brothers. I know what it is to suffer from racism. It's a kind of black brotherhood. Only Mizrahim can understand Ethiopians. It hurts me to see their suffering. I know what racism towards blacks is. Even though for them it is more difficult because of the color of their skin… It is important for the Mizrahim to show responsibility for the Ethiopians because Ashkenazim won't do that. It is our obligation. I also explain to them, "You have to open your mouth and scream just like the Mizrahim. It won't help you if you sit quietly." I told them a thousand times, "Be like Mizrahim, be proud that you are black. Don't let the Ashkenazi whites offend you."

It is interesting to note that Hodaya, who places Mizrahim and Ethiopians under the category of blackness, distinguishes between racism toward Mizrahim and racism toward Ethiopians. ("It is more difficult for them because of their skin color"), expresses concern for them, the responsibility she thinks Mizrahim must show toward Ethiopians, and the advice she gives them for strengthening their black consciousness. The latter has been suggested by many Mizrahi students, as going "quietly" was their common critique of their Ethiopian friends. The encouragement by Mizrahi students that Ethiopians express black consciousness was described to me as anger at the Ethiopians, at their quiet natures, and especially their obedience regarding the demands of the educational staff.

This encouragement was based on a common definition of blackness, on the similarity between Mizrahim and Ethiopians as citizens who experience everyday racism, and on the boundary work between Mizrahiness and Ashkenazism. Ashkenazim were often described as having left-wing views and preferring to show empathy toward Arabs (or non-Jews) rather than Mizrahim and Ethiopians. Furthermore, this link is based on the expression of resistance and protest, in terms of black identity. Many Mizrahi students described their opposition to the school control and their racialized experiences in boarding school through their deliberate emphasis on their black identities. This is how Ben-El, male, aged 16, describes it:

> I actually spite the instructors and the principal and tell him, "Don't mess with blacks, they know how to fight back." He gets mad at me [laughs] because they don't like when I talk like that. He says it is racist. I spite him [laughs] because he is a huge racist.

This description echoes Spivak's (1988) "strategic essentialism" expression, which includes, *inter alia*, the deliberate highlighting of essentialist characteristics for action, agency, and resistance in order to produce social change.

Ethiopian students: "They prefer that we not be Mizrahim but that makes no sense"

In response to my question, "How do you define yourself?" Most Ethiopian students did not identify themselves as Ethiopians and gave responses such as, "I am ordinary," or "I do not define myself in any special way. Normal. I am normal. Like everyone else." (On the engagement in "normalness" among young Ethiopians, see Mula 2018). When I asked the direct question, "Do you define yourself as Ethiopian?" most of the students answered like Rachel, aged 17, who replied. "I am Israeli. I was born here. My Ethiopianess doesn't matter. I have no connection with Ethiopia."

Phenomenological preoccupation with normalness has been described by a number of scholars as a desire for normative identity, a lack of marking, and respectability (Skeggs 1997). The Ethiopian students, unlike the Mizrahi students, rarely used blackness for self-definition. Most Ethiopian students described the educational experience in the boarding school as negative. They expressed their preference for attending school in the cities where they grew up, and near their family homes. They even expressed their wonder at the large number of Ethiopians in the boarding school. Within this context, Ayala, aged 18, remarked, "Have you noticed the amount of Ethiopians in the boarding school? There are no Ethiopians left in the city [laughs]. I can't understand why the country removes Ethiopian children from their family. Isn't it strange?"

The Ethiopian students' engagement with their skin color emerged when I asked them about their relationship with other students in the boarding school. Most of the interviewees described how the educational team was angry about the connection between Mizrahim and Ethiopians and that this was puzzling to them. Aviva, female, aged 18, depicted it as follows:

> I don't understand why the instructors are upset about our relationship with the Mizrahim. You know that one of the counselors once told me that I was a "Mizrahi-Ethiopian" as if it was a disgrace. I am not ashamed of it. They prefer that we not be Mizrahim, but that isn't logical because there are only Ethiopians and Mizrahim in the boarding school [laughs], so who will be my friend? A rich Ashkenazi? There are no Ashkenazim here [laughs].

Aviva later points out something "really strange" in her eyes: "And what's the strangest thing? Something really weird. They [the instructors] think the Mizrahim are convincing us to be black [laughs]. Look at me. What do I look like? A blonde, white with blue eyes? Like, duh, I'm black, I don't need any Mizrahi to tell me I'm black and besides I love the Mizrahim here. They really know how to be friends and are right about everything they say." When I asked Rachel, "What are they [Mizrahim] right about?" She replied,

> That we should be proud of being black, that we should learn to make noise, because Ethiopians are really quiet, and we really should not keep quiet and

> experience racism silently. In short, I have fun with my Mizrahi friends, they are good to me and we have the same experiences.

The similar occurrences that Mizrahim and Ethiopians experience, as Aviva and other Ethiopian students mentioned, are associated with everyday racism and discrimination. These experiences have been described by many interviewees as producing rapport. Tagau, male, aged 16, also mentioned the closeness with Mizrahim:

> We are both blacks who experience discrimination, say in the selection for clubs, and it brings us close. Half of the Mizrahim here and all the Ethiopians here do not pass selection for the club in the kibbutz near the boarding school. They understand my suffering… just black understands black. The instructors don't understand the suffering. They keep telling us, "Let's talk about it and try to understand why it hurt you so much?" That's so retarded, what's not clear here? What is there to talk about? That's why I love the Mizrahim. They are *dugri* [straightforward], they understand me immediately and I love their solutions [laughs] … not to shut up [but], "to burn the house down" and demand respect.

It is interesting to note that Tagau, like many Ethiopian students, does not use blackness when defining himself, but attributes it to his Mizrahi friends. In addition, he views the connection between Mizrahiness and resistance as positive and empowering for Ethiopians. Active protest as a Mizrahi solution to painful experiences as a result of phenotypic or symbolic blackness was described by many Ethiopian students as a more appropriate existential alternative than the psychological solutions provided by the educational staff. This unique connection between blackness, Ethiopianess, and Mizrahiness will now be portrayed extensively in the discussion section.

Discussion: Blackness as social problem and as resistance

The out-of-home placement rate into educational and therapeutic boarding schools in Israel is one of the highest in the world. This means that, unlike other countries where children and adolescents are removed from their homes and live with foster families, in Israel they are transferred to total institutions (Kosher et al. 2018). Another important point to note is that the overwhelming majority of students who populate the educational and therapeutic boarding schools in Israel are members of subaltern groups (Mizrahim and Ethiopians of low socioeconomic class).

I propose to view these social facts as a practice of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991) that conveys latent and unconscious messages (which in turn create misrecognition and self-blame) about the inferiority of specific ethnic groups and the social superiority of other groups. This description is influenced by Tyson's (2011) insightful study of the paving and populating of gifted classes mainly by white

students. In Foucault's (2007) terms, the existence of educational boarding schools and gifted classrooms is a governmental means of population management. This article shows that these ethnicized and racialized spaces provide a unique research opportunity to describe social constructions of blackness and the relationships between black subjects from different groups.

One of the key findings of my research is the dramatic engagement of the boarding school staff in the blackness of the students, in questions about the characteristics of phenotypic and symbolic blackness, and the interpersonal relationships between students who define themselves as black. The self-definition of subjects as black, their rhetorical use of blackness vocabulary ("blacks," "Niggers," "black panthers," "Mizrahi Ethiopians") and its use as a practice of resistance, occupies a central place in the day-to-day educational routine at the boarding school. The educational staff not only deals with this on an ongoing basis, but also creates hierarchies of good and bad blackness.

Some of these hierarchies include an invention of blackness that is irrelevant to Ethiopian students. The educational staff's preference for African American blacks over Mizrahi blacks ignores the fact that Ethiopian students were born and raised in Israel and that their cultural origins are in Ethiopia. Throughout all my ethnographies at the boarding school, I was not exposed, for example, to educational activities that expose Ethiopian students to Ethiopian culture or Ethiopian blackness. I am not suggesting that Ethiopian students would necessarily connect with Ethiopian blackness, but that the encouragement of the educational staff for what they called "good [African American] blackness" (Barack Obama and Rosa Parks) has nothing to do with the daily lives of the Ethiopian students. These students expressed the alienation, dissociation, and non-recognition of African American blackness and preferred to associate with the Mizrahi blackness in Israel. This blackness, although not always phenotypic and usually symbolic (at least in terms of skin color), is experienced by them as empowering and providing them with tools (political cognitive attribution and encouragement for active and not quiet resistance) that alleviate the suffering associated with everyday racist experiences. Furthermore, Ethiopian students favored Mizrahi blackness even though the educational staff constructed it as "problematic," "dangerous," "violent" and ineffective (psychologically and socially).

One of the aspects that the educational team ignored, and which was explicitly voiced by Ethiopian students, was the *impossibility* involved, from their point of view, in adopting African American blackness. The Ethiopian students stressed that this blackness was foreign and unfamiliar to them. They emphasized mainly that the Mizrahi blackness was natural to them because Mizrahim and Ethiopians from the same low socioeconomic class, live together in the same cities (called "development towns" in Israel) and in the same impoverished neighborhoods (also called "rehabilitation neighborhoods"). Furthermore, this impossibility of adopting African American blackness, as imagined by the educational staff, was also impossible for them because the educational boarding school was populated primarily by Mizrahim and Ethiopians. These interdependent influences among

Mizrahim and Ethiopians were therefore perceived by the Mizrahi-Ethiopian students as self-evident products of specific living conditions.

One of the unique practices for preventing the Ethiopian students from adopting Mizrahi blackness (problematic blackness) was the construction of a new social problem: the social connection between Mizrahim and Ethiopians. The invention of new social problems is a significant control tool for constructing reality, dominating "dangerous" groups (Foucault 2007), and establishing an ideal cultural order. The invention of this new social problem was accompanied by moral panic (Hier 2016) that manifested itself in rhetorical formulations of "catastrophe" and "a danger to society as a whole," and entailed long-term consequences of personal and cultural destruction.

One of the main means of establishing this social problem was the invention of a new social category that does not exist in everyday Hebrew: "Mizrahi Ethiopians." Mizrahi Ethiopians are those who embrace the Mizrahi habitus (in terms of local dialect, accent, tone of voice, musical preferences, and personality traits described as "tendency toward violence," "noisy," "emotional," and "preference for immediate gratification"). The premise of this social category is that Ethiopian blackness is more positive (in terms of restraint, civility, respect for authority) than Mizrahi blackness. In other words, unlike African American blackness, which is depicted in terms of violence, hyper-sexuality, threat, and risk (Joseph-Salisbury 2019), Ethiopian blackness in Israel is constructed as positive blackness that should be encouraged.

One of the aspects of Mizrahi blackness that was not attributed to Ethiopian blackness, and which plagued the educational staff at the boarding school, was the preference for a critical-structural attribution of social life over a psychological attribution. This preference ignores recent findings describing how low-socioeconomic populations, feeling the tyranny of structural constraints, favor political-critical attributions of life. High socioeconomic class populations, on the other hand, because of freedom from material limitations and a higher sense of control, favor psychological attribution (Kraus et al. 2012). Another explanation is that psychological discourse, which is more prevalent in the spaces of high socioeconomic class, in turn equips privileged subjects with cultural and symbolic capital (Shoshana 2016).

The findings of the study indicate that the refusal black students (Ethiopians and Mizrahim and, more precisely, Ethiopians following the Mizrahim) to adopt psychological solutions (such as participation in empowerment groups and taking personal responsibility) has been described as a "psychological problem," which in turn indicates their problematic situation and their being youth at risk, thus requiring treatment and rehabilitation. This psychologicalization of inequality, and of students' blackness, deserves special research and educational attention.

Psychological or therapeutic subjectivity is widely described in the research literature as class subjectivity. This is an ideal subjectivity that equips individuals with cultural capital (traits and skills for navigating the social world), symbolic capital (prestige and appreciation), and economic capital (attaining senior

positions). It is subjectivity that encourages identity solutions that are appropriate to the neoliberal discourse (Shoshana 2014), such as personal responsibility, hyper-self-awareness, self-fulfillment, and psychological attribution. Moreover, it is subjectivity that favors dissociation from collective identities (such as high ethnic or black consciousness), dissociation from political-critical identities, and even the a-politicization of social and personal life (Shoshana 2014).

The predominance of neoliberal and psychological discourse, and the subjectivity associated with it, was experienced by the informants in my research as obedient, impossible, and encouraging them to adopt identities that were irrelevant to their life-worlds (white identity, Ashkenazism, or white and Ashkenazi performance). The findings also reveal how this discursive dominance, which involves treating the black identity of the students, completely ignores the responses by the black students and their positive strengths. Both Ethiopian and Mizrahi students conveyed experiences of discomfort because of the boarding school, especially because they viewed it as a white space.

The experience of education in white spaces was described as a product of dramatic engagement in blackness as a problem, preference for blacks who behave like high socioeconomic class whites, or the lack of acceptance of black identities by low socioeconomic class subjects. It included excessive engagement in verbal hygiene (the correction of the dialect referred to as Mizrahi), and a perpetual experience of war and clashing. In other words, despite the stated desire of white spaces, such as the boarding school in this study, to improve the living prospects of black (phenotypic or symbolic) residents, the subjects report alienation, exclusion, and clashes between cultures, discourses, and habitus. These clash should cause concern in light of long-standing research reports on their impact on the well-being of marked students and their academic achievements (Tyson 2011). Finally, white spaces, as my research reveals, also do not include thinking about alternative (or culturally sensitive) solutions to the social suffering of black individuals experiencing everyday racism. Psychological solutions, as this study reveals, are not perceived as effective by Ethiopian and Mizrahi students. These students actually offer political-critical solutions for empowering blacks.

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9 Black city[1]

Sounding race, territory and belonging in Tel Aviv's "African refugee crisis"

Sarah Hankins

> Culture makes us proud. To be part of it, to present it, to show the people, to participate with others as well. So, I'm hearing a lot of news that's very funny to me. Like we're celebrating here, and some people came to demonstrate. It's pretty funny because I sometimes could say they have riots, because this is their state [of mind.] But let's be happy together guys. When it's time to demonstrate, we can also demonstrate together. It's time for us to show something different; not like always. I profoundly believe that when a society or a community comes together, works side by side, it will make everything easier. When you're working alone, you're not going to move forward, but when you're working together, you will succeed.
>
> (Mustasim Ali)

Hundreds were converging on the Goldstein Country Club, a community center in south Tel Aviv's Kiryat Shalom neighborhood, for an event quite unlike any that had occurred in this space before. Used primarily by the *Mizrahi* and Russian residents of the neighborhood for youth day camps, adult continuing education classes, and sports (the location is colloquially called *Brichat haRussim*, or "Russian pool") Goldstein Country Club was now hosting the city's first "Sudanese Cultural Day." This February 2013 event, organized by the Bnai Darfur NGO (Sons of Darfur) in cooperation with Tel Aviv's Amnesty International chapter, would feature speeches, a theatrical skit, music and dance performances by refugees and asylum seekers from Sudan, South Sudan, and Darfur. As Bnai Darfur director Mutasim Ali made clear in his introductory speech, this unprecedented display was intended to showcase a side of refugee experience commonly overlooked in Israel's public sphere debate around refugee presence. Art and music, beauty and pride would counter notions of East Africans as dangerous, impoverished, uneducated and uncultured. In reaching out to sympathetic or open-minded Israelis, the Sudanese community would strengthen valuable interpersonal and institutional ties in their adopted city, forging unity in an urban environment beset by fracture.

Judging by the many Israeli faces amongst the capacity crowd in the Goldstein auditorium, organizers' hopes for coalition-building were not misplaced. And the celebration of culture that Mutasim calls forth, and which I describe below, would become overwhelmingly apparent in the gorgeous music and dance taking

place onstage, in the happy cheers of the crowd throughout an afternoon of performances. Yet, as Mutasim alludes to in his speech, not everybody at Goldstein was celebrating that day. When I arrived to the event, I found a group of approximately 40protesters outside the entrance. A middle-aged man wearing spectacles and a *kippa* (Hebrew: yarmulke) was speaking forcefully into a bullhorn, and several adults and teenagers held signs:

> "*Toshvei ha'schonot* ***hem****ha'mgorshim ve ha'cluaim*." "The residents of these neighborhoods **are** the expelled and jailed."
>
> "*Shigrat haiynu: hazancha, pesha, ones, alimut.*" "The routine of our lives: neglect, crime, rape, violence."

A young Darfuri man in a cowboy hat and suit jacket was standing a short distance from the protesters to greet those who had come for Cultural Day and escort them inside. There was, I learned later, some concern that protesters would harass participants, or even that a riot might break out; my friend Nirit B. had in fact warned me off the event for this reason (interviews with author, February 2013). Nothing of the kind occurred, however. Israelis sometimes joke about argument being their national pastime, and it was often my experience during fieldwork that individuals on different sides of the "refugee issue" would engage in long private debates with one another during public protests and demonstrations. Sudanese Cultural Day was no exception: rather than violence, the scene outside the country club was marked by loud but basically reasoned exchanges between pairs of demonstrators and Cultural Day audience members.

Listening to some of these arguments, and to the words of the man on the bullhorn, I felt a moment of compunction about crossing through the demonstration. I could not disagree with some of the protesters that south Tel Aviv's low-income and working-class Israeli communities have historically experienced neglect on the part of national and municipal governments. This was the driving idea behind the sign identifying south Tel Aviv's *Israeli* residents as "the expelled and jailed," a provocative appropriation of language more commonly used by pro-refugee activists to describe the plight of East Africans in Israel. Notably, there were no explicitly anti-refugee sentiments expressed in protest signage, and I heard only few in verbal discussions. Instead, amidst the cacophony of voices, accusations emerged of Israel-wide anti-*Mizrahi* racism, of liberal *Ashkenazi* elitism, and of a government that was dumping incoming Africans into a resource-poor Israeli neighborhood, rather than trying to solve the refugee problem at a structural level. This multi-part complaint is perhaps best synthesized in the slogan "send them to Ramat Aviv," which I heard chanted outside Sudanese Cultural Day and at other protests during my fieldwork. Why, this slogan demands to know, must *Mizrahim* and other marginalized Israeli residents share limited resources with the new arrivals, when the primarily *Ashkenazi* residents of Ramat Aviv and other wealthy north Tel Aviv neighborhoods remain unaffected?

The class-focused aspect of protesters' argument was compounded with an assertion that African refugee presence in south Tel Aviv has exponentially

increased crime and violence, especially rape. Between 2012 and 2014, there were fairly regular media reports of Israeli women raped by refugee men in Tel Aviv, and this point was often repeated by politicians and demonstrators during public events. The overwhelming pervasiveness of this notion (to the extent that a *Mizrahit* friend declined my invitation to Rasta Club one night because of fears of rape) is a subject of contention amongst pro- and anti-refugee activist collectivities, with the former claiming that numbers of rapes perpetuated by refugees are inflated, and the latter, that they are under-reported (Derfner 2012: 972mag.com)

The rhetoric of protest at Sudanese Cultural Day, and the arguments taking place there between Israelis (I saw no refugees talking to the demonstrators), revealed once again that much of the intensity of debate around refugee presence is driven by fissures within Israeli society; by conflicts of class, ethnicity, and culture that have been present since the earliest decades of the state. Accordingly, this chapter gives roughly equal attention to East African musical activities, values, aesthetics, and expressed political agendas, and to Israeli participation in refugee-related activities and discourses. As Mutasim emphasizes, refugee-Israeli coalition-building is a crucial part of refugee political strategies, and much of the musicking I describe in this chapter is aimed, at least in part, at winning more Israeli allies to the East African cause or consolidating the support of existing pro-refugee activists.

In order to provide an overview of the vast, complicated world of refugee-related activity in Tel Aviv, I first outline of Israel's shifting and convoluted policy progression with respect to African refugees and asylum seekers, which has taken place at both national and city levels. Framing Tel Aviv's Sudanese and Eritrean social actors as a "community of dissent" (Shelemay 2011), bound by the shared project of resisting marginalization, I explore some of the nuanced ways in which expressive forms can further this cause. I next home in on several public events that feature Sudanese and Eritrean performers, as well as Israeli-led protests and demonstrations that rely heavily on music and sound to heighten messages. The dual approach laid out in Mutasim's Sudanese Cultural Day speech, a simultaneous celebration of expressive culture and fortification of an issue-focused constituency, is found throughout East African performance in urban Israel, pointing up, as I examine below, a marked permeability of boundaries between aesthetics and politics that helps facilitate claim-making. In this connection, I attend closely to the quality of "sound as force" (Goodman 2012) in the music, speeches, and slogans of protests, demonstrations, and public performances on both sides of the "refugee issue," exploring the effects of sonic vibration, dynamics, and timbre on the psycho-somatic processes of participants and witnesses.

Although this chapter frames East African musicking in urban Israel as political action, I do not suggest that Sudanese and Eritrean refugees engage music only or even primarily in service of overt activism. Personal and small-group music-making is constantly happening in churches and at weddings, in nightclubs, cafes, and homes. Musical production, performance, and consumption remains a source of pleasure and recreation for refugees, even as music has emerged as a central component of group self-representation and public politics. Yet I wish

to emphasize that, in the midst of the "Tel Aviv crisis" around refugee presence, music's pleasures and its politics, its "public" and "private" spheres, are not fully separable, so that even the act listening to an imported CD of Khartoum pop in one's bedroom can resonate in concert with large-scale events taking place in the city outside, just as a *krar* performance at thousands-strong demonstration can afford immense private enjoyment for participants. James Scott has described "the political life of subordinate groups" as taking place either "offstage," in discourses and activities hidden from hegemonic view, or in "disguised forms […] insinuated into the public transcript" (1990, 136), in which resistance is couched in language or aesthetic expressions that are acceptable to hegemony. As I will describe, the musical politics of East African refugees and their allies complicates this framework to a certain extent, in that the use of music and other expressive forms in public can variously "disguise" *or* foreground oppositionality. As Mutasim says, "Let's be happy together, guys. When it's time to demonstrate, we will demonstrate together." The arts of refugee resistance are found in celebration and in forthright confrontation alike.

Refugee status and the making of a "community of dissent"

When I arrived for fieldwork in Tel Aviv in February of 2013, Israel's nongovernmental African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) and Amnesty International were estimating "African refugee population" at approximately 55,000 (ardc-israel.org). This number includes most Sudanese and Eritrean refugees and/or asylum seekers (more on the distinction between these two categories below), as well as some individuals from Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This figure does not account for migrants from African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Uganda, among others, who may have entered Israel as pilgrims, tourists, or, less frequently, as workers, and who remained in Israel after their visas expired. Furthermore, not all children born to African migrants in Israel are counted, and even some adults entering the country have had to elude authorities at all stages of their journey, therefore remaining "off the books." The figure of 55,000, in other words, is a rough and somewhat conservative estimate; unofficially, some members of the human rights and pro-refugee activist communities put the number at thousands more.

Of the official count, only a few hundred possess an S2(a)5 card, a document representing one stage of Israel's seemingly ever-shifting refugee policy. Over 90 percent of African asylum seekers arrived between 2005, the end of Sudan's second civil war and the worsening of unrest in Eritrea, and 2012; during this five-year period, the permissions and restrictions of "Conditional Release" were subject to change at the discretion of national authorities. Some of the earliest arrivals, for example, were subject to a semi-codified and partially-enforced policy decision colloquially termed "Gadera-Hadera," which restricted asylum seekers to residence in peripheral parts of the country, delineated as north and south of those two towns (Moshe Morav, interview with author, August 2010). Later

came the busses ferrying East African arrivals from holding centers at the southern border directly to Tel Aviv's Levinsky Park, putting a de-facto end to Gadera-Hadera, but heralding no clear decision about the status of the asylum seekers, nor plans to implement a refugee determination process. By 2010, some S2(a)5 cards were printed with the statement "this visa is not a working permit"; many refugees who arrived after this date have found "under the table" work on construction sites or in restaurants, while others lost work when their employers were fined by the government.

According to ARDC, the period between 2007 and 2012 was marked by "hot returns," in which Israel expelled hundreds of Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers to Egypt, where authorities then sent them back to countries of origin. Although *Beit ha-Mishpat Ha'Aliyon* (the Israeli Supreme Court) ruled against this practice in 2011 as a contravention of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Israel is a signatory, the majority of the South Sudanese community – undocumented asylum seekers and S2(a)5 holders alike – were expelled in 2012 following South Sudan's independence. Even during the ostensibly "welcoming" years, then, when authorities were at least issuing residence permits and investing in transportation from periphery to center, national approaches to the African "refugee issue" were mercurial and sometimes internally contradictory.

The major blow, according to many members of refugee communities as well as Israeli and international workers, came in early 2012, when the Knesset and the Prime Minister's Office passed amendments to the decades-old Prevention of Infiltration Law, revised to permit the detention of asylum seekers for up to three years without trial, or indefinitely for individuals arriving from "enemy" countries such as Sudan. With the passage of this act came the ramping up of security infrastructure including a Negev/Sinai "border fence" and nearby Saharonim detention center. Since that time, the few individuals still able to cross through Egypt into Israel have been stuck in detention without a release date, and the flow of asylum seekers from the Negev to Tel Aviv has slowed to a trickle. While a 2013 *Beit ha-Mishpat HaAliyon* decision revoked the revised "Anti-Infiltration Law" as a human rights violation, the fence and the detention centers remain operational. Further, the national government has announced a $3,500 grant to any Sudanese or Eritrean refugee who is willing to relocate to Uganda, according to a behind-the-scenes deal struck between Ugandan and Israeli authorities.

This roughly nine-year history of East African refugees in Israel, itself only the most visible, public phase of a longer saga of African migrants seeking a place in the country, is marked by a whirlwind of shifting policies, reversed decisions, raging debate amongst Israeli politicians and public alike, and constant, grinding insecurity for refugee communities. Merav Bat-Gil of Aid Organization for Refugees (ASSAF), a pro-refugee Israeli activist who helped me to understand some of the intricate details of various laws and regulations, emphasizes that the biggest problem for both Israel and the refugees is a nightmarish lack of clarity and consistency in policymaking and implementation. "Israel is a signatory to the Refugee Convention, so it knows what it is supposed to do," she explains. "But it didn't think about Africans when it signed. There is still no process" (interview

with author, March 10, 2013). According to ARDC, fewer than 200 individuals have been recognized as refugees by Israel since its establishment in 1948 (ardc-israel.org); such recognition has come in an ad-hoc fashion, absent an official determination process or identifiable government body responsible for dealing with asylum seekers.

For this reason, and following usage amongst my refugee and activist associates, I use the terms "refugee" and "asylum seeker" interchangeably despite distinctions between these two statuses. Although an asylum seeker legally becomes a refugee only once such determination has been made by the receiving country, many Sudanese and Eritreans will refer to themselves as refugees even though few have been granted formal recognition. Relatedly, as Bat-Gil and others have pointed out to me, many individuals from countries like the Congo, Ghana or Cote d'Ivoire who consider themselves labor migrants are technically in the same "residence category" as East African asylum seekers, and, infrequently, may gain permanent residence via the same elusive refugee determination (interview with author, March 10, 2013.)

Through interviews with associates, participation in information and planning meetings with activist organizations, and attendance at public performances and political demonstrations, I have come to understand that the question of *official status* is simultaneously highly charged and hardly relevant. That is, most any asylum seeker/refugee needs and desires formal recognition as a resident of Israel and member of its labor force, and every pro-refugee activist shares this objective for members of her community of concern. Despite this overarching agenda, and despite the logistical constraints imposed by the status issue – not the least of which may be hours spent standing on line at the *Misrad HaPnim* every few months to face another S2(a)5 renewal interview – members of refugee communities live out their daily lives only partly in deference to status. The business of finding work, keeping house, engaging in social activity, and making music will always occupy a great portion of one's attention, imagination and plan-making, whether one faces the immediate future with confidence or maddening doubt. Moreover, refugee-oriented social service organizations seek to address immediate community needs like housing, health, employment, and opportunities for aesthetic expression *while* attending to longer-term strategies for policy change. Groups like ARDC, ASSAF, and Amnesty try to help all comers, whether they are S2(a)5 holders, undocumented arrivals, or labor migrants.

There is a communal feeling, a sense of "we're all in this together," that marks the atmosphere amongst refugee community leaders and Israeli activists that I find inspiring. It is possible to spend weeks, months, even years as an "outsider" in Tel Aviv encountering primarily pro-refugee, anti-racist attitudes and initiatives, participating in alliance-building activities, and associating with countless individuals, African and Israeli alike, who are committed to a wide array of social justice-oriented ideals. As a U.S. Foreign Service Officer responsible for the "refugee" reporting portfolio at the American Embassy between 2002 and 2005, this world of pro-active migrants, left-leaning Israeli political activists, and diverse cultural producers was my initial introduction to Israel's complex "refugee issue." As an

ethnographer between 2010 and 2014, I encountered darker aspects of African refugee experience, and witnessed a turbulent unfolding of the refugee debate at local and national levels; yet there remains an aura of optimism and determination around this seemingly intractable "issue" in certain quarters of Tel Aviv civil society that is difficult to define. This "pro-refugee" Tel Aviv is an urban landscape simultaneously material and ideo-imaginary, made up of hard work and visible, audible results as well as lofty rhetoric, heartfelt ideals, and future-oriented desires, one which is all the more potent and compelling for its persistence alongside equally urgent cityscapes that can only exist via the destruction of the refugee presence. "Pro-refugee" Tel Aviv is, too, a process, an ongoing "practice[s] of taking over, reclaiming or rewriting actual spaces into hopeful places [a] remapping, re-visioning, and reworlding" (Davidson et al. 2011, 12).

My understanding of the claim-making struggle that plays out between the proponents of pro- and anti-African refugee Tel Aviv(s) has emerged from interviews and personal conversations that always seem to hover around "big ideas" – I think here, for instance, of the concept of "Mediterranean blackness" that drives my associate Khen E. interpretation of political *Mizrahiyut*. Equally, though, I have learned much from my observations of, and involvement in, the planning and execution of pro-refugee demonstrations and public initiatives. As an ethnomusicologist, I have been drawn to activities that promised, in advertisements and word-of-mouth promotion, musical and theatrical demonstrations of refugee experience and the "refugee debate." There were many that took place during my fieldwork, and many more I have encountered via video recordings and eyewitness accounts. Whether or not urban Israel is an especial hotbed of "aesthetic" activism, evincing more politically oriented performance *per capita* than other modern nation-states, is a significant inquiry that is, in itself, beyond the scope of my research, yet Kay Kaufman Shelemay's articulation of "musical communities" (2011) incorporates a framework of "dissent" that is powerfully applicable to contemporary Tel Aviv's musico-political landscape. "Dissent communities," she writes, "generally emerge through acts of resistance against an existing collectivity […] Individuals involved in processes of dissent quite regularly draw on musical performance as a mechanism to enlist others in their cause" (370).

Sudanese Cultural Day is a prototypical example of the kind of musical activity that a dissent community may undertake, in which performances of traditional music and dance serve the dual function of reinvigorating communities of Sudanese, South Sudanese, and Darfuri refugees following the upheaval and fracture of migration, and protesting societal racism and institutional marginalization in Israel. Significantly, none of the songs or dances taking place in the Goldstein auditorium was clearly "oppositional" in content. Performers sang love ballads and lullabies from their home villages, enacted ritual courtship dances and elaborately costumed war pantomimes that were old even in their parents' time. Euro-American (and Israeli) vernacular understandings of musical dissent that tend to mark out explicitly political songwriting as distinct from other forms of music may overlook the valences of defiance in such "folk" and "traditional" performances, hearing them as apolitical or, perhaps, pre-political. As Shelemay emphasizes,

however, musics closely identified with "descent" communities – that is, groups formed around shared ethnicity, kinship, religious or national ties – can easily shift from affirming shared identity to voicing political resistance (2011, 360). When a group's ethno-cultural and national identity are the cause of its marginalization, as is the case for East African refugees in Israel, "descent" music and "dissent" music overlap extensively.

It is context, of course, that is largely responsible for shaping a dissent community; the same music and dance seen on a south Tel Aviv stage in 2013 might convey different messages if performed in Sudan, or even elsewhere in diaspora. According to Shelemay, "Dissent communities […] tend to coalesce quite rapidly, arising in response to a particular event or circumstance at a specific moment in time" (2011, 370). East African refugees and asylum seekers have faced challenges to recognition and belonging in Israel for close to a decade; these challenges came to a head in the 2012 with the passage of the modified Prevention of Infiltration Act, catalyzing a major surge in collective organizing and public activity with a performative component. Surrounded by vocal groups who object to their presence, their own civic activities tightly constrained by shifting governmental and administrative restrictions, and immersed in an urban culture that has inherited Israel's national penchant for expressive politics and political aesthetics, Sudanese and Eritrean refugee groups have come to understand their own expressive forms as integral components of socio-political strategy.

"Voice under domination": Performance as oblique and overt resistance

I have sought to highlight music and other expressive forms, including dance, poetry, and performative speech, as effective claim-making tools in part because they can be *enjoyable,* able to reach audiences at sensory and psychoaffective levels where direct protest or complaint may fail. Expressive aesthetics open up spaces in which complicated discourses and controversial ideas can be gracefully aired, by priming participants into states of heightened receptivity (Goodman 2012, 150). Shelemay describes this dynamic in straightforward terms with respect to dissent communities and the targets of their messages: "music can give voice to dissent while partially masking its critical edge and reducing risks of retribution from more powerful forces" (2011, 370). Similarly, James Scott identifies expressive idioms such as "disguises, linguistic tricks, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures" as "veiled discourses of dignity and self-assertion" in marginal groups' engagement with agents of hegemony (1990, 137). East African refugee communities employ music and dance alongside many of the categories Scott outlines in their public demands for improved status in Israel, under the ever-present threats of deportation, detainment, and even violence.

Among Sudanese Cultural Day's stage performances was a Darfuri "warrior dance" depicting young men of the region's *Fur* group preparing and departing for war, fighting, and returning home victorious. A male vocal soloist and three female singers in matching print dresses and head scarves engaged in lines of

call-and-response, as four men in modified *taub* (Arabic: gown) paraded back and forth across the stage to the rhythm of (identify drum) accompaniment. The lead man held a wooden sword, which he raised aloft before "battle," then turned upside down and held by the "blade" after victory. The pride and pleasure they took in this performance was obvious in their smiles, in the energy of their gestures and voices; the sense of celebration, brought powerfully to the fore as the women singers fell to their knees to praise the returning "warriors." was infectious to audience members. Yet this spectacle can also be understood as a representation of conflict in which a clear message of armed resistance is wrapped up in ostensibly innocuous ritual gestures and "folk" narrative. Here, the imagined "pre-modernity" of rural Darfuri song and dance in the collective Israeli ideo-imaginary is *itself* a "disguise," rendering the performance's implied threat "too ambiguous to be actionable by authorities" (Scott 1990, 139).

If the oppositional potential of such a performance seems weak on the face of it – this was a staged dance in a country club, after all – consider its rhetorical and even material implications if the group of Cultural Day protesters were to have come inside and watched. How, for instance, would the individual holding the "crime, rape, and violence" sign regard the figure of the sword-bearing refugee? And what if this performance took place outside, perhaps on Neve Sha'anan Street, where Israelis and migrants mix freely and the Immigration Police regularly patrol? Furthermore, Cultural Day organizing group Bnai Darfur maintains a website and social media page critiquing Israel's reluctance to fulfill its responsibilities under the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This NGO has a codified agenda of dissent that does not *disappear* in the presence of traditional performance, but rather undergirds such performance (bnaidarfur.org).

Music and dance engage the senses to an especially high degree; performers and audiences are immersed in sounds, images, and physical sensations that, by design or not, can serve as agents of indirection with respect to messages of resistance. Yet what of speech, or other expressive forms that transmit such messages with comparatively more straightforwardness? Refugee social actors in urban have built up a robust practice of "political theater" to convey their experiences and aspirations in ways that augment the solidarity-building and symbolic resistance facilitated by the warrior dance and other "traditional" cultural performances. Through drama and comedy alike, refugees can speak directly about the charged topics of civil war, migration, detention, employment troubles, visa status, and racism while retaining certain expressive idioms that render these subjects "safe" enough for performers and audiences to confront together.

Sudanese Cultural Day's song and dance spectacle culminated in a short, non-musical play that chronicled the first days of a semi-fictional Sudanese asylum seeker in Levinsky Park. This character was played by Mubarak, a cheerful, stocky fellow whom I ended up interviewing several times during my fieldwork. Onstage, Mubarak was fleeing the Janjaweed militia in Sudan, which had killed his family. Arriving in Israel with high hopes of aid and succor, Dim's attempts to learn the ropes were fraught with both hilarity and horror: the thrill of meeting a fellow villager so far from home; a night rolled up on the Levinsky Park lawn; a morning

"bath" at the Park's water fountain; a Kafkaesque encounter with bureaucracy at the *Misrad HaPnim* (Hebrew: Ministry of Absorption); an Israeli boss, played by Mubarak's friend Dim in a slick silk shirt and tie, shouting out job instructions.

This skit told a true story, or true enough, with each indignity enacted onstage representing a familiar experience for refugees, and a talking point for Israeli pro-refugee activists. Yet harsh realities were transformed through humor, particularly Mubarak's exaggerated pantomimes of sleeping and washing in the Park, and the extreme dangers that Israeli officials and employers pose in real life were neutralized through Dim's burlesquing of the restaurant boss. This scene is an especially rich example of the "carnivalesque" in Mikhail Bakhtin's usage, a subversion of hegemonic power structure through humor, chaos, grotesquerie or performative role reversal that is found in the expressive cultures of many marginal or subordinated peoples (Dentith 1995, 67). Although Mubarak's character remains at the mercy of Dim's Israeli figure, this "boss" is portrayed as blustering and buffoonish, contorting himself into absurd postures as he demonstrates the proper way to sweep a floor, his voice breaking histrionically. As the audience roars with laughter, Mubarak nods, straight-faced, or replies with a simple "*ken*" (Hebrew: yes), displaying self-control and physical dignity, a marked contrast to Dim's capering.

Mubarak's performance here has affinities with other strains of Afro-diasporic expressive traditions that prioritize subtlety and restraint in the face of insult, for instance the African American game of "the dozens" and the narrative of the "signifying monkey." As "dozens" players win by not losing their temper and the monkey "tropes a dope" (Gates 1988, 63) by cleverly turning the words and actions of rivals against themselves, Mubarak's equanimity positions him as the clear hero; the Israeli boss's antics only embarrass himself and invite audience derision. It is worth noting that the tactics Mubarak demonstrates in performance are similar to those that Mutasim Ali employs in his introductory speech, and to which the greeter outside of Goldstein Country Club turns, perhaps instinctively, when he matches the shouts of protesters with nonengagement and words of cheerful welcome to the arriving audience. Much more than a potent theatrical device, "the ability to control emotions and anger [is] often necessary for survival" amongst vulnerable communities (Scott 1990, 137).

Significantly, refugee theater engaging burlesque, satire, and physical comedy is not limited to venues populated by sympathetic audiences, nor are displays of self-restraint and poise as means of tacitly contradicting authority. While Dim and Mubarak could be reasonably confident that refugees and left-leaning activist Israelis in the Goldstein auditorium would react to the skit with appreciation, no such certainty exists during public performances and outdoor demonstrations that are often witnessed by unsympathetic people in close proximity. For instance, an April 2013 "Darfur Remembrance Day" event in the Kikar Rabin city square featured Mubarak and several colleagues satirizing the failure of countries and institutions to address the crisis via raucously unflattering portrayals of United Nations, African Union, and Israeli officials. Meanwhile, a number of Sudanese and Eritrean volunteers stood at the edges of the watching crowd, their backs to the

busy street and sidewalk, wearing neon vests emblazoned with the phrase "Giving Back to the Neighborhood With Respect" in English and Hebrew. Sporting these vests, arms crossed, the men cut dignified, assertive, but nonconfrontational figures, using bodily comportment to contradict public rhetoric that labels African refugees as perpetrators of crime and violence in Tel Aviv neighborhoods.

Thus far, I have described expressive forms as powerful political tools for East African refugee communities because they can transmit complicated, controversial, dangerous or painful content in basically appealing or at least ostensibly "inoffensive" ways. As such, music, dance, and theater partially shield refugee activists from accusations and reprisals. Yet expressive forms serve other functions in addition to this "shielding." The bolstering of ethno-cultural pride for Sudanese participants in the Cultural Day event is an instance of one such function, and indeed, the strong group-specific associations that music, especially, can contain are always part of the equation when considering the purpose, meaning, and outcome of any public performance. These "extra-musical" associations, however – be they recollections of home, visions of the future, evocations of a transnational African diaspora or a local multi-ethnic coalition – are inextricably bound up with musical particulars. The sound of the *krar* can call up a memory with as much clarity as a lyric. Melody, harmony, and instrumentation work alongside dynamics, rhythm, tempo, and timbre as some of the qualities of musical sound that directly impact the psycho-somatic apparatus of performers and audiences.

Sound retains its materiality whether it is "musical" or not; Dim's satire of an Israeli restaurant boss is effective in part because of certain vocal qualities: loudness, tremolo, register breaks, high tessitura. In Steve Goodman's wide-ranging discussion of "sonic warfare," he posits that "before the activation of casual or semantic, that is, cognitive listening, the sonic is a phenomenon of contact and displays, through an array of autonomic responses, a whole spectrum of affective powers" (2012, 10). For Goodman, these affective powers "preced[e] ideology" (2010, 10). This quality of "sound as force," I suggest, is partly responsible for the prominence of music, performative speech, sloganeering and chants in public politics. If these forms can sometimes "disguise" resistance in the ways I outline above, they can at other times *foreground* it, at least in the immediate affective experience of performers and audiences.

Public sound as force in the refugee debate

When I paused briefly in front of the Sudanese Cultural Day protesters, hesitating before entering the Goldstein auditorium, it was more than just my basic sympathy with *Mizrahi*-led critiques of the structural marginalization in south Tel Aviv that caused me to halt. If these protesters were, say, quietly handing out leaflets, I would have taken one and moved on. Instead, they were making a lot of noise, and the shouted slogans mediated through a crackly, overdriven bullhorn in particular struck me at a visceral level. It was the aspect of *sound as force* in addition to sound as message that acted as a boundary between me and the auditorium,

capturing my full attention, stopping my feet, and triggering a momentary experience of torn allegiance.

Most political protests and demonstrations are noisy events, and those that are not, as I discuss below, use the absence of sound in order to transmit both cognitive information and somatic experience to participants and witnesses. Researchers across the social sciences and humanities have explored the use of sound as a technology of conflict (c.f. Sterne 1997, Cusick 2006, Goodman 2012). Sounds, as Steve Goodman notes, can trigger deeply painful associations (especially in the case of music), and they can also be painful in themselves, precipitating

> an injurious or otherwise painful moment literally recorded by the body. This recording should not be confused with memory that takes place in the brain, and it should not be assumed that a person even needs to be conscious to record an injurious experience.
>
> (Semons in Goodman 2010, 135)

Especially when sound implicates both cognition and *soma*, as much public sloganeering and speech does, it can become an incredibly powerful weapon, an ostensibly "hands-off" instrument of violence. In this connection, I consider a 2011 video of anti-refugee protesters in Levinsky Park chanting "*Sudanim le'Sudan*" (Hebrew: Sudanese to Sudan) as they ran across the nighttime lawn waving Israeli flags. This takeover of Levinsky's endlessly contested physical space, which even at the moment of protest was occupied by several dozen refugees sheltering in tents and lean-tos, was rendered exponentially forceful via the sheer volume of the chanting, the abrasive timbre of angry voices, and the "hocketed" quality of the repeated phrase, conveying the presence of a multi-person threat. "*Sudanim le'Sudan*," I insist, manifests as inarguably stronger and more dangerous when voiced than it does on paper or in concept; the fact that refugees in tents might partially attenuate the impact of this slogan by physically covering their ears only underscores the obstreperous, real-world *puissance* of intentional sound.

"Sound as force" (as distinct from latent sound in written words or music) always means sound in place and time. Special experiential meaning emerges at the spots where content-rich sound waves meet the edges, slopes, and bulky forms of the material world. This meeting *is* the nature of affect as described by Davidson et al.: an implosion of ideo-imagination and social/spatial milieu that is "infused with power, grounded in place" (2011, 5). Because sound is here-and-now, and because it impacts the physical body in addition to cognitive structures, its potential to precipitate or even enact chaos and types violence is significant. James Scott points up this slippage when he notes that "actual rebels" often mimic the behaviors of people engaging in "carnival" behaviors, including extreme noisemaking, and that "the world-upside-down symbolism of carnival […] would frequently spill over its ritual banks into violent conflict (1990, 181). Some protests in Tel Aviv have included acts of direct, corporeal violence or the destruction of property (Sheizaf 2012, 972mag.org), yet even "hands-off" demonstrations like the "*Sudanim le'Sudan*" march have engendered in refugees the visceral experience

of attack, and perpetuated a climate of fear that wears down and disciplines refugee bodies (Goodman 2012, 17). It is worth noting that very few individuals I met during the course of my fieldwork had experienced "hands-on" violence, or could identify the exact state of ever-shifting African refugee-related legislation or formal government policy; many of them, however, recounted to me the sonic distillations of racism and anti-refugee sentiment I have described.

Sound's capacity for somatic impact is not found solely in its relative loudness or softness, of course. Political slogans are often effective in part because they are "catchy," evincing, alongside linguistic properties such as rhyme or metaphor, qualities like brevity and rhythmic cadence that muster listeners' bodies into alliance with their thoughts or emotions. When Minister of Knesset Miri Regev of the center-right Likud party sought to mobilize fellow lawmakers and Israeli citizens around proposed amendments to the Prevention of Infiltration Law in 2012, for example, she picked a 1,000-person protest in HaTikva neighborhood to exclaim "*plitim hem sartan ba'guf*" (Hebrew: refugees are a cancer in the body) into a microphone. This slogan subsequently appeared countless times in printed media, but it also received extensive verbal repetition, including by refugees themselves. Even as most of Regev's speech was forgotten or misrepresented, refugees remembered the phrase and thereby retained the vicious thrust of her message. One young Eritrean man I met while hanging up posters for an Amnesty International had misheard the Hebrew slogan, repeating it to me as "refugees *have* cancer in the body," and was furious that this lie had become such a common refrain in Tel Aviv (interview with author, April 2013).[2]

Even memorable speech can be misunderstood; this is, after all, what makes the children's game of "Telephone" enjoyable, and the experience of having one's words "twisted" in an argument so frustrating. Thus, if slogans are designed to stick, they can also have a sonic life beyond what is intended, and they ripe for parody. The intentional manipulation of sound has a place in Israel's cultural politics, from the exaggerated imitation of Eritrean and Sudanese accents I have heard in anti-refugee protests to the "straightening out" of Ethiopian musical rhythms by Israeli pop musicians. In one prominent example, producer Noy Alooshe created a hip-hop style remix of another speech by Miri Regev that went viral on the Internet, in which her spoken words are edited into a chorus of "Miri Regev *hi schoonah, kapayim*!" ["Miri Regev is 'ghetto', clap your hands!"]. Regev's utterances are de- and re-contextualized to generate a biting depiction of the right-wing politician as something of a *frecha,* the Hebrew slang insult for a low-income, tackily-dressed, vapid girl. The *kapayim* shout's well-known associations with *Mizrahi* musical performance enhanced the humor and repeatability of the song – and, not incidentally, perpetuated the sense among some *Mizrahi* activists of anti-*Mizrahi* racism among left-leaning Israelis. Combining memorable speech with a straightforward, infectious dance groove, the Regev remix became an "earworm," infecting listeners' somatic experience in ways that written words or "plain" speech might not, such that even mention of the song could prompt roars of laughter and sung renditions amongst pro-refugee urban Israelis for months after it hit the Internet.[3]

Another widely circulated video, a documentary edited by pro-refugee activists David Sheen and Max Blumenthal (2013), includes footage of an Israeli woman resident of south Tel Aviv yelling into a microphone at a protest, claiming frequent rapes of Israeli women by East African refugee men. "If fear for my life means that I am a racist, then I say it proudly: I am a racist!" ("Israel's New Racism": youtube.com). This statement, delivered loudly, angrily, and cheered by a sizeable audience of fellow protesters, amounts to a performative "speech act" (Jakobson 1960), in that it not only communicates content, but by effecting a social "state of affairs." By presenting an if-than condition that, according to her audience, does apply, the speaker *makes herself* a racistin any sociopolitically meaningful sense of the term.

While speech act theory is commonly applied to circumstances in which utterances comprise the only or primary marker of formal status – e.g. "I do" at weddings, or "adjourned" in courtrooms (ibid.) – I return to Israel's pervasive "politics of emotion" that renders forms and instances of expressive culture so central to the shaping and re-shaping of structural and institutional realities. Just as there is immense historical slippage between art and politics within national Israeli culture, boundaries between political speech and political action are permeable, and both retain significant hold over the lived experiences of city-dwellers. And, I emphasize again, when speech is presented at a volume and intensity that is sufficient to physically impact listeners, its nature *as action* (Davidson et al. 2011) is all the more difficult to overlook.

In presenting a set of culturally rich, refugee-led music, dance, and theater performances that partially "disguise" resistance, and a series of primarily anti-refugee protests in which sonic force is used to confrontational or painful ends, I do not intend to put in place a dichotomy of pro-refugee "good sound" and anti-refugee "bad sound." Anger and harmful intentions are present in plenty of leftist sonic politics; this is arguably the case in the Miri Regev remix, in which sonic manipulation and a particular musical genre are employed to figure Regev in misogynistic and racially offensive terms. Sound can also disrupt psycho-somatic equilibrium even when it is not necessarily intended to do so. At a public garden cleanup event sponsored by a group of Israeli residents of south Tel Aviv, the talk turned to my study of music in Friendship House church services, and, more broadly, to the pervasiveness of "African music" in public cityspace. "It's everywhere," an elderly woman explained. "I can't leave my house without hearing them singing or listening to loud Arabic music. I can't even open my kitchen window without it coming in" (interview with author, May 12, 2013).

Sound's capacity for ideological and material "takeover" is not to be underestimated. As Jonathan Sterne writes of programmed "Muzak" in the Mall of America, music can become "a form of architecture. Rather than simply filling up empty space, the music becomes part of the consistency of that space (1997, 23). Elsewhere I have described certain musics and spoken languages contributing to the ideological and material ownership of space in Neve Sha'anan's *Tachanah Merkazit* (Hebrew: Central Bus Station), where native Israelis, Jewish immigrants, refugees and migrant laborers come together in large numbers on a daily basis for the purposes of commerce and transit (2014). Sound's very real claim-staking function is explained in part by the "interaction between the physical sound

environment, the sound milieu of a social-cultural community, and the 'internal soundscape of every individual'" (Goodman 2010, 46–47). When long-standing Israeli neighborhoods begin to resonate with the sounds of migrant church singing, Tigrinya and Arabic pop music, and spoken languages that residents cannot understand (indeed, in the case of Arabic, which many Israeli residents have been taught to fear), the question of intent on the part of sound's producers is less relevant than the nature of this "sonic effect" on listeners (ibid).

Although some Eritrean and Sudanese activists participate in relatively confrontational sonic activity – Bnai Darfur, in particular, has taken to the Tel Aviv streets with chanting, slogans, and bullhorns to publicly demand visas and refugee rights (bnaidarfur.org) – East African refugees and their Israeli allies do not generally shout anti-Israel statements during protests, demonstrations, and public performances. This distinction from anti-refugee activity is significant, but it does not necessarily suggest the presence of different or stronger moral compass on the part of refugee collectivities; rather, refugee use of music, spectacle, and displays of self-restraint is simply a reasonable strategy in an environment in which refugees are already labeled as disruptive and dangerous. Loud, angry chanting of harsh sentiments is more likely to reify than counteract such labels. Within the multivalent utility of sound as force, then, potentially *inviting* rather than hostile sounds, and quiet or silence rather than noise, do a specific kind of political work for refugees. In the examples of the greeter outside Sudanese Cultural Day, Mubarak on the Goldstein stage, and the men wearing vests at Darfur Remembrance Day, I have suggested that self-control, which can include bodily stillness and minimal or absent speech, dignifies refugees, especially when juxtaposed against high agitation on the part of protesting Israelis. This is a dignity accessible at any time and in any place, irrespective of structural disenfranchisement and marginalization. In addition to facilitating individual experiences of empowerment, collective displays of quiet and restraint can be as impactful to witnesses as noisy protest, if for different reasons.

During a festival of short plays at the experimental bar-and-theater *Teatron Tmunah* on Soncino Street in south Tel Aviv, for example, Dim, Mubarak, and a third associate presented a series of monologues in which they related harrowing stories of the Janjaweed Militia and their own flight to Israel in measured, somber tones. The stage was empty save for the three folding chairs on which they sat. Surprisingly, one of Mubarak's monologues was a recitation from Shakespeare's "King Lear," which he delivered with careful diction. This interjection, unrelated in terms of content to the other monologues, accorded with the overall emotional tone of the performance. Taken together, the minimalist stage set, the unadorned narratives of war and emigration, and the "sonic effect" of precise Elizabethan English relayed with immense slowness in Mubarak's Sudanese accent, underscored the gravity and urgency of narrative, conveying information about refugee experience that might be overlooked in the nosier, busier arena of protest or even musical spectacle.

If the subdued comportment of three individuals is a potent message to witnesses, crowds of hundreds or thousands working toward the same affect are exponentially powerful. In January 2014, some 30,000 Sudanese and Eritrean

refugees and their Israeli allies marched from Levinsky Park to Kikar Rabin in resounding silence, a demonstration of, and protest against, voicelessness. Similarly, during that year's Passover holiday, thousands staged "sit-ins" across Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, gathering to sit on the ground with their arms raised and crossed over their heads in a gesture evoking shackles. This silent reminder of injustice was a sharp counterpoint to the commemorations of ancient Israel's *Yetziyat Mitzrayim* (Exodus from Egypt) that were taking place in homes and synagogues across the country. As ASSAF employee Merav Bat-Gil observed sarcastically on her Facebook page, "Just as the Jewish people are celebrating Pesach, the spring and freedom fest, memorizing how they escaped slavery in Egypt, they imprison asylum seekers. Lovely!! Its very important to educate the young generation to remember what happened 5000 years ago, while ignoring today's reality."

Notes

1 Primary fieldwork for this chapter was carried out in Tel Aviv from January to June of 2013. Although my larger research project on Afrodiasporic cultural formation in Israel continued through 2019, I have chosen to situate this chapter in the earlier ethnographic context, in order to preserve a kind of ground-level "history" of the racialized conflict that dominated south Tel Aviv during the Spring of 2013 — a period that would come to be recognized as the peak of Israel's "African refugee crisis."

I have adopted the title of "Black City" with reference to broad range of historical, ethnographic and theoretical sources. Central among these is Sharon Rotbard's White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa (The MIT Press, 2015), an account of the spatial politics that have separated and sheilded Zionism's "first Hebrew city" from its "shadow self," the originary Palestinian settlement that was called يَافَا or Jappho, since long before the founding of the Jewish State. Yet stories of the Black City also circulate widely in the vernacular discourses of contemporary urban Israel. Mizrahi activists have used the term to call attention to south Tel Aviv's ongoing racial and economic marginalization, and to mobilize a millennial ethics of subaltern resistance against Israel's Ashkenazi-dominated political infrastructure. The disruptive potential of this movement was confirmed in the summer of 2013, when Israeli police violently suppressed a "Black Night" street party staged by the Akhoti Mizrahi Feminist organization in protest against Tel Aviv's official "White Night" event, a municipal celebration of Zionist history that has taken place annually since 2003, after UNESCO designated the city's Bauhaus architectural center as a World Cultural Heritage Site. In the past two decades, the growth of Israel's "foreign populations" — including of tens of thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers who began arriving in 2005 — has further complicated and enriched the notion of a Black City of Tel Aviv. "[The city's] geography is now composed not only of the phantom names of its dead Palestinian past," and of the deeply-held claims of its current Mizrahi residents, "but also of new imaginary places such as 'Manilla Avenue' and 'Little Khartoum.'"

There is a blackness that dwells deeply within the Israeli national imagination; its historical trajectories, reconstitutions and perennial multivocalities are the central subject of my research. In recent years, articulations of black political culture in Israel have drawn on the model of the North American Black Lives Matter movement, among other globalized formations. In this chapter, however, I am concerned with a racializing process that is highly localized in place and time. The import and the anxiety of this

moment is perhaps best expressed in a Times of Israel article from December 2, 2013, featuring a quote from an elderly Tel Aviv resident named Sophie Mesnahe: "South Tel Aviv is South Sudan now."

2 This misreading of Regev's slogan – that Israelis view East African refugees as harboring disease – can be examined with reference to the targeting of the *Beta Israel* (Ethiopian Jewish community) as a public health threat at various points since their initial arrival in the early 1980s. Thousands of Ethiopian Israelis rioted in 1996 after revelations that the Ministry of Health had destroyed all stocks of blood donated by Ethiopians on the grounds that it might be contaminated with HIV. In 2013, Israeli and international media reported Ethiopian Israeli women coming forward with stories of Israeli doctors and Health Ministry officials who urged or forced them to take Depo-Provera, a long-acting form of birth control, upon arrival to Israel and subsequently. According to some of these women, Health Ministry officials claimed they could not receive Israeli citizenship unless they accepted the shots (Greenwood 2013)

3 Likud MK Miri Regev is a controversial figure, drawing immense antipathy from leftist Israelis but a more ambivalent response from *Mizrahi* activists, including some identify as leftist themselves. Many *Mizrahim* appreciate Regev's outspokenness about her *Mizrahit* identity, even if they take issue with her party's hawkish politics. Furthermore, they regard the vitriolic intensity of some attacks on Regev as evidence of liberal *Ashkenazi* elitism and anti-*Mizrahi* racism. In one example of Regev's highly contentious status, Nirit B. was widely and harshly criticized by *Mizrahi* activists for her 2012 Ha'aretz op-ed against the MK, which included the suggestion that Regev's rightist race and class politics ran counter to her own interests as a *Mizrahit*. According to Nirit B., "these people were actually my friends. We worked together, we agreed on things. But they willfully took my op-ed the wrong way, and they totally shunned me" (interview with author, November 2013). As Khen E. explains it, "she went too far. How can an *Ashkenazit* speak for what a *Mizrahit* should or shouldn't think? It's like if I were to claim I, as a *Mizrahit*, can speak for Africans, or for black Americans" (interview with author, May 11, 2013.)

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10 Trajectories of soul citizenship

African dance clubs between global blackness and local awareness

Uri Dorchin

Heeding Michelle Wright's call (2015) to reorient the scholarly center of gravity in Black Studies away from the Middle Passage paradigm toward late modern and multidirectional migration, this chapter will focus on African nationals who, toward the end of the millennium and shortly after, made their way eastward, to Israel. Between 1990 and 2000, thousands of Africans, citizens of more than fifteen countries, entered Israel in the hope of finding gainful employment, with an eventual view to improving their own and their families' life back in Africa.[1] Their acclimation in Israel was far from easy. As undocumented aliens, illegal and deprived of any formal status, African laborers negotiated their place in Israeli society as if waging an uphill battle. Eloquent of the difficulties they experienced in Israel was a rhymed Hebrew aphorism they favored: *Shachor velavan yam shel balagan* ("black and white, lots of mess"). What gave popular currency to this saying was, perhaps, its applicability to the many challenges they faced from failed attempts in courting Israeli girls to tensions with local employers or neighbors. Capturing the overall socio-political climate, the colloquial Hebrew term *balagan* became closely related to the perceived differences encoded in skin color.[2]

In interrogating Africans' attitudes as they negotiated their place in Israel, I employ the concept of *soul citizenship* originally introduced by Markowitz, Helman, and Vertesh (2003) in reference to another African-descended group in Israel, the African Hebrew Israelite Community (AHIC). Soul citizenship, as conceived by these authors, refers to claims of belonging of people or groups based on an affinity for the nation that denies them legal status. While I find soul citizenship to be relevant in the case of African labor migrants, I also contend that there remain significant differences between various cases and that these differences, in turn, allow us to acknowledge different modalities or trajectories of soul citizenship. In very basic terms, while the AHIC frames their journey to Israel as a homecoming, Africans see their exodus to Israel as an escape from dangers in their home countries. Given their essentially different perceptions of Israel – a homeland for the AHIC and an asylum for the Africans – their expressions of soul citizenship are significantly different.

The suggested thesis will be examined through an ethnographic account of two competing nightclubs formerly operated by and catering to members of the African community in Tel Aviv. Focusing on nightclubs is not an arbitrary choice;

as I explain, these establishments bore much significance for their patrons, serving as expedient platforms for refashioning the African community as both black *and* Israeli. Moreover, as social arenas dedicated to the consumption and rehearsal of various tastes and styles – by means of music, fashion, and dance – an examination of the dance club experience can illuminate one of soul citizenship's most distinctive qualities: people's capacity for "self-making" amid rigid structural conditions and legal regulations. Yet, the process of self-making itself is subject to differential considerations, perceptions and objectives that serve as basis for different manifestations of soul citizenship. As the cases of the AHIC and African laborers reveal, different perceptions of the matrix of homeland, diaspora and blackness – as well as the perceived place of Israel within that matrix – inspires different sentiments and practical goals.

This chapter – like others in this book – pays attention to the formation and acquired meanings of blackness in a country whose defining lines of belonging do not rest on racial demarcations, with no clear sense of color lines. In this spirit, it responds to the call to problematize rooted paradigms of Black Studies that fail to acknowledge senses of blackness beyond its purview.

Soul citizenship

As an ideal, soul citizenship may be understood as the option for individuals and groups to detach themselves from nations and states to which they legally belong and to attach themselves anew with other nations with which they identify more. Such a characterization typifies the AHIC's approach to the United States and Israel. Careful reading of the Hebrew Bible supplied AHIC numerous evidences for their past connection to Israel, and for Israel's connection with Africa (Markowitz 1996). This discovery opened up new options for political and identity affiliations for the AHIC; their eventual exodus to Israel thus aimed at "reconnecting their soul(s) with their bodies in the land of their forbears as an assertion of the rights due any human soul" (Markowitz et al. 2003, 304).

Israel, being a Jewish state, defines citizenship based on ethno-religious affiliation. Whereas it does not confer citizenship based on "soul affinity," of course, it does permit orthodox conversion to Judaism as a means to citizenship under the state's *Law of Return*. For their part, the AHIC rejected this solution. By insisting on primordial affiliation with the collective of historic Israelites, they challenged Israel's sovereign right to determine the criteria for legitimate residency in its borders. The AHIC nevertheless adhered to the modern principle supporting the right of nations to establish themselves on their historic homelands. Moreover, the community's claims echoed one of the most prominent Zionist ideas, depicting life in the diaspora as a disastrous existence that leads to spiritual degeneration (ibid.: 304). It was these similarities that made possible the inclusion of the AHIC in Israel as an exceptional case (see Markowitz, this volume).

Soul citizenship sheds light on the dialectic relations between formal power wielded by states and informal power exercised by individuals and groups residing therein. Markowitz et al. emphasize that the case of the AHIC in Israel

reflects both sides of the coin: the nature of communities as self-making entities and the structural conditions under which these groups and their members are being made. These relations do not constitute a mutual exclusion but rather imply a continual dialectics in which the two dimensions regenerate one another. As we learn, both the AHIC and the state of Israel did change their approaches and policies over more than four decades, adjusting to changing conditions and the moves made by each of the parties.[3] While not withdrawing their claims altogether, the AHIC "adopted the Zionist discourse that urges the Jews to return to Israel but have interpreted 'Jews' to mean everyone with a soulful connection to the land of Israel" (ibid.: 306). Self-making, thus, is in fact a continual process of self-remaking that may, in turn, change the conditions in which the group subjects are being made. The realization of Markowitz et al. reinforces the complementary theoretical proposition that by negotiating with the state, and even by challenging its limits of power, minority groups may in fact endorse the state's status as a legitimate arbiter.

Theoretically, the idea of soul citizenship derives from the ongoing conversation about the related notion of "cultural citizenship" (Rosaldo 1994, Ong 1996, Siu 2001). In spite of their different interpretations of this concept, scholars unanimously agree that cultural citizenship addresses dimensions of citizenship beyond the merely official or legal. Citizenship, they claim, is "cultural" in the sense that citizens experience it in different ways according to their social position and cultural background. Thus, citizenship is not merely an equalizing bureaucratic status but also a process of social construction that operates in various facets of day-to-day life. Based on this understanding scholars represent two different approaches. For some, cultural citizenship entails – beyond any other prerogative – the right of minority groups to preserve their differences from the national mainstream culture (Rosaldo 1994) and to maintain their counter-hegemonic practices as means of self-enfranchisement (Flores, in Siu 2001, 10). Contending against this perception, Aihwa Ong demonstrates how the state and civil society channel different groups into different positions according to local racial logic. These two competing perspectives illuminate the innate tension between liberal and republican conceptions of citizenship as well as the dialectics between potential process of "self-making" and the institutional reality in which identities are always also "being made."

An important contribution to this conversation was imparted by Lok Siu's concept of "diasporic cultural citizenship" (2001). According to Siu, the parties to the debate mentioned above built their theoretical arguments in reference to communities of newcomers to nation-states but failed to acknowledge processes outside of the host society. Accordingly, the two parties, claims Siu, overlook the decisive role of the diasporic dimension, not only in regard to immigrants' self-perceptions but also to the viable transnational networks they maintain. In that respect, Siu's diasporic cultural citizenship complicates the binary opposition between the bottom-up and top-down perspectives, for when citizens maintain simultaneous affiliations in and beyond the nation, the state ceases to be the ultimate force that "makes" the people, or the sole target for presses they operate from "below."

Instead, both the state and its citizens operate, while being operated, in the context of an interstate networking.[4] This multifarious perspective is useful in examining the case of African laborers in Israel. As will be seen, Africans regularly appeal to the state and local society while also nurturing attachments to their home countries and regions and keep open channels with other diasporic African communities.

Built into the wider framework of cultural citizenship, the option of soul citizenship bridges otherwise competing models of modern nationalism and the postmodern discourse of post-nationalism. Soul citizenship, in other words, denotes the doubleness of rejecting exclusionary demarcation by ethnic nation-states while embracing the idea of bloodlines connecting *the* nation to *its* territory. This model, as Markowitz et al. explain, thereby "open new space for framing claims of inclusion that allow self-defining people – be they immigrants, diasporic groups, sexual or racial minorities – to place themselves in the states that resonate with their aspirations" (2003 304). Indeed, given the doubleness intrinsic to its very essence, soul citizenship can be relevant for residents, legal and illegal alike, and can illuminate similarities and differences within and across social groups.[5] For example, like other Jews, Ethiopians cherish the narrative of homecoming. However, because their Jewish roots were sometimes questioned Ethiopians fortified their claims, as the AHIC did, by emphasizing the connection between longing and belonging. Labor migrants, in contrast, do not claim Israel as their fatherland but they still posit their own version of soul citizenship. As many of them define themselves as Christian Zionists (Kemp and Raijman 2003), expressing pro-Israel sentiments in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they aspire to acceptance in Israeli society by virtue of their support for the country's existence. Moreover, African asylum seekers, very much like African Americans before them, invoke the Bible to underscore similarities between the fate of the Jews and their own. As Hankins (2018) has shown, commemoration of historic events in Jewish experience is an opportunity for Africans "to burnish 'pro-Israel' credentials" and "to represent the idea of African belonging within Jewish Israel" (Hankins 2018: 194–195).

While Africans (Jews and non-Jews) recognize the legitimacy of the state's authority they also favor an inclusive policy of multiculturalism in which their blackness will no longer be interpreted as a signifier of strangeness and danger. Yet, given their differential positions in the local society, and the different experiences that derive from it, neither their strategies nor their sentiments are uniform. Examining the differences and variations between them will illuminate different trajectories of soul citizenship.

Labor migrants in Israel

By the mid-1980s, the share of Palestinian workers from the West Bank and the Gaza strip in Israeli labor market grew to almost 10% and few sectors became totally dependent on Palestinian labor (Semyonov and Levin-Epstein 1987). By employing non-citizen commuters, Israel could thus enjoy the benefits of cheap labor force without needing to host labor migrants in its cities. However, the rising

tension in the Palestinian territories, culminating with the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987, created new conditions. Construction, industry, and agriculture, the sectors that depended most on Palestinian laborers, became especially vulnerable in the new order since neither contracts nor produce can accommodate an unreliable supply of workers. Represented by strong lobbies in the corridors of power, these unions pushed and, eventually, brought decision makers in the Israeli parliament to undertake – for the first time – regulated recruitment of labor migrants. Side by side with continual employment of Palestinians – which also diminished after "the second Intifada" of 2000 – the sectors of construction, agriculture, industry, health and elder care were occupied by laborers from (mainly) China, Philippines, Thailand, India, Romania, Turkey, and countries of the former Soviet Union. While Africa never became a venue for the regulated recruitment of workers, Africans nevertheless took advantage of Israel's open gates policy to enter the country on tourist visas and overstayed as undocumented workers.

The condition of an undocumented worker, taken at face value, is one of greater temporariness and instability. Yet, whereas this reality cannot be denied, the trajectory of these particular under-the-radar workers offered some advantages. First, entering Israel as tourists Africans could sometimes bring their families with them or arrange for their arrival after establishing themselves in Israel. Second, being unbound to a specific employer, as legal workers are, Africans had some leverage, modest though it was, in negotiating their employment conditions, in moving between or combining multiple concurrent jobs, and launching their own initiatives. Also, unlike legal laborers tethered to one employer, Africans boasted better opportunities in choosing their area of residence. Consequently, since the mid-1990s most Africans saw fit to gather in the southern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv, where they created a vibrant community near their workplaces in and around the Tel Aviv metropolis. Living and working in the country's biggest urban center, Africans found within reach numerous households, restaurants, hotels and small industries allowed them limited engagement in the public sphere and opened opportunities for creating social networks therein.

This background is significant for a proper appreciation of how soul citizenship is being claimed by its exponents, explaining as it does by what means Africans organize grassroots associations to protect their interests and to mobilize support from among the locals. Indeed, by the end of the 1990s, each national or tribal group in the African community ran its own self-help associations, all subsumed under an umbrella organization, the African Workers Union (AWU). In their sociological study of the processes of organization among labor migrants, Kemp et al. (2000) emphasized that such associations are prerequisites for "negotiating the limits of membership and participation in the host society" (95). Through such organizations that Africans could marshal potential allies in the local media, civil organizations, parliamentary lobbies, and the legal world to promote their interests. Though not adopting Rosaldo's notion of "cultural citizenship," Kemp et al. seem to share his view that the macro perspective of (labor-) migration, especially when

employing formal-bureaucratic definitions, tend to neglect "a wide array of extra-electoral political participation in which [undocumented] migrants can engage" (Ibid).The case of the African community thus demonstrates how efficient operation of semi-formal voluntary organizations, along with the construction of informal networks in the local society, can enable noncitizens or undocumented laborers to participate in the public sphere.

Their empirical orientation notwithstanding, Kemp at al.'s analysis also lays the foundation for a phenomenological approach permitting various meanings of the praxis of participation. In what follows I propose to show how the adoption, by Africans, of blackness as a collective social identification is translated into claims to "soul" partnership. Also, it is both apropos and important to note that the establishment of the AWU in 1997 was triggered by the enactment of harsher deportation policy by the state. In an effort to come to terms with this policy, African community leaders in Israel capitalized on their connections with a variety of local human rights advocates – activists, journalists, and lobbyists – to broadcast two complementary messages. They reminded local citizens and officials about Israel's commitment to international agreements regarding universal human rights while representing Africans and black people in general as a unique "community of suffering" (Kemp et al. 2000: 106). In adopting the newfound image of blackness – an image partly imposed on them by locals – Africans both constructed a hierarchy of suffering and "privatized" the discourse of universal rights. And yet, more than defying Israeli sovereignty, these "Africans-turned-blacks" drew on the discourse of suffering to posit a proximity to their Jewish hosts, with whom they accordingly sought fellowship as brothers in historical victimhood, distinguishing themselves from other non-Jewish groups thereby. By this means, their strategy dismantles the apparent contradiction between universal values and republican ethos.

The club

Lacking official status in Israel, Africans were obliged to form self-help organizations in order to maximize accommodation and employment opportunities and to provide safety nets for their members. Formed on the basis of national affiliations – and to a lesser degree on tribal or other categories – these organizations operated as organized bodies with bureaucracies featuring such positions as chair, vice chair, treasurer, and sometimes even inspection committees and spokespeople. Maintained by monthly dues and occasional charitable contributions, the club provided immediate support for newcomers upon their arrival. It also assisted its members by maintaining a segregated "pool" of rooms and jobs and provided in times of illness, detention, and deportation. Such national clubs were, therefore, integral to community members' everyday lives, even if they lacked state recognition or official status.

Founded as they were to meet their members' everyday needs, national clubs did not occupy themselves with building platforms for constructing an extended community, let alone for bringing Africans and Israelis together. Yet if the Africans'

intention was to cultivate an alliance with the local society, as I claim it was, then this goal could have been achieved by celebrating those dimensions of their culture that allowed for the participation of outsiders while downplaying those that were exclusionary. Dance clubs perhaps favored this outreach better than other establishments; by offering a festive experience in which Africa is mediated by – and associated with – global blackness, dance clubs projected a sense of Africanness that is modern and cosmopolitan and thus attractive to the outsider. In a previous article I compared dance clubs to two other venues, very different from one another, in which music plays – quite literally – a significant role: the church and the central bus station mall (Dorchin 2018b). In that article I contended that, just like the national club, neither the church nor the mall sufficed to construct a sense of collective African community, although for different reasons. This comparison deserves another look, for it may also explain why dance clubs – unlike other migrants' social hubs that feature music – were more likely to build avenue to soul citizenship.

In her study of the soundscape of Tel Aviv's central bus station, Sarah Hankins (2013) described this scene as a permissive and democratic environment that encourages cultural multiplicity. Being home to immigrants from all continents who share its space and transform it into a lively multiethnic hub, the bus station area offers a tangible alternative to the Jewish ethno-national ideology. Moreover, as Hankins explains, the mixture of so many different people precludes any one culture from predominating the space (ibid.: 288). It is reasonable to assume that such conditions make it difficult for immigrant communities to establish lasting relationships with locals and to craft alliances with them. Indeed, for Israelis who pass through the area (they never stay unless they have good reason to) the heterogeneous mass of alien citizens – their different looks, sounds, smells – signal strangeness far more than commonality. Also mixed are churches which, despite their diversity, are much less permissive in terms of cultural Encounters.[6] Moreover, in a national society whose ultimate sense of belonging draws on Jewish affiliation, attending church underscores one's position as an outsider.

It is for different reasons, thus, that national clubs, churches, and the central station mall could not help immigrant to offer a message of partnership to their Israeli neighbors based on social, cultural or ideological similarities. Being too exclusive or too permissive they all had the same effect of hampering the potential alliance between immigrants and local citizens. Dance clubs on the other hand combined both aspects, defining themselves clearly as "African" while constructing this very self-definition in flexible terms that welcome others to share in the "African experience." Indeed, that these clubs opened their doors for diverse audiences was part of their effort to mediate progressive, secular, liberal, and cosmopolitan image and thus to reverse negative stereotypes locals may have had of Africa and Africans.

Put against the accumulated research of "club cultures," African clubs in Tel Aviv support some common assumptions while challenge others. A basic assumption shared by many scholars is that the collective consumption of music within designated spaces creates intimacy between group members as well as

between them and the space which now become "their" place (Malbon 1998). As such the discourse surrounding club experience derives from the Bourdieuan idea of cultivating *distinction* and it is here that African clubs in Tel Aviv shows us a more complicated picture. According to the distinction paradigm the consumption and production of music is a strategy for groups to distinguish themselves from others, to construct valuable or otherwise positive self-images, and, sometimes, to resist marginal positions assigned to them in a social order imposed by dominant groups (Lewis 1992). Whereas African night clubs in Tel Aviv, by billing themselves as such, proposed sense of distinction they were nonetheless oriented to break out of narrow social categories and to cultivate collaborations across differences. Black popular music, the central feature of the club, is simultaneously a signifier of alterity and of inclusion, one that signals otherness while bringing people together across space, race, and time. In this respect, even the very "Africanness" of the club cannot be taken at face value as objective signifier of ethnic or geographical definition. Within the local context it is rather a matter of invention, a process fated to be mediated through the dialectic between inevitable distinctions and potential integration.

Different trajectories: Pan-Africanism and global black

At the time I conducted my field work (2000–2001), the two prominent dance clubs of the African community were Afrovision and Obaa-Ya. Located near the central bus station, about one mile from one another, the two attracted mostly – though not only – Africans. As I have previously described (Dorchin 2018b), Afrovision was founded by four entrepreneurs from four different countries. The collaboration between the four, and the name they chose for their club, reflects their conscious intention to create a social framework breaching the boundaries demarcated by national and tribal clubs. For their first year, Afrovision organizers operated as a production team arranging parties and festive events in different spaces, sometimes even organizing day tours or weekend vacations. Later they rented a space on Har Zion Boulevard, at the back of garages and greasy workshops, establishing Afrovision in its permanent location, a location destined to become the preferred hangout for most Africans.

The Obba-Ya was established shortly earlier and was operated in an underground space located near the busy Neve Sha'anan pedestrian zone. It was opened and owned by Demian, a Ghanaian man then married to an Israeli woman. Unlike the self-declared pan-African orientation of Afrovision, Obaa-Ya attracted mostly Ghanians who at the time were the largest African community in Israel. Yet, the Obaa-Ya was also attended regularly by non-Ghanaians, non-African migrants, and Israelis. In terms of style, Obaa-Ya presented itself as a reggae club, an image that was strongly associated with its owner's mode of dress and typical dreadlock hair style. While Afrovision's logo featured four arms holding each other, signifying the collaboration of the four owners and, by extension, solidarity within the African community, Obaa-Ya featured large wall paintings of Kwame Nkrumah, Haile Selassie, Bob Marley, and different symbols

of Rastafarian culture, highlighting its telltale colors (also the colors of Ghana's national flag). The juxtaposition of the portraits of Ghana's founding leader and two iconic representatives of global blackness – the Ethiopian emperor Selassie and the Jamaican Marley – suggest a nexus between the national character of the club and its supposed international appeal.

The two clubs, then, projected a message of inclusiveness, albeit in slightly different ways; both leaned on a designated base (Ghanaians at Obaa-Ya, heterogeneous Africans at Afrovision) complemented by others: namely, Israelis and various non-African labor migrants. As to the music, the principal means by which clubs impart a certain sense of place and which binds its diverse attendees, the two clubs were mostly similar. In both places the musical menu comprised contemporary hits with a special emphasis on genres recognized as representing black music, i.e. reggae, rap and hip hop. Based on this similarity each of the clubs featured slightly different musical focus; Obaa-Yaa invested more in reggae and dancehall styles – including its less mainstream tunes – while Afrovision integrated all manner of African pop in many different languages. Yet, in spite of their similar defining lines, and their shared flexibility as a means to accessing various audiences, community members perceived the two clubs as opposites and often emphasized those aspects that differed them from one another. While referring to one another's club, both owners and attendees often praised their club for its inclusive policy and for its tolerance toward diversity while depicting the other as one characterized by sectarianism and narrow-mindedness. In other words, comparative evaluations between the two clubs was often measured in terms of perceived level of liberalism.

If it is true that Obaa-Ya and Afrovision established themselves first and foremost by enhancing relationships between African citizens who would have otherwise remained parted along ethnic, national, religious, language or other defining lines, then it is also true that they presented themselves as rare meeting places for Africans and non-Africans to share in social recreation. These intentions, however, wrought the different orientations of the two clubs, pointing to what I refer to as different trajectories of soul participation. In the case of Afrovision, I call it "pan-Africanism" and in that of Obaa-Ya I call it "global blackness." Whereas both denote social circles that transcend their local Israeli milieu they also function as platforms both for appealing to the country's citizens and for legitimizing their place in their host society.

Pan-Africanism

Afrovision, as its organizers told me, was established to offer an alternative to the Obaa-Ya. Admittedly, the Obaa-Ya was not big enough to accommodate both the large Ghanaian community and the rest of the Africans, but spatial limitations aside, many non-Ghanaians said they felt unwelcomed in it. The counter-claim that "Ghanaians like to be with their own kind," which I have heard more than once, cast them as a people less likely to create cross-communal alliances. Accordingly, their club was often perceived as an establishment that promoted

segregation, not inclusion. "[We] Africans," a Nigerian named Klitus told me, "are 'group people', we love being with others and the Afro[vision] gives us this opportunity." My conversation with Klitus took part one Friday night at the Afrovision; on April 27, 2001, as Afrovision celebrated South Africa's national Freedom Day. That evening local members of the South African community were exempted from the entrance fee while their friends from other countries, some hundred people, honored them by standing in silence when Trevor, the Gambian resident DJ, played their national anthem. There is nothing special about this gesture, explained Klitus; African people at home or abroad live in highly diverse societies and are used to being respectful of others' sensibilities. Strengthen this claim, he added that during the Israeli National Remembrance Days (for the Holocaust and for fallen soldiers), when a siren sounds throughout the country in a momentary commemoration of the deceased, Africans always stand in silence side by side the rest of Israeli population. Trevor observed that such memorial event appeals to Africans in a very special way because "African countries have also experienced many sufferings." African participation in Israel's most sacred national events is relevant to my discussion on two counts. First, by standing in memory of fallen Israeli soldiers Africans mark themselves off from non-Jewish and/or non-Zionists groups in Israel who do not perform this commemorative act. Second, by acknowledging the loss experienced by their host society, and in emphasizing the similar fate shared by Africans and Israelis, Africans project a sense of solidarity beyond national boundaries without negating the status of nationalism *per se*.

Association between pan-Africanism and solidarity with the state is sometime stated deliberately. When I first entered the Afrovision I was surprised to see that the only national symbol in the club are two flags of Israel, one welcomed the people at the entrance and the other one was hanged above the dance floor. When I asked Samson, one of the four organizers of the club to the reason for that, he seemed surprised by my own surprise. "This is an Israeli club," he said as if articulating an obvious point,

> we opened it for the African people, but anyone is invited. We cannot hang all the flags of all people that come here. [Besides], our national flags symbolize our different backgrounds; as long as we are here the Israeli flag is our shared basis.

But acknowledging the symbol of Israeli nationality as the ultimate basis of unification in an African club is not as obvious as Samson suggests. After all, Afrovision organizers could further invest in pan-African symbolism, in line with the club's title and logo. Choosing the Israeli flag instead betrayed their intention to carve out reciprocal relationships with the local society based on mutual acceptance.

This inclusive orientation was apparent in Afrovision on a regular basis. Unlike "regular" clubs, which aim to appeal to certain audiences by means of distinguished style, Afrovision deliberately avoided any particular idiom. Its emphasis on "black music" was itself eclectic enough to appeal to the tremendously

heterogeneous audience and to include popular African music (sang in English, French, Portuguese, and many other local dialects), Jamaican reggae and American hip hop. In addition, attendees to the club felt free to approach Trevor with special requests and often handed him their own discs. Trevor himself regularly played particular tunes as a nod to certain groups, which he often prefaced with a special dedication to the people concerned. One night, when I came with few Israeli friends for whom it was a first visit to the club, we were surprised to hear Trevor greet us on the microphone before playing an Israeli dance song "especially" for us. In that respect Trevor acted as host more than a "professional" DJ and in so doing, reflected the ethos of the club.

It is my contention that the sense of pan-Africanism rehearsed in Afrovision has a double meaning. While it aimed to make the club home to all Africans and to accommodate their unique cultural preferences, its "Afro" did not imply an exclusively African orientation. Employing the notion of pan-Africanism, I aim to understand it as a signifier of a certain *attitude* more conducive to an alliance across social groups. Against this background, we can understand why people of the Afrovision chose to depict Obaa-Ya as a "reggae club" and why this definition was associated with Ghanaians' alleged self-alienation. The imagined commitment to a strict musical and stylistic line represented the exclusionary approach attributed to Obaa-Ya. In avoiding the company of other Africans, the partisans of Afrovision alleged, Ghanaians reveal themselves as people unwilling to adjust to changing conditions, who cannot tolerate diversity, and who are less equipped – culturally speaking – for life in a modern, liberal and multicultural society.

Global blackness

That "Ghanaians prefer to be among themselves" is a statement that was sometimes endorsed by Ghanaians themselves. Harry, a doorman at the Obaa-Ya, explained to me that unlike most Africans who tend to prioritize individual considerations and therefore prefer to relocate permanently in Western countries, Ghanaians prefer to gather within themselves, are more proud of their nationality, and would rarely apply for a permanent status in other states. This supposed contrary preference seems to stand Ghanaians in the company of citizens of Western countries, who see their states as equal participants in the "family of nations" and their nationality as the preferred basis for creating global social network.

This narrative also reverses the interpretation given by the Afrovision people in regard to Ghanaians' sense of aloofness. Cady, a right-hand person to Damian at the Obaa-Ya, explained that "for most Africans it is hard to get along with the peaceful 'Ghanaian spirit'. In Ghana there are no tensions between different tribes as you will see it in other [African] countries. Nigerian people for example are 'hot;' they are violent, and there are a lot of hard feelings between the tribes there." Damian himself added that "Nigerians think their country is a super power; it's true that Nigeria is rich, but they forget that 90 percent of the teachers in Nigeria are Ghanaians who came to teach and educate their people." These statements emphasize the point that beyond military, technological or economic

power, being modern is a matter of attitude which is perhaps both the result of and impetus for individual and collective progress.

It is from this perspective that Ghanaians read their own history. Pointing to the wall-painting in front of us, Harry went on telling me about Nkrumah's vision of creating "The United States of Africa," a vision that was allegedly thwarted by the pettiness and greed of his contemporary African leaders. "[African] people don't understand the idea of 'united we stand divided we fall'," said Harry, reciting the slogan featured by so many reggae singers and rappers, "[Africans] do not support one another and this is the reason that Africa will never be the united empire Dr. Nkrumah wanted it to be." To be sure, the speakers are not concerned about the past; rather, as often is the case, the historical narrative is neatly applied to interpret the present situation. Both Harry and Cady attribute the reason that Africans did not feel comfortable in the Obaa-Ya to their supposedly belligerent attitude, one they apparently brought with them from their home societies. "Here in the Obaa-Yaa we keep order, [one] cannot do whatever he likes" said Cady, "they [non-Ghanaians] prefer the Afro[vision] because there is more *balagan* there." Against the image of their past leaders and the alleged mentality in their countries, Afrovision devotees are cast as if lacking the cultural sinews and personal qualities required for long term agreements.

Eliminating pan-Africanism as a shared foundation, the Obaa-Yaa people – again, as their wall paintings hinted – marked global blackness as alternative grounds for an alliance with others around them. It is on this basis that Damian fell in with the then-developing local scene of reggae and hip hop and launched, in the winter of 2001, a series of reggae parties that featured leading Israeli DJ's and rappers. Seasoned by training in Jamaica, Miami, London and other world-centers of "black music" and armed with the most updated tunes and exclusive and rare cuts, these practitioners offered the Obaa-Ya stamp of approval in terms of cultural capital, and, no less important, brought a new local audience to the club. Considering the vicissitudes of blackness in the late modern era, it is scarcely ironic that a Ghanaian club owner in Tel Aviv sought to introduce African people to an "authentic" black music experience mediated by Jewish-Israeli millennials. Alas, this aspiration soon erupted into a dispute between the new (Israeli) audience in the club and its regular attendees, and eventually between Damian and the local performers. While Rudeboy, Chulu, Fishi and other locally acclaimed artists wished to display their skills and knowledge, most Africans wanted to have the familiar, allegedly less hip, musical menu. Frustrated as he was by the lack of appreciation on the part of the local audience, and by the less than professional sound system in the club, Rudeboy told me that "it is not for me to play in *mo'adonim Ka'ele* ['these kinds of clubs']." "If Damian really wants to compete with other clubs in the city" said one rapper, "first he has to take care of elementary things like air-conditioning and bathrooms. I'm not even talking about the quality of sound." This controversy is telling not only because it imparts a comparative dimension to what may be regarded as "modern," but mainly because it reveals different perceptions of black music, and hence the different expectations of it. Whereas for Israelis hip hop and reggae comprised a niche, one that distinguishes

them from other local musical scenes (Dorchin 2018a), Africans aspired to dissolve rigid distinctions. Once the celebration of black music took on an exclusive manner the collaboration between the groups seem to lead into inevitable conflict. In that respect the strategy enacted by Damian at the Obaa-Ya replicated that of the Afrovision in spite of the stylistic differences between the two clubs.

Conclusion

As emerges from the foregoing**,** in spite of a mutual perceived difference, Afrovision and Obaa-Ya promoted rather similar agendas aimed at breaching the social boundaries of African community and offered a channel for constructive relationships with local society. Within this similar pattern both clubs featured subtle distinctions that was mistakenly or strategically magnified to represent essential differences. Yet, the contested arguments put by both parties, once examined, seem to resemble more than contradict one another. Both clubs, for example, operated as inclusive hubs whose welcoming policy was intended to attract their Israeli guests, who, in all other contexts, function more as hosts. Moreover, by imparting an air of hospitality to Israelis, Africans may present themselves (and hence the African community in large) as residents who fit in a multicultural and liberal society. Like the AHIC before them, Africans understand and embrace the local discourse that portrays Israeli society as an ethnic salad bowl or a combination of various *edot* (ethnicities) (Markowitz et al. 2003). Africans realize, of course, that Israelis apply this typology exclusively to Jewish groups, and yet they seek to stretch it so as to include other immigrants whose belonging is based, not on ethnicity or religion, but rather on loyalty to the state and contributions to society.

Admittedly, when focused through the lens of the club these messages remain indistinct and must, therefore, be discerned by means of interpretive induction. In conversations, however, they were articulated more explicitly, thus reinforcing the conclusions derived from this interpretive procedure. In portraying themselves as tolerant and liberal club owners and attendees distinguished themselves from other people and groups in Israel – Jews and non-Jews, citizens and noncitizens – whose social and political attitude to the state is less favorable. One prominent example was repeated references to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the association of Arabs with religious fundamentalism and cultural conservatism. The eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada at the time, and the persistent suicidal terror attacks on the streets, provided a good background for Africans to pledge their loyalty. It was not so much a negative appreciation of Arabs *per se* exhibited by my interlocutors as a self-serving comparison that would endear themselves to Israeli Jews.[7]

Another prominent example in that regard is the frequent references made by Africans to Jews from an Ethiopian background. For Africans the interactions with Ethiopian Israelis is significant for two reasons. First, being Jews of African descent Ethiopians demonstrate that blackness itself is not a categorical barrier for legitimate position in Israeli society. Second, unlike other Israelis, Ethiopians attend African clubs on a regular basis and generally maintained more social relationships

with Africans. Accordingly, Ethiopians could apparently offer Africans a template for greater involvement in the larger Israeli society. Nevertheless, most Africans believed that instead of uniting the otherwise exclusive identities of Jewishness, Africaness, and blackness, Ethiopians preferred to buttress the distinctions between them. As I have previously noted (Dorchin 2018b), Africans have interpreted Ethiopians' identity politics as a practice of double exclusion in which they emphasize their Jewishness to differentiate themselves from other – non-Jewish – Africans while at the same time emphasize their sense of blackness to differentiate themselves from other Israelis and to "bypass Israeliness" (Shabtay 2001). Like Israel's Arab citizens, thus, Ethiopians are portrayed by Africans as people that capitalize on their assigned legal position to shirk assimilation and the option (or duty, as Africans would have it) to contribute to the national community.

That undocumented aliens feature such a supportive attitude toward their host nation should not surprise us; in fact, this is a key aspect of soul citizenship, and perhaps what differentiates it from the broader sense of cultural citizenship. Yet, as Markowitz convincingly demonstrates (Markowitz 2004, Markowitz et al. 2003), this perspective achieves its full effect only when coupled with an extra-republican dimension expressed through the discourse of universal human rights. Instead of being contested elements, these dimensions complement one another. Therefore, when the AWU rested its claims on the universality of human rights, as stated by international conventions, it coupled these very claims with clear acknowledgment of Israel's sovereignty to define its own national character. Moreover, by introducing the troubles experienced by Africans – and black people more generally – spokespersons of the community never ignored the perceived sense of victimhood of Jewish Israelis. On the contrary, more often than not, the language of victimhood aims to sketch the similarities between the national and migrant communities and hence to offer a point of conversion between them (Hankins 2018). It is this organizing principle of mutual acknowledgment applied within the structural and ideological order of the nation-state, that the African clubs celebrated.

Soul citizenship is an option for a sentimental alliance rooted in difference; it entails the sensitive operation of differences unquestioned but nevertheless productive of social, political or cultural bonding. This sentimental alliance may rest on perceived similarities, for example by the self-serving reading of historical narratives (e.g. experiencing similar atrocities) or current political situation (e.g. having shared enemy). However, more than indicating a mere objective condition soul citizenship is a proposal or invitation for a process of mutual adjustment. When Africans depict themselves as a people who readily adjust to the conditions of liberal society, they do not simply depict Israel as such (in fact many times they claim the opposite), but rather they lay stress on what they want Israel to become. Sowing these ideas in the official political arena or planting them in the Israeli national consciousness is to plough on hard ground. It is here that the permissive environment of a dance club concretizes abstract ideas by means of recreational experience, offering a radical solution free of radical terminology. African clubs, an inclusive place in which "everybody is welcome," introduces blackness as a *different* subject-position that nonetheless operates as point of convergence. Black

and white, they suggest, may not necessarily culminate in *balagan* but may also bring about sustainable coupling.

Notes

1 Being undocumented, it is hard to determine the exact numbers of immigrants who entered and stayed in Israel. Yet, conservative estimation is that between 1990 and 2003 more than 20,000 African subjects stayed in Israel for the purpose of work. By the end of the millennium, African laborers counted almost 15,000, one-third of undocumented labor migrants in Israel at the time (Kemp et al. 2000: 95).
2 Literally means "mess" or "disorder," the colloquial meaning of the term *Balagan* is extended by Hebrew speakers to encompass all sorts of trouble, difficulties, conflict, and even emotional conditions like pressure and worry.
3 According to its founding narrative, the AHIC perceived black people as the righteous successors of ancient Israelites and therefore claim that it is they, not modern Jews, for whom the Land of Israel is a birthright. This racially informed perspective and its supporting myths were later modified in line with the state's moderate policy.
4 It should be noted, however, that the state itself is an active player in that "interstate" global reality and can just as well use these relationships to reinforce its differential division of legitimacy.
5 The contrary is also true: groups that possess legal status may adopt a "soulless" attitude toward their state. As I mention later, this is the claim made by Africans as they compare their attitude to that of Arabs in Israel.
6 For discussion about innovation and conservatism of musical expression in the African church in Israel, see Sabar and Kanari (2006).
7 It is worth mentioning that the Africans welcomed Arabs to their clubs, including undocumented Palestinian workers from the West Bank who could not afford to enter Israeli-owned clubs in Tel Aviv.

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11 Already black … and proud, and righteous

The African Hebrew Israelite Community in the State of Israel

Fran Markowitz

As several chapters in this volume have documented, during the twentieth century many Jewish groups and individuals found themselves Orientalized and racialized upon arrival in the State of Israel. Secularized Euro-modern Ashkenazim often dubbed olim from Middle Eastern and African lands "traditional" if not primitive and in dire need of modernization (see Bar-Yosef 1967; Eisenstadt 1954). A general belief in the backwardness of Arabic- and Amharic-speaking Jews merged with an equally strong perception of them as darker hued, and discursively amalgamated thousands of people with varied histories, social statuses and experiences into an inferior, racially marked sociocultural category (Khazoom 2008, 27). For their part, the newcomers, who had in their previous countries physically resembled the general population even as they faced anti-Jewish discrimination, suddenly and unexpectedly found themselves *being-made* black in the Jewish homeland (see Ben-Eliezer 2004; Chetrit 2009; Djerrahian 2015; Kaplan 2002).

By contrast, the American-born men, women and children of the African Hebrew Israelite Community[1] entered the State of Israel in the 1970s as *already* black, the bearers of a long and painful history in North America. Influenced by a wide range of Civil Rights, Black Pride and Black Power organizations, they sought to understand that history, dismantle the US color line (Douglass 1881), and overturn its unjust discriminatory results.

Like many African Americans in the 1960s, those in the Chicago Abeta Hebrew Center from which the AHIC emerged, wondered why they had never been taught in their neighborhood schools about the civilizations of Africa. They then explored a variety of sources to educate themselves about the richness, diversity and might of African societies. Amazed by a wealth of achievements, they asked each other, "How could so many great civilizations have fallen so completely?" Puzzled and perturbed, they searched for a reason for the success of Europeans in conquering Africa and brutally exploiting its people. But none of the political and economic theories offered in secular historical accounts could provide the Abeta Center Hebrews with a viable answer.

Recalling the "bits and pieces" of wisdom offered by family elders about their connections to the Children of Israel, Abeta Center members delved into the Bible and read it as their people's history. The verses of Deuteronomy 28 especially

resonated because they provided corroboration for inklings about a greater power causing black people such debasement, and over the 25 years of my research in the Hebrew Israelite Community many declared, "That's when it all came together for me!" Projecting backward from their twentieth-century predicaments to the biblical Israelites, they reasoned that instead of diligently following God's Commandments, their ancestors disobeyed, and in 70 CE, the armies of Rome sacked the Temple in Jerusalem and scattered the people of Israel. Since the Roman armies attacked from the north, they inferred that most Israelites fled south across Africa where, bedraggled and impoverished, they settled, embraced gods of wood and stone and lost their identity. The ultimate punishment for these misdeeds occurred several centuries later on Africa's west coast where those forsaken people were kidnapped and brought in chains to America, thereby fulfilling the most heinous prophesy of Deuteronomy, "a second slavery by ships."

For the Abeta Center's members who had devoted much time and energy to these studies, the prophesies of Deuteronomy 28 provided the only convincing reason that explained both the gruesome enslavement of their African ancestors and why, over a century after emancipation, African Americas remained in a debilitated state. Many concluded that as the land of their captivity and continuing chastisement, the United States never did and never would offer them freedom, justice, or prosperity. Some agreed that their redemption – and perhaps that of the entire world – depended on seeking divine forgiveness by returning to the Scriptures and serving the God of Israel in the Holy Land of Israel.

In 1966, Ben Ammi, then an up-and-coming leader at the Abeta Center, experienced a vision of the angel Gabriel, who instructed him "that it was time to start the journey back to the Promised Land and to establish the long awaited Kingdom of God."[2] Almost a year later, he left Chicago with some 300 men, women and children on an exodus out of America. The first part of the journey followed the reverse route of their ancestors' African diaspora. After a cooling-off and adjustment period in Liberia to get rid of the materialism and "foolishness" of America, their ultimate destination was the young State of Israel (see Prince Gavriel Ha-Gadol 1993). There they were to become part of the prophesized ingathering of the exiles and fulfill their divinely inspired goal of dwelling among the righteous. It hardly occurred to any of the Black Hebrews that the state would reject them, and that the struggle for self-definition, recognition and rights of belonging would begin anew in the land that they considered their own.

Radically different from the experiences of Middle Eastern and African olim who, even as their Jewish status was affirmed, were *made-black* in Israel, this chapter reviews the vicissitudes of the *already-black* African Hebrew Israelites whose claims for belonging in the Jewish state were dismissed on the grounds that they were not Jews. Influenced by Civil Rights goals and the principles of Black Pride and Black Power, I show how these men and women asserted their self-defined African Hebrew origins and primordial ties to Israel, waged a successful struggle and ultimately won recognition, rights and residence in the Jewish state. With their eloquent English-speaking leaders and unwavering commitment to an autochthonous Israelite identity and the righteousness of their mission, these

American-modern, politically savvy Black Hebrews presented a dramatically novel, while also Biblically based, model of blackness to Israelis.

In order to contextualize the AHIC's assertions of their "power to define who we are as a people" as part of their demands for acceptance in Israel, the chapter first presents the social and political life of Euro-American-defined blackness against which African Americans transformed [their] stigmatized color to a chosen black identity of perseverance and moral superiority. I follow this review with an analysis of the confrontation between the AHIC's power to self-define and the power of states to demarcate their boundaries through the establishment and execution of immigration and deportation policies. Specifically, I offer an analysis of the 30 years that Israel refused to accept the Black Hebrews as olim on the grounds that they did not conform to its halachically based legal definition of "Who is a Jew." Reiterating their power to self-define and insistent that they be recognized as descendants of the original Israelites, the AHIC refused to undergo Orthodox Jewish conversion, even though it would have led to the bestowal of full Immigration and Absorption rights, including health care, housing stipends, and citizenship. Israeli officials considered deporting the Black Hebrews, but opted instead to leave the small, irksome group to their own devices in the underdeveloped Negev, figuring, perhaps, that in such difficult circumstances they would leave. But they did not. How did their American citizenship and global-modern blackness influence that decision? As the story unfolds, I will show that despite their precarious position, the Community gained allies, solidified and grew while peacefully resisting state exclusion in difficult conditions.

By 2004, approximately 1,500 long-term Israel-based Hebrews and their Israel-born children won from the state the recognition and rights that they had long sought. The story, however, does not end here, because the State of Israel did not accept the Black Hebrews as a legitimate, self-defining part of the Jewish people. The chapter's third part demonstrates that while the AHIC's combination of American modernity, black pride, and Bible-based commitments unsettled and maybe even dislodged the solidity of the European-influenced dominant discourse of blackness, Israel's granting of legal residence status to members of the Community comes with conditions, qualifications, and limits. In creating an *exception* for the Black Hebrews who arrived in Israel during the 1970s, the state has not expanded Jewish inclusiveness nor changed its citizens' attitudes about blackness. Instead, in confirming the AHIC as a self-defined, heterodox group of non-Jews who are *not* entirely not Jewish, this strategy of exceptionalism has reinforced Orthodox law and popular belief that (almost) all African and African-descended blacks do not belong to the Jewish people, and unless they can prove otherwise, hold no place in the Jewish state. I conclude by reasserting that the doubt regarding the Black Hebrews' Jewishness coupled with certainty about their blackness, distinguish the African Hebrew Israelite Community from other racially marked Jews while linking them to non-Jewish Africans, and that such ambiguity keeps them precariously perched on the verge of Israeli society and culture.

Black self-making in 1960s America: Black pride, black power and the original black Hebrew Israelites

Beginning with the writings of Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, which portrayed Africa and Africans as exotic and uncivilized, the diversity of African societies and the richness of their traditions were routinely collapsed over the longue durée of European history. Travel literature, military chronicles, and the accounts of traders and clerics often reduced Africans into a naturalistic and irrational "single group of black bodies" (Thompson 2009, 56–58). Historian Roger Ballard asserts that these black bodies became "entrenched within the European psyche" as physically strong, passionate, superstitious, sexually lax and prone to violence, representing the polar opposite of how white, rational and restrained Christian Europeans preferred to see themselves. This dichotomous portrayal, which over the centuries became entrenched as naturalized and even God-given, provided a comprehensive and secure ideological foundation for imperial expansion (Ballard 1996, 30), and a compelling rationale for colonialism and slavery (Young 2005; Smedley and Smedley 2018).

In the New World, slavery accomplished the actual destruction of African distinctions by amalgamating un-free people who were once part of specific kin, tribal, and ethnic groups, into a subjugated race of black bodies. Slavery deprived them of their languages, identities, and religions by objectifying men and women alike as "big, strong and stupid" units of labor (Collins 2004, 56–57). Post-emancipation, driven by fears of blacks' prodigious physical strength and hyper-sexuality, Americans legislated anti-miscegenation laws and executed harsh, often violent, discriminatory measures to reinforce the dominant view of uncivilized, unregulated black bodies in need of white control.

At the same time that slaveholders and segregationists invoked Old and New Testament passages in support of the subjugation of blacks, people of African descent found messages in that Bible condemning slavery and providing routes for righteousness, equality and freedom. First, acceptance of the Gospel and receptivity to the Holy Spirit offered a path for understanding and transcending earthly woes. Jesus lent solace while furnishing a role model of righteousness that endowed suffering with meaning and morality, and assurance of salvation in the hereafter (Raboteau 1995; Matory 2007). Complementing these New Testament messages of transcendence are the compelling examples of this-worldly deliverance described in the Old Testament in the personae of Daniel, David, Joshua and Moses (Levine 1997, 78). No single story reverberated with black Americans' embodied experience and hopeful vision than that of Exodus, which beyond providing "the prototype of racial and nationalist development" (Wilmore 1986, 37) broke the equation between blackness and enslavement and proved that slavery is a wicked human institution in opposition to divine will.

Whereas Exodus captured African Americans' imagination early on, by the latter part of the nineteenth century the rather obscure verse, "Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God" (Psalms 68:31) began circulating in black churches. Although the line is ambiguous, it offers

a rejoinder to the dominant discourse of African depravity. Black Americans identified Ethiopia and Egypt metonymically with their own origins and pointed to these ancient civilizations as indicative of a noble African past and the likelihood of a glorious future (Raboteau 1995, 43). By the 1920s, these themes manifested in Marcus Garvey's UNIA [United Negro Improvement Association] as black pride, self-reliance and separatism (see Burkett 1978; Jenkins 1975), and in the 1960s in a variety of messages, activities and organizations that swept across the United States as the Black Power Movement (Van Deburg 1997; Ogbar 2019).

Many of the men and women who entered the African Hebrew Israelite Community during the 1970s had sought hope in the integrationist Civil Rights movement spearheaded by Martin Luther King Jr., but asserted that such hope had begun to fade during the urban riots of 1967, and was dashed with King's assassination in 1968. Some recalled then moving through a variety of Black Power groups, from local self-defense leagues to the Nation of Islam, in search of an assertive black position instead of an integrationist demand for the equality already guaranteed to all Americans by the US Constitution.[3] At the first Black Power conference in 1966, Stokely Carmichael and Adam Clayton Powell urged America's black people to display black pride and take political and economic control of their organizations and communities. By the last conference in 1970, these aims had solidified into the separatist Four Principles of self-determination, self-sufficiency, self-respect and self-defense. Algeron Austin argues that:

> Black Power was in part a rejection of many of the ideals of civil rights. Black Power activists rejected nonviolence in favor of self-defense. They rejected racial integration for racial separation. They rejected the pursuit of civil rights in American society for the pursuit of black self-determination. More and more activists came to see themselves not as Americans, but as Africans who were living as a colonized people in the United States.
>
> (2006, 85)

So too did Ben Ammi and his colleagues at the Abeta Center come to see themselves not as American Negroes or black Americans, but as African Hebrew Israelites. In America, they came to see that they had been duped, and then convinced themselves into believing that the United States offered them adequate opportunities for a good and prosperous life and that Christianity provided needed spirituality and a redemptive path. Ben Ammi's studies of the Bible, of world history, and of the English language, convinced him, however, that, "everything connected with the color black, no matter whether it was race, religion or culture was labelled base, backward and uncivilized" (1990, 143). Much like his contemporary, Elijah Muhammad in the Nation of Islam, he railed against the continuing grip of black people's slave mentality as they strived toward materialism and thereby colluded with the white establishment in its continual reduction of them "to nothing in order to recreate them in the image sought by the slavers" (1990, 142). The Abeta Hebrew Center urged congregants to reject their slave names and replace them with Hebrew names. Those who did so received

a signed Certificate of Nationality declaring its bearer "a Jew of the nation of Israel."

Almost a year after having had his vision of the archangel Gabriel, Ben Ammi led a contingent of Abeta Center Hebrews out of America to reverse the debilitating legacies of slavery and assert, define, and enact "who we are as a people" by being "free in God" (Ben Ammi 1990, 165). After a readjustment period in Liberia, the group's aim was to reclaim and reenact their original Israelite identity by dedicating themselves to the God of Israel in the Land of Israel.

The Hebrew Israelites' power to define meets the power of the Jewish state

The AHIC emerged from the Chicago Abeta Hebrew congregation during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s, and it was from within that context of racial pride, beauty, strength and self-reliance that they put together "bits and pieces" of family wisdom with the Scriptures and concluded that they (and most black people in America) were the descendants of the original Children of Israel. Recovery of this once lost knowledge was a great source of pride and endowed them with a new understanding of what they considered their woeful historical plight (see Markowitz 1996). Those who followed Ben Ammi in 1967 to retrace the route of their ancestors' diaspora first sojourned in Liberia to rid themselves of the toxic trappings of America before entering the Holy Land. Having interpreted Israel's Law of Return as an invitation to all people identifying as Jews, by 1971 those who had not returned from Liberia to the United States arrived in Israel eager to reclaim their patrimony and participate in the new state's ingathering of the exiles.

During several hours of conversation in 2018 and 2019, Prince Hizkiyahoo, who with Ben Ammi was the first of the Black Hebrews to set foot in Israel, recalled his childhood in rural Georgia, his family's migration north to Gary, Indiana, and his involvement in the Abeta Hebrew Center in Chicago. Clear about his (people's) past and the importance of reclaiming Hebrew roots and practices, he, his wife, children and parents joined the black Hebrew Israelites in 1967 on their flight to Liberia. About a year later, Ben Ammi announced at a meeting that the two of them would be the first two of the group to enter Israel. ("I thought: Why me? I was in shock!" Hizkiyahoo parenthetically confided). On May 1, 1968, they boarded an airplane in Monrovia and landed the next day at Lod Airport where they presented their US passports and explained in English to Israeli immigration officials that, "We were Hebrew Israelites from the tribe of Judah who were returning to the land of our forefathers." After brief deliberations, they were then assigned a room in an absorption center. Two weeks later, Ben Ammi returned to Liberia after having enrolled Hizkiyahoo in an ulpan on a kibbutz in the Galilee. Despite his distress at being left to fend for himself, Hizkiyahoo quickly adjusted to the new circumstances and accepted his assignment to learn the ways of the Land. He recalled "studying for half a day and working for half a day" and enjoying the communal atmosphere of the kibbutz where he established himself as a well-liked,

diligent and devoted worker. In a matter of months, the kibbutz secretary applied for and received oleh documents for him along with those for three Ethiopian young men who had recently immigrated. Hizkiyahoo reported his positive reception to Ben Ammi, who responded by sending the first group from Liberia to Israel in December 1969. That group was comprised of over two dozen women and children with just a sprinkling of men (three or four, Hizkiyahoo recalled), and the kibbutz secretary, who was expecting "more strong young men like me" declined to host them. After some discussion between the kibbutz secretary and an Absorption Ministry official, the group was advised to go to the new Negev development town of Arad.

> She called the people from Arad, and to be accepted they needed to interview you. They came up and interviewed us, and that's how I got housing in Arad … and I got a job as a carpenter. We were given housing as olim … [and] I've been in Arad for 50 years.

More Hebrews came, but not everyone was accepted in Arad, and, according to Hizkiyahoo, some months later "they [Ministry of Absorption] sent some buses and deposited us at the shikun, a whole brand-new building in a new neighborhood in Dimona. There were 39 of us, including my family: my wife, four children, my mother and stepfather who got an apartment here in Dimona. Yeah," Hizkiyahoo added with a smile, "we were all 'tourists' on our American passports – all except myself." Years later, a government official informed him that he had received official immigrant status "by mistake." Nonetheless, in 1969 Hizkiyahoo had become the first – and for over 30 years, the only – American-born black Hebrew Israelite to become a legal resident of Israel.

At this point in our conversation, Prince Hizkiyahoo paused and mulled over what he considered a strange, sad and ironic situation: "People kept on coming. Then, the law changed. They didn't want us here. So what they decided to do (in 1972) was throw us out!" He elaborated: In the late 1960s when he and the first group of Hebrews arrived in Israel, "The Law of Return was – You say you're a Jew and [that you] live according to the Laws, and you were accepted." That perfectly suited the Black Hebrews whose goal was to dwell in Israel and serve the God of Israel (see Ben-Yehuda 1975). In the late 1960s, the state and the sect agreed.

In 1970, eight years after having resolved the long and contentious immigration case of Brother Daniel, Israel amended its 1952 Law of Return.[4] The amendment stated that while the Right of Return remains vested in children, grandchildren and spouses of Jews, it excludes those persons who had been Jews but voluntarily converted to another religion. "For the purposes of this Law," it established that, "'Jew' means a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion." Having been born and raised in various Christian denominations, the Black Hebrews did not conform to this halachically informed definition, and from the 1970s through the early 1990s, their "power to define who we are as a people" clashed with the power of the state

to establish and enforce the criteria that demarcate the boundaries of its territory and population (Joppke 1999, 620).

Beginning in May 1970, the American passport-bearing self-defined Original Hebrew "Jews of the tribe of Judah" became ineligible for Israeli immigration rights under the amended law. With over 50 Black Hebrews residing in the Negev and more on the way, Israeli officials came up with a solution to this anomalous situation by offering conversion classes. Upon completion of those classes the Hebrews would be versed in the practices of rabbinical Judaism, could undergo conversion and officially become Jews. Declaring, however, that, "We have the power to define who we are as a people," Ben Ammi categorically rejected the proposal. Prince Hizkiyahoo supported that decision, "We were Hebrew Israelites! We didn't want to be converted! We didn't need to be converted."

Still hoping to negotiate a favorable solution, the government provided temporary accommodations in an empty apartment block in the desert development town of Dimona, where, having rejected the offer of conversion and allowing their tourist visas to lapse, the Hebrew Israelites became illegal migrants and barred from all state education, health and welfare services. Despite these dire conditions, throughout the 1970s and 1980s hundreds more American-born black Hebrew Israelites entered the country to join Ben Ammi's divinely inspired, self-defining and self-reliant Community in Dimona.

Sensitive to racism and steadfast in their decision to persevere, the AHIC did not take Israeli rejection lightly. In addition to continuing assertions of their "power to define," the group responded by incorporating rhetoric from radical black groups like the Nation of Islam and from other Hebrew Israelite camps that dubbed the "white Jews" usurpers of Mosaic Law and the Land of Israel. Some even vowed to overthrow Israel's parliamentary government, to replace it with their Nation's Holy Council with Ben Ammi at the helm (see Kurtis 1981). Over 30 years later, when I questioned Prince Hizkiyahoo about these threats, he justified the Community's position by insisting that no one has the right to deny identity or belonging to anyone else:

> If you're saying that I ain't the one, then I'm saying, you ain't the one. Who am I to say that I am and you ain't? If you was the one, you would know that I am it too. Whatever you went through – the Holocaust – we went through it too with slavery. When we come in and somebody starts to preach to me who I'm *not*, how can he tell me that? How can he have the *audacity* to tell me that?

With larger, more pressing problems in Lebanon and with the Palestinians in its Occupied Territories, since the Black Hebrews only numbered in the hundreds, the Israeli government hardly took their belligerent language seriously. At the same time, Israel was keen to avoid accusations of racism both from Africa's newly independent states and from African Americans, and despite its right to do so, was reluctant to issue deportation orders (cf. Rustin 1981). Nonetheless, the untenable stalemate between the sect and the state continued to rankle, and in 1978, the Minister of Interior appointed a special commission to investigate and solve "the

problem of the Black Hebrews cult." Two years later, the resulting Glass Report (1980) confirmed that the Hebrews did not conform to the state's definition of "Who is a Jew" and were indeed disqualified from immigrating according to the Law of Return. It noted as well that all the group members should have been deported after the expiration of the 90-day tourist visas on their US passports. Recognizing, however, that hundreds of the Community's men, women and children had been living in the country for a decade, Glass and his colleagues recommended enactment of a one-time exception to the Law of Return that would allow those Black Hebrews to remain in Israel as legal residents. The state, however, did not implement this recommendation (see Markowitz, Helman and Shir-Vertesh 2003, 305), even as the illegal, and increasingly destitute Hebrew Israelite Community continued to grow in size and in reputation throughout the black world.

The state once again broke the stalemate in 1986, this time by launching a nighttime raid on those AHIC members who had found temporary work picking and packing fruit at a moshav. Fifty people were arrested, of whom 36 were deported (see Jackson 2013, 87). The Hebrews responded by staging public demonstrations in Dimona, Tel Aviv, and in Washington, DC. At all these venues, but especially in the US capital, they appealed for the right to reside with dignity in their ancestral homeland. At the same time, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to remain in Israel, the Black Hebrew Community filed into the US embassy in Tel Aviv and turned in their US passports. With that act, they automatically became stateless refugees, which obliged Israel, a signatory to the United Nations' refugee policy, to shelter them.

In the United States, deported Black Hebrews joined forces with local supporters who rallied members of the black Congressional Caucus to plead their cause. These black congressmen convinced their colleagues to assist the Community by including funds for building a school in Dimona and providing hot lunches to its pupils from within the multimillion-dollar US aid package designated for Israel.

Because of US government involvement, the AHIC became more than a rhetorical force to reckon with, and in 1989, the Minister of the Interior, Aryeh Deri of the Sephardic religious party Shas, came to Dimona and became the first Israeli cabinet member to meet with Ben Ammi. Their discussions ended with an oral agreement of principles in which the AHIC promised to curtail the number of illegal newcomers and to refrain from propagating "anti-Zionist views" (Owen 1990). In return, Deri gave assurances that Community members already residing in the country would be granted legal status. Three years later, the AHIC and the Ministry of the Interior of the State of Israel registered some 1,500 black Hebrew Israelites as temporary residents, and in 1993, the newly completed American-financed Achva Comprehensive School (K-12) opened its doors to the Community's children under the auspices of Israel's Ministry of Education. Over a decade passed before the government granted permanent resident status to most AHIC temporary residents (see Markowitz, Helman and Shir-Vertesh 2003), and in 2009, Elyahkeem Ben-Yehuda became the first black Hebrew Israelite – after

Prince Hizkiyakoo in 1969 – to apply for and receive Israeli citizenship (see Esensten 2009).

During the same timeframe, the Black Hebrews modified their narrative of exclusively black Chosenness and rid it of antagonistic anti-Israeli rhetoric. The AHIC now acknowledges that after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, although most Israelites fled south into Africa, some went northward into Europe and Asia where they became the ancestors of today's Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. Toward the end of the twentieth century, Prince Asiel, who was then the Community's international ambassador, told me, "It's not about black and white. It's about what's wrong and right. In 1968 we were young, and we were radical, and we were not about to let any white person tell us who we are and who we can and cannot be. We have studied, and we have grown. The Community in 1998 is not the same as in 1968." Applying the metaphor of a speckled bird, he expanded on the AHIC's long-standing position that all people with a demonstrated historical connection to Israel and devotion to the laws of the Tanakh hold a rightful place in the Land. This inclusiveness in no way detracts from the Black Hebrews' special position of having fulfilled the prophecies of Deuteronomy 28. Success in rallying the United States for support enabled the AHIC to secure solid footing for negotiating with the State of Israel, which furthered their goals of residence and recognition in Israel and confirmed their conviction that they were acting with God's favor.[5]

The State of Israel, however, even as it granted legal status to the Black Hebrews, has not amended its long-standing contention that they are not Jews. While some Israeli politicians, particularly in the city of Dimona, increasingly use inclusive language when referring to the Hebrew Israelite Community, such is not the case with the Chief Rabbinate. Although status-holding men and women of the AHIC view their receipt of rights and residence in Israel as acknowledgment, at last, that they are a part of the Jewish people, most Israelis do not agree. They see the Hebrews of Dimona as an exotic sect of black people that are not Jewish, but not entirely without connections to the Land and people of Israel. To delineate and solve this anomaly, the State of Israel made a decision not to change or expand its Law of Return, but to execute a tightly circumscribed *exception* to it. This shrewd solution left Israel's 1970 definition of "Who is a Jew" intact, and the African Hebrew Israelites, as a social category as well as rights-vested individuals, beyond its bounds.

Conclusions in the meantime: Black is, black ain't and the matter of black Jewish anomalies

Keenly aware from my earlier work in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the ongoing, not always successful, efforts that states exert to control their borders and stabilize population categories (Markowitz 2007), I sought to clarify how many Black Hebrews in Israel hold official status. I turned first to the director of the AHIC's Department of Public Relations, who reported that as of March 2019, some 2,000 of its men, women and children reported holding permanent resident status, while

an additional 500 claimed to be Israeli citizens.[6] I then sought the same information from the government, and at the end of March 2019, I sent an online inquiry to the Ministry of the Interior. That query was immediately redirected to the Authority for Population Statistics, which sent me instructions for completing another form to delineate the exact information I sought, and to specify the purpose to which that information would be used.[7] I did so, and a few days after that post, I received a one-sentence e-note stating that the sought information was not available to the public. I was ready to accept that my search had reached its end until an Israeli-born colleague advised me to "Write back and ask, 'Why?' " I followed his advice, and the next post I received now stated that the information I had requested was beyond the scope of the Authority for Population Statistics. As I was pondering that message my phone rang, and the caller identified himself as its sender. He then lowered his voice and said that if I really needed the data I had requested I should file an official complaint with the government and invoke the Freedom of Information Act to obtain it. Touched by his helpfulness and astonished by the secretive nature in which he was assisting with my request, I filed my complaint. In return, the Commissioner for the Freedom of Information in Israel sent me one sentence, "At the end of 2017 there were 40 temporary residents and 1,002 permanent residents." I immediately thanked the Commissioner and added a request for the number of Black Hebrew citizens. Five minutes later she responded, "98 citizens as of the end of 2017."

Although it is noteworthy, my primary aim in telling this convoluted story is not to expose the numerical discrepancy between the AHIC and the Israeli government, but to illustrate that government's discomfort in acknowledging that a mere 1500–2500 (depending on who is counting) Black Hebrews hold legal status and belonging in the State of Israel. The secrecy surrounding their existence contradicts the usual policy of transparency regarding Israel's demographics, as evidenced by easy online access to information and scores of publications documenting Israel's population according to age, sex, labor market participation, country of origin, religion, and ethnicity. The country's Central Bureau of Statistics regularly publishes demographic analyses of Israel's major cities, the Arab sector (sic), immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and from Ethiopia (see, e.g. the 2017 Press Release from the Central Bureau of Statistics, "The Ethiopian Population in Israel").

The government's reluctance to reveal the numbers of AHIC members holding official residency status and citizenship suggests an ongoing unease in its dealings with blacks and Africans, who, in addition to their plea for universal human rights, might invoke connections to Judaism and the Promised Land when seeking refuge or resettlement in Israel. In the main, Israelis tend to agree that blacks and Jews are incommensurate peoples of different geographic origins, beliefs, customs and religions, and even if their skin tones are closer to beige and brown than to ivory, dissociate themselves from Africa while identifying with Europe and whiteness (Kaplan 2002). In this bifurcated racialized world, black and African Jews seem, if not altogether unimaginable (Kaye/Kantrowitz 2007, 36), then a strange and jarring anomaly (Gibel Azoulay 2001), prompting

questions of authenticity and origins, Lost Tribes, deviant sects and heterodox cults (Markowitz 2018, 104).

It took decades of rabbinical debate for the State of Israel to confer Jewish status on the Beta Israel of Ethiopia, because they held to several customs that strayed from Orthodox Judaism, and having no knowledge of Hebrew, used liturgy and sacred books written in Ge'ez. Declaring them the long-isolated descendants of the Lost Tribe of Dan helped to explain those anomalies but did not entirely resolve them. After having been airlifted to Israel in 1984 and 1991, the Rabbinate insisted that these Ethiopian Jews rejoin the fold by stripping their Quessem of religious authority and requiring all men to undergo a "symbolic conversion" (see Djerrahian in this volume). In contrast, the Hebrew Israelites independently exited America and executed their own Aliyah. Once in Israel they proudly presented themselves as the descendants of the Tribe of Judah – not a deviant Lost Tribe – ready to serve the God of Israel in the Land of Israel. Israeli authorities, incredulous that black Americans might be of Jewish origins, offered them a way (back) into the mainstream through rabbinical supervision and conversion. But the Original Hebrew Israelites, steeped in the principles of Black Power and indignant about centuries of being misnamed and abused, declared themselves the rightful heirs to Israel with no need for conversion. They then bore the consequences of resisting rabbinical and state authority, until they rallied the support of the US. American patronage paved the way to negotiations with Israel's Minister of the Interior, and in 1992, without succumbing to the humiliation of rabbinical supervision they were granted temporary residence status. By 2004, with the bestowal of permanent residency, the African Hebrew Israelite Community won the rights and recognition that they had long claimed.

As this chapter has shown, while granting legal status to the AHIC, officials in the State of Israel continued their skepticism about the legitimacy of Black Jews, and they did not modify the 1970 definition of "Who is a Jew" to include them. Instead, they authorized a clearly delineated and restricted exception to the Law of Return. Despite that tidy solution, the resistance that I encountered when seeking state statistics documenting the Hebrews' legal statuses indicates continuing concern about that decision, one that the Israeli government prefers would remain under wraps. Perhaps they worry that if the AHIC's success in gaining residency rights without conforming to Halacha were made public, other black groups – like the Lemba of southern Africa whose songs, prayers, dietary practices and DNA suggest Jewish ancestry (LeRoux 2018; Tamarkin 2014), or even the thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers who interweave their experiences of suffering and exile with those of the Jewish people (Hankins 2018) – might cite it as a precedent in their own petitions for recognition and refuge.

Today, there are just over 200,000 African and African-descended people in Israel, the majority of whom are Ethiopian Israeli Jewish citizens of the Jewish State (144,100, see State of Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2017). There are also some 10,000 black Bedouins who also are citizens of Israel (see Bekerleg 2007; Strauss 2011), and the approximately 2,500 men, women and children of the AHIC. The remaining 35,000–40,000 are African migrants and asylum seekers

(Bob 2019, down from the 45,000–50,000 of 2012–2015). Despite the appeal of African American entertainment and sports figures to Ethiopian Israeli youth, and outreach efforts by the Hebrew Israelite Community toward Negev black Bedouin and African asylum seekers, for many reasons, these four groups have not united to forge a black identity or common cause in Israel.

The black, proud and righteous African Hebrew Israelites stand out in any assessment of the social and political life of blackness for perturbing Israelis' long-held beliefs about blacks and their inherent incommensurability with the Jewish people. True, since the state's early days, young Jewish immigrants from Arab countries adopted the name of the militant US Black Panthers (Bernstein 1984; Cohen 1972) to insist on equality and dignity while expressing anger at *being-made black* via discriminatory treatment from fellow Jews. However, it was only with the arrival of first dozens, and then hundreds of articulate and politically astute Black Hebrews, resolute in self- defining who they are and impervious to pressures to conform to the demands and definitions of (white) others, that Israelis encountered black people very different from their expectations. Rather than amending these socially imagined ideas of blackness, Israelis began to perceive of the Dimona Hebrew Israelites as an exception. That way of thinking about the AHIC, coupled with pressure to ameliorate their plight from Israel's most beneficent ally, ultimately led the state to reach the same conclusion: The African Hebrew Israelites, in their stance, style, beliefs and dedication to the God of Israel, are a unique exception to ordinary blackness, and merit exceptional action. By delineating a precise exception to its Law of Return, the State of Israel, its institutions, and many of its citizens (can) continue to view black people as other, and justifiably perpetuate their jaundiced view of Africans' petitions for sanctuary and inclusion.

As a result of being accepted on their own terms, long-term members of the African Hebrew Israelite Community have become a legal part of the people of Israel. But even as they are part, they are also inherently not part because they are considered a heterodox, black and non-Jewish – yet *not* entirely not Jewish group. Transgressing the boundaries of both black and Jewish social categories, they have been deemed exceptional and officially awarded legal status in Israel on that basis. It is precisely this exceptionality, those lingering doubts about their Jewishness coupled with certainty about their blackness, which preclude the further immigration of Black Hebrews and keeps the AHIC under scrutiny, peripherally and precariously placed on the verge of Israel's society and polity.

Notes

1 The AHIC is officially listed on the Internet as the African Hebrew Israelite Community of Jerusalem. In Israel, they are known as the Hebrew Israelite Community of Dimona, or the Black Hebrews. Many Israelis refer to them as *ha-cushim ha-ivriim*, which the Community rejects because they sense that the Hebrew *cushi* is a pejorative, equivalent to the English n-word. When they first entered Israel and throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, they called themselves the Original Black Hebrew Israelite Nation. Adults often describe their entry into the Community as joining the Nation or coming

into the Kingdom (of God/Yah). This multitude of names reflects different yet overlapping periods in the AHIC's 50-year history, as well as the group's assertion that will be discussed throughout this chapter: that they hold the power to define who they are and how to name themselves (see Ben-Ammi 1990, 50–80).

2 YouTube video, "Ben Ammi's Own Words Why He Left America," November 2002.

3 The Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, ratified three years after the 1865 Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery, granted citizenship to former slaves, and guaranteed all citizens "equal protection of the laws."

4 In the wake of what is known as "The Brother Daniel Case," the Israeli government enacted an amendment to its Law of Return. Without providing definitions or guidelines as to "who is a Jew," the original law stated that "every Jew has the right to come [to Israel] as an immigrant." In 1962, Brother Daniel, who had been born and raised a Jew but converted to Roman Catholicism during the Nazi occupation of Poland, was denied Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return because he had left the faith. He appealed this decision, but the ruling was upheld. In 1970, an amendment to the Law of Return stipulated that Israeli residence and citizenship are rights only for persons having a Jewish mother or grandmother, or having a Jewish father or grandfather, or who have converted to Judaism. The amended Law of Return also specified that despite birth of a Jewish mother or father, those who had converted to another religion became ineligible for immigration under the Law of Return.

5 At the same time, it had also strengthened their connection to, and dependence upon the country that they had long abjured as the Land of the Great Captivity. While I view this development as ironic, several men in the AHIC governing structure assured me that it was not. Their view of the money received from the United States is as delayed compensation for their ancestors' slave labor. And besides, they noted, "God works in mysterious ways."

6 These figures are an approximation based on self-reports, and since the AHIC has no official liaison with Israel's Interior Ministry, are not official.

7 I requested the number of Black Hebrews who are permanent residents and citizens and listed my purpose as "ongoing academic research in the Hebrew Israelite Community of Dimona."

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Part IV

Blackness and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

12 What is the color of the Arab?

A critical view of color games[1]

Honaida Ghanim

This chapter aims to investigate the way in which color is represented as well as its symbolic, conversational and visual expressions in the changing social and national context. My argument is that the color perception of the individual self or of the collective and its representation is a social construction. This assertion is based on an examination of the way the Palestinian in Israel representing their color at different moments in their history: the moment of national resistance, the moment of national ambivalence, and a moment of nationalistic withdrawal.

At the moment of national resistance, which prevailed strongly from the time of the Nakba until the end of the 1960s, the Palestinian color is constructed as dark and blackish, while the Zionist colonialist is represented by whiteness. Darkness is presented as a certificate of indigenousness and denotes an organic and direct connection of Palestinians to their homeland. Whiteness, on the other hand, is presented as the color of immigrants, occupiers, aliens, that which is illegitimate.

At the moment of ambivalence, the national identity waivers and causes the Arab to vacillate between the desire for freedom in the future and disappointment in the present. The entire national discourse is scrutinized, even though no adequate ideological alternative has yet been found. The attitude to darkness as the color of indigenousness also changes and becomes the clear sign of the national trap: on the one hand there is no desire to regard it as the national marker; on the other, there is no way to be rid of it.

At the moment of national withdrawal, the discourse of indigenousness is replaced by the discourse of citizenship. Arabs in Israel are offered opportunities for personal advancement on the social scale. Whitewashing becomes a significant means for passing, for acceptance by the dominant group. Darkness and blackness turn into signifiers of cultural backwardness and of "ethnic violence," and the aspiration is to erase or soften them. The ability to maneuver in a wide range of colors and identities derives, *inter alia*, from the fact that Arabs are perceived as not quite black and not quite white – they are half-White and half-Black (Bishara, 2003) – "Summor"

An examination of the modes of representation of colors will be conducted in three different fields: **National poetry** – the poems of Mahmoud Darwīsh and Rashad Ḥusayn (Rashid Hassan?) written in 1954–1957, which reflect the moment of national resistance, and the poems of Nazeih Kheir that reflect the moment

of ambivalence; **Autobiographic texts –** Sayed Kashua's novel, *Dancing Arabs* (2004), which reflects the ambivalent national atmosphere that prevailed in the 1980s and in the early 1990s; **Visual representations –** the photograph of Leila Khaled that reflects the moment of national resistance compared to photographs of Arab celebrities at the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s that represented the moment of national withdrawal – the dissipation of the Palestinian national dream and the intensification of the Israelization process.

"Asmar": The fluctuation of the liminal color

In folklore, in the national discourse and in oral and written historical narrative Arabs are described as having a blackish color. Classical and modern poets tended to use "Asmar" (for males) and "Samraa" (for females) in their descriptions to praise a loved one, to describe their heroes and to indicate their ethnic lineage and belonging. Thus, according to the classical Arab dictionary *Lisan al-Arab* by Ibn Manzur:

> al-*sumra* is the color between black and white. It derives from the word *'samar'* – the shadow of the moon, as its color is in the range between white and black. The term *el-samar*is from the same root and means no sleep and talking into the night.

In the modern dictionary *Al-Wasit*[2] (1960), published by the Arab Language Union (Academy?) (*Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah*) in Egypt it says: "*Asmar,* (plural *sumor*; f. samraa, *samrawat*) – the water returns the color of *asmar,* almost the color of *sumra,* i.e. between black and white." And the Al-Mukhit dictionary (1990) says: "*Al-asmar:* someone who (embodies the -) *sumra,* i.e. whose color is between black and white."

From the three above definitions we learn that the uniqueness of the color *asmar* is its liminality, its position on the threshold between black and white. It belongs to both these color categories equally yet does not belong to either of them. "*Asmar*" is on the margins of black and of white and as such is likely to turn into a performance venue of racialized identities. As a liminal color it presents possibilities of passing and challenges the essentialist assumptions that are often attributed to skin color. It shows that ethnic or racial (and even sexual) identities are performative identities that may be realized under certain conditions or dismissed and discarded under other conditions.

Palestinian folklore is rich in poems that present the ontological tension derived from the Arab being neither black nor white. At folk weddings, for example, it is still common to hold a competition between two poets who take upon themselves the task of representing color – one praising the beauty of fair women and vilifying dark women, while the other praises the beauty of dark women and vilifies fair ones. The competition speeds up greatly as audience enthusiasm increases and is always open-ended, as there is no winner or loser. Both colors remain in the

realm of possibility in constructing beauty and ugliness – but also of ambivalence, of vacillation and of desire that dances to the beat of the national context.

Black as a certificate of indigenousness: Reflection of the moment of national resistance in poems and pictures

After the Nakba in 1948 some 170,000 Palestinians, about a tenth of the Palestinian people at the time (Keyman 1984, 5) remained within Israel's borders. Jaffa, Haifa, Acre and west Jerusalem were almost emptied of their Arab inhabitants and the abandoned areas underwent a "cleansing" process that all but erased all traces of the culture that was flourishing there only several months previously. Azmi Bishara (1993) notes that "The Palestinian population in Israel after 1948 were the remnants of a defeated society." Nevertheless the Palestinian population that survived regarded the new reality as temporary and fleeting, and the national poetry that emerged in 1954 clearly reflects this attitude (Ghanem, 2004). Poets clearly conceptualized their experience as one of a nation under temporary colonialist rule. The poetry focused on praise for the homeland, a call for resistance and a depiction of Palestinian suffering. The state as a civilian arena was absent other than as the guilty party, as being the colonialist and oppressive conqueror (ibid.).

From an anthropological perspective poetry is a textual narrative used by nations to depict their imagined past, present and future experiences. According to Edward Said, for societies under colonialist rule the narrative is an important device for highlighting their historical past and unique identity:

> The main war is indeed over the land, but when the issue spills over to questions such as who is entitled to the land, who has the right to live on it and work it… who returned it and who is shaping its future – then the way in which these issues are reflected in discourse is what will determine (the outcome).
>
> (Said, 1997, 58)

For the Palestinians since 1948 poetry has been the most important reflection tool for their national experiences, beliefs and desires. The poetry of Mahmoud Darwīsh, Samih al-Qasim, Moein Basiso and Rashed Ḥusayn, was of decisive importance in constituting the culture of resistance among/for Palestinians, in supplying national myths and in constructing the image of the Palestinian fighter who looks onto his occupied homeland.

The Palestinian national identity was created by these poets and those of the Nakba generation around two important elements in which color plays an important role. First, the construction of the Palestinian national identity as an essential entity and presenting members of the group as blackish compared to the others, the white-skinned invaders. Second, the native's connection to land was presented as being an organic and symbiotic one without cultural intermediaries. The color of land and the color of the native are one.

In the words of Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 1985) minorities appropriate the essentialism as a tactic for creating the authenticity of their experience. When they are in danger of being symbolically or actually wiped out or of severance from their historic or national context, they tend to adopt the identity as both an essentialist stand and as a political strategy (see Lavie and Swedenburg, 1995). The differences between the self and others – within as well as outside the society – thus become essential. According to Hall (1988), making identity essential is a two-fold process of containment and exclusion. The process creates a binary division and total dichotomy between self and the other, and defines the "friend" as opposed to the "enemy" as in Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (Schmitt, [1932], 1976). According to Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (1995) turning identity into an essence is a tool used by the racialized oppressed as a defense against and resistance to oppression. The poet appropriated this essentialism to form his political stand against the oppressor. The Palestinians in Israel experienced reality after the Nakba as a snare; a bubble bordered by death. Thus, their social cohesion was created as a sort of "forced volunteerism." In 1958 Rashid Hassan wrote: "*Our borders are serrated guillotines / Death spills into them from fortified posts*" (Hassan 1990, 322).[3] In response to the Palestinian trap within the borders of death the poet marked the collective identity as an essentialized one and presented it as an active, creative and proud identity. In 1966 Mahmoud Darwīsh wrote in his poem, "A Song for Men":

> We are indeed Arabs
> And we are not ashamed of it
> We know how to hold a sickle handle
> And how will he defend himself he who has no gun
> We know how to build a modern factory
> (…) a home, a hospital, a school, a bomb and a rocket
> And we compose music and beautiful songs, polished and full of feeling and thought
>
> (Darwīsh 1988, 251)

As opposed to this identity the others are described in light of the national destruction. They are marked as invaders whose presence in Palestine is an act of rape. Thus wrote Darwīsh in his poem "Identity Card":

> So!
> Write at the top of page one
> I do not hate people
> And I am not an encroacher
> But if I get hungry
> The flesh of my rapist will be my food
> Beware …
> Beware …

Of my hunger
And of my anger.
(ibid., 76)[4]

In the presence of this perception of the other, the poet's words become discursive ammunition through which he raises his experience of indigenousness. This is Darwīsh's answer to the question "Who are you?" asked by the Jewish investigator at a detention center:

Write!
I am an Arab.
The color of my hair … coal
The color of my eyes … brown
My characteristics:
On my head is a headband on a keffiyeh
The palm of my hand is strong as a rock
My address:
I am from a forgotten and undefended village
With nameless streets
And where all the men … in the fields and the quarry
Does that make you angry?
(ibid.)

Darwīsh's answer is drafted in terms of the indigenous identity the Palestinian presents compared to the Israeli identity forced on him. Against attempts by the other to expropriate his identity the poet paints the native Palestinian – his characteristics, facial features, eye color, hand structure, the look in his eye and his skin color – and holds it up to the Zionist invader, the colonialist.

As aforementioned, color is the identifying mark of indigenousness and it creates an organic connection between the indigenous inhabitants and the soil of the homeland. In Palestinian eyes, the organic connection is evidence of their claim on the land. In his poem "The Red Harvest" written in memory of children from the village of Sandala killed in a bomb explosion in the fields of Marj Ibn Amer, Rashed Ḥusayn, writes: "*The flesh of our sons is your mud / Their faces blackened, as are you*" (Ḥusayn, 1990, 186). And in his poem "The Revolution of the Peasant Farmer" he writes:

The color of the blackish mountains was created by the farmer's breaths
If you ask, their rocks will tell you about the plower, the reaper and the shepherd
[…]
I swear by the pure blood, by the dark girl in war time
If I do not obtain my rights by force, dogs will feed off my flesh
(ibid., 121–122)

The Palestinian's body is made of the mud from the soil of Marj Ibn Amer, his skin is dark, the exact same color as this soil. It seems that the dark color of the soil spilled over and colored the Palestinian's world, the loved one, the warrior, the fida'i,[5] the village. This collaboration is the source of allegorical and metaphorical games in which the land and the lover become alternative terms for the homeland. The two interchange to the extent that they become indistinguishable. Mahmoud Darwīsh wrote about this in his poem "The Shahid Song":

> I was not the first to carry a bouquet of thorns
> To tell the dark woman: cry
> I loved you like a religion …
> (Darwīsh, 1988, 104)

On the other hand, in his poem "The Poets' Hangman" (in the feminine) Rashed Ḥusayn, describes the Israeli lover as having blonde hair, a colonialist and alien persona:

> And two blonde plaits, radiating sunlight,
> Sent by her to watch over the blooming leaves of hell
> And her exposed breast that became cemetery for the Ten Commandments
> (Ḥusayn, 1990, 259)

Ḥusayn continues and exposes the balance of power between himself and his mistress:

> Your lips, a storm of reddish death
> Lying like a meat pie in the dark bed
> And I devour the flesh of the lips at her command
> Wild despite the culture and the grey civilization
> (ibid., 260)

The Arab fluctuates in his existence as a colonial subject and experiences the sexual act between him and the Jewish woman as a symbolic battle between the dark Arab and the white invader: the Arab defeated in war wins in bed. Indeed he indicates that the woman is the controller, as it is she who arouses his passion with the demands emanating from her lips, ordering him to devour them with the uninhibited passion relayed by her body – "the Storm of Reddish Death." But it is in fact the Arab man who dictates the tempo with a recklessness he adopts to tame this storm; i.e. by adopting the rules of the game that he thinks is appropriate for the wild situation. Passing the struggle between the conqueror and the conquered, from the colonial context to that of the bedroom, and the symbolic outcome thereof is not unique to the Palestinians. For numerous Third World writers, the sexual conquest of the white woman is a form of fighting back.[6]

In juxtaposition to the blonde Jewish mistress is the lover, an allegory for the homeland as a sad and suffering character entreated by the poet to wrestle against her pain. This is how Ḥusayn, described his Palestinian loved one in the poem "The Blue Dress":

> Oh dark one, your eyes are the cradle of the heart of the merciful poet
> […]
> Do not cry, tread mercilessly on the hearts of the roses
> If not for the flowers of love in our land, we would not see the shadow of the moon.
>
> (ibid., 39)

This form of representation is strongly connected to the historic circumstances in which the poems were written in the 1950s and 1960s. In those years numerous national struggles against colonialism took place. The Algerian war of independence was at its peak and many Third World nations gained independence. It was also a time of the Black struggle against racism in the United States and Arab nationalism led by Gamal Abdel Nasser was flourishing. The Third World presented a revolutionary alternative in which dark men and woman were its agents. In his poem *The "Murder of Djamila Bouhired"* written about the Algerian freedom fighter when it was falsely rumored that she had been murdered by the French, Rashed Ḥusayn, wrote:

> The gardens of Algeria in Djamila's eyes rested
> And the blackish honor shines over the merciful lips
> Prison cells could not extinguish extinguish her flames
> […]
> Djamila was etched on the arm of her people as a mark of honor
>
> (Ḥusayn, 1990, 238)

As an activist in the Algerian struggle for liberation Bouhired presented a model different from that of the submissive woman in a patriarchal society. She served as an inspiration for Palestinian women fighters, who carry guns and struggle for the freedom of Palestine, such as the woman portrayed by Ḥusayn in his poem "*To the Woman Fighter*":

> You, whose words were written in fire
> Your power is like a poem in the revolutionary hearts
> […] It is you I loved, you I revered
> […] I do not seek beauty and delicacy in my beloved
> […]
> The revolutionary worships only the beloved who fights
> […]
> And tomorrow we will still meet in the liberated square
>
> (ibid., 246–247)

The poem is a means whereby the Palestinian body becomes an alternative arena for the representation of desired national and cultural codes. The visibility of this body, i.e. its performativity and verbal expressions, transforms the Palestinian hero in nationalistic poetry into a representative of the national struggle and of coping with the reality of political and national oppression. In contrast, the image is meant for the internal Palestinian audience as well as for the other. The image of the real Palestinian warrior (fida'i, or Fedayeen) in the 1970s and 1980s is a visual expression of the dark revolutionary depicted in Folkloric songs, such as the description of Yasser Arafat as a fighter in the siege of Tel al-Zaatar:[7]

"I saw him, a blackish fida'i, in the alleys of Tel al-Zaatar, his name Abu Amar." The dark fida'i (man) or fidaya (woman), carrying rifles – the archetypal image of the Palestinian warrior – is the answer to the other and the call of Palestinians to action. Thus did Leila Khaled become the mythological symbol of the new Palestinian woman – dark, wearing a kaffiyeh and bearing the flag of the liberation of the conquered homeland. However, this image of Leila Khaled that inspired the hearts of all Palestinians by presenting the Palestinians as freedom fighter began to dim among Palestinians in Israel due to the influences of historical, local and global developments.

Darkness as a trap: Reflection of the moment of ambivalence in autobiographic poetry and prose

The annulment of the military government over Israeli Arabs in 1966 and the 1967 Six Day War had a far-reaching influence on Palestinians in Israel. The annulment of military rule led to a partial presence of Arabs in the Israeli civil space, while the meeting with Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip led to their renewed presence in the overall Palestinian and Arab space. But in both these spaces their presence was typified by their inherent differentness and structural liminality. My use of the term "structural liminality" refers to the transition of the perception of their status in the reality created by the Nakba and the establishment of the State of Israel as temporary and fleeting, to the perception of their status as permanent, as in "permanent impermanence." According to this concept Arabs in Israel are unique in their differentness in both the Palestinian and the Israeli spheres. In the Palestinians sphere, although they are part of the Palestinian People, they are excluded from the Palestinian national dream because they are Israeli citizens, while in the Israeli sphere, they are contained as citizens, yet are excluded from the country's national structure as they are not Jewish. They are thus positioned somewhere on the border of the two spheres – containment and exclusion – being simultaneously contained and excluded. This situation is characterized by a sense of hesitation and ambivalence and is to a great extent different from the secure sense of nationalism that prevailed after 1948, the focus of which was the dream of a liberated Palestine. The national dream reflected in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwīsh and Rashad Ḥusayn, was replaced by various alternatives – ideas about liberating the territories conquered in 1967 alongside absorption Arabs in Israeli civilian society. The 1967 borders, which had been

decided by military power, started to take shape as the border of the national discourse. This transition was due to the political, social and national changes that took place at the time.

In the general Arab arena, the defeat in the 1967 war exposed the weakness of Arab countries and their inability to keep pace with the advancement of the modern world. Consequently, the vision of pan-Arab nationalism collapsed and turned from a delusion into a nightmare. Many Palestinians recognized Israel's military strength and the weakness of the Arab armies. On the Palestinian national front, the belief grew that a Palestinian state would be established in the territories conquered in 1967 and that the national project would mainly take effect in the refugee camps. On the Israeli civilian front the partial inclusion of the Arabs was on the rise. With the annulment of the military government in 1966 Israeli control over the Arabs and direct surveillance of their every move became more lenient. In this connection it is important to note two significant processes: first, most surveillance resources were diverted to the occupied territories, which resulted in less surveillance on the Arabs in Israel; second, the Arab population was constituted as marginal group that was self-supervisory.

In the Arab discourse the 1967 defeat is called "*Naksa*" i.e. a temporary setback, compared to the "*Nakba,*" which was a total catastrophe. The defeat expresses not only the collapse of the belief of Nakba generation poets that the national crisis will be solved, it also marks the differences between Palestinians in Israel and the rest of the Palestinians. Some even regard it as the beginning of the history of Israeli Arabs as a group separated from the Palestinians. Thus wrote Azmi Bishara:

> 1967 marked the real beginning of the separation of the Palestinian minority in Israel and the rest of the Palestinians, as it seemed then that in addition to their improved economic status, the Arabs [in Israel] enjoyed political and civic benefits that West Bank and Gaza inhabitants did not have. If until 1967 the ultimate frame of reference for Palestinians in Israel was the homeland, and the Palestinian struggle was perceived as being against the foreign invader, after 1967 the abovementioned factors led to the presence of the State becoming part of the landscape of the Palestinian in Israel. This was indicated by the awareness of Israeli citizenship that grew in the 1970s together with the rise in the Palestinian national consciousness.
>
> (Bishara, 2000, 85)

This process was accompanied by a transformation of the discourse on the collective and national identity (Ghanim 2004). Before 1967 Palestinian poets positioned the collective oppressed and just self against the colonialist oppressive other, and regarded the injustice created by the very establishment of the State of Israel on the ruins of Palestinian villages as the base of the oppression. On the other hand, for the reasons mentioned above, after the 1967 war the Palestinians living inside Israel adopted a civilian discourse and demanded equality as Israeli citizens. The issues that started to crystalize on an intellectual level were not about

how to deal with the colonialist presence and the conqueror, but rather about the possibilities of integrating into the Israeli political structure and about how to soften the boundaries between the self and the other.

The national subject, which grew in the shadow of the ancestral dream of liberating the homeland, began to flounder after the defeat in 1967 between dream and nightmare. For example, in his autobiographical book *Dancing Arabs* (2008), Sayed Kashua, writes that the national hope is dying. However, one can still sense its presence behind his words:

> There haven't an ounce of hope in my heart. I am filled with hate. I hate my father. Because of him I can't leave this country, because he taught us there was no other place for us, that we must never giver give up; it would be better to die for the land. I picture him and tell him everything that's on my mind. I say that if it weren't for all the nonsense he drummed into us I would have left long ago. Now he is drunk, like me, but still clings to hope. If he loses that he'll die. Hope is dwindling, but somewhere it can still be felt. Even when he cries, as Nazareth comes under attack, it sounds like the distress of someone who expects the great redemption to come soon…
>
> (ibid., 151–152)

As hope dwindles, the Palestinian finds himself in an uncomfortable position. The dream is diminishing but the reality does not offer a suitable solution. The presumptions of certain victory that formed the basis of the national discourse weakened and mythical representations turned into the source of ambivalence. The identity was no longer unequivocal and no longer served as a shelter, and the period was marked by a sense of embarrassment and uncertainty. The dichotomous thinking of the self vis-à-vis the other as two concrete entities that characterized the poetry and literature in the 1950s and the 1960s and is expressed in Darwīsh's poem "Identity Card" written in 1964 (Darwīsh, 1988, 76), was replaced by reflection, contemplation and by wandering identities, as expressed in the poem of Nazia khair, "Identity," published in Hebrew:

> Do not be astonished
> I am the strange contradiction
> Between a thousand opinions and a thousand lies
> In all breached fences
> I am the contradiction in the balance between the old and the new
> The contradiction between the fortune teller and practicality.
>
> (Nazeih Kheir, 1993, 251)

The sense of ambivalence and insecurity is even more pronounced further along in the poem:

> When I sleep in my Israeli belonging
> And sometimes wake with my Palestinian grief

With my Arab anguish
And with my Druze discomfort
So what do you want me to say,
That all these are my identity.
(ibid., 252)

The disintegration of the boundaries of the collective identity created in the national poetry following the Nakba calls into question all the markers of national identity and its symbols. *Inter alia*, the darkness of color and steadfast Arabness cease to be the source of security and the symbol of Palestinian identity vis-à-vis white Israeliness. In fact, dark Arabness becomes a stumbling block, a booby trap for the Arab's racialized identity. Again, the question of color arises in the context of the ambivalent position of the Arab placed on the threshold: neither black enough nor white enough, neither Palestinian enough nor Israeli enough.

Unlike the blackish Palestinian, who viewed his darkness as proof of his indigenousness, the ambivalent Arab moves between his black or white masks according to the circumstances. The Arab sometimes chooses whiteness as a defense mechanism, but he can never really be white; he can only wear a white mask. Sayed Kashua describes the fluctuation between whiteness and blackness in the social context:

> There was one time when they picked up on the fact that I was an Arab and recognized me. So right after that I became an expert at assuming false identities. It was at the end of my first week of school in Jerusalem. I was on the bus going home to Tira. A soldier got on and told me to get off. I cried like crazy. I'd never felt so humiliated.
>
> (Kashua, 2004, 91)

This incident taught Kashua that it was worthwhile to hide his Arabness to avoid being bullied and humiliated, a direct outcome of the very unbalanced meeting with the culture of force and control. Kashua goes on to describe his intention, with the onset of the October 2000 *Intifada*, to conceal his identity:

> I'll tell the cops I'm a citizen and that I'm only renting here. I'll show them my ID. I got it at the Ministry of Interior in Netanya. I'm not really a Palestinian … I'm counting on the fact that I look like a Jew. Let's just hope they don't see my wife. Couldn't I have picked someone with a lighter complexion?
>
> (ibid., 154)

Concealing blackness is undoubtedly one of the alleviating measures used by many Arabs when they enter the Jewish-Israeli sphere – shopping mall entrances, road blocks, in city centers and in all other places in which the distinction between "friend" and "enemy" is based on racial phenotypes. However, concealment behind the whiteness mask requires extreme reduction of identity down to the

mute phenotype. Any deviation from this position, any attempt to increase the extent of one's presence beyond the phenotypic component – entails a complete turnabout, as it places the Arab in a position of imposter and thus exposes him to additional bullying. The minute the Arab opens his mouth his accent immediately gives him away and he is then seen not as just an Arab, but also as a "criminal" whose success in infiltrating the Jewish-Israeli space indicates the need to create more stringent sorting methods. The whiteness disguise is only effective as long as the physical and verbal signifiers are silenced. Thus, this whiteness is loaded, tense, and primarily threatening.

Yet security personnel asked to distinguish between an Arab and a Jew solely according to racial phenotypes will fail to do so; other racial markers are required to fulfil this mission, such as accent, facial expression, body language, and perhaps even smell. In an interview with Galei Zahal (the army radio station) on May 20, 2003, Knesset member and former Deputy Head of the General Security Services (GSS), Gidon Ezra proposed a way to differentiate between Arabs and non-Arabs. He suggested that Arab security guards be used in crowded spaces because, he claimed, Arabs will have more success in identifying potential terrorists. According to Ezra,

> The person best able to differentiate between Arabs and non-Arabs is an Arab. He will be able to use his sense of smell to make this differentiation better than any of us can, and definitely better than anyone who immigrated (to Israel) from the former Soviet Union.
>
> (Walla, 2003)[8]

Improving people-sorting methods helps to cope with the liquidity of color, with melting boundaries and with signifiers that refuse to be definitive. Yet not only the ruler improves his sorting methods – those under his control also improve their masks to avoid exposing their annoying identity in a way that makes it increasingly difficult to perform the sorting mission, and also sometimes because they have internalized the power and attraction of whiteness as a meta-signifier. In other words, faking identities may avoid bullying and harassment, but it is also part of the desire nestling in the heart of those ruled to be part of the ruling culture and to discard the marks of inferiority that the ruling culture has attributed them. As Kashua writes:

> I look more Israeli than the average Israeli. I'm always pleased when Jews tell me this. 'You don't look like an Arab at all' they say. Some people claim it's a racist thing to say, but I've always taken it as a compliment, a sign of success. That's what I've always wanted to be, after all, a Jew. I've worked hard at it, and I've finally pulled it off.
>
> (Kashua, 2004, 91)

For Palestinians living in the shadow of the hegemony of Israeli culture and its values, the expression *"You don't look like an Arab at all"* has deep emotional

significance. This includes feelings of shame of the defeated self, embarrassment with regard to identity, awareness of the disgust felt by the other, and very often also self-disgust. It inherently comes with a range of assumptions, stereotypes and racial prejudices, as is reflected in the first and traumatic meeting between Kashua and his peers in the Jewish boarding high school he attended:

> I cried when my roommates found out I'd never heard of the Beatles and laughed at me. They laughed when I said *bob* music instead of *pop* music. They laughed when I threatened to complain to Principal Binhas- instead of Pinhas. "What did you say his name was?" they asked, and like an idiot I repeated it: "Binhas." […] They laughed at my pants. At first I even believed them when they said they really wanted to know where they could buy such pants. "Do they make special pants for Arabs?" they asked.
>
> (ibid., 92–93)

The Arab present in the space dominated by white Jewish Israeliness and whitewashing is not a neutral subject in his own eyes, but a subject made up of a range of national, cultural and social tensions, especially of the emotional complexes created by the power relations that exists between slave and master (Fanon, 2008) – i.e. between the marginal and defeated Arab and the Jewish victor and ruler. The Arab is the antithesis of the cultured Jew; his appearance, clothing and minimal education are the markers of a backward otherness. Kashua is forced to upgrade himself in order to resemble the cultured other; to be more Israeli than the Israelis, to internalize the image the other created of him.

Yet, he uses the very same image – the same perceptions that caused him to cry in his first meeting with Jews, i.e. before whitewashing himself, to sort Arabs. This is evident in a conversation that developed between Kashua and his Arab lady friend Shadia, who worked at a discotheque:

> It's the night of Purim and two Arabs are taking over the dance floor. 'They shouldn't let Arabs dance here', I say to Shadia, who's standing there with me behind the bar. She chuckles and agrees with me. "It's disgusting. In Nejaidat or any other village like that, people like that would be raped. I'm telling you, they simply grab those kinds of people and fuck them whenever they want to."
>
> (Kashua, 2004, 173)

Kashua agrees:

> They are really ugly, especially the short one with the mustache. He swivels his ass, crammed into those cloth pants of his, making a mockery not only of himself but of anyone dancing next to him – of the whole bar, especially Shadia and me.
>
> (ibid.)

Opposite the Arabs who arouse feelings of disgust in the cultured others with their crude demonstration of all the markers of backward Arabness (mustache,

inappropriate dancing style), Kashua and Shadia are standing together as two people, a man and a woman, who represent the model of the "cultured Arab," who know how to dance, to speak fluent Hebrew and to hold a conversation according to impressive cultural codes. According to Kashua, "Shadia was the first Arab I met who knew about Tom Waits" (ibid., 126). She probably also knew who the Beatles were. In other words, she is an Arab who had moved closer to whiteness.

Fanon writes:

> Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.
>
> (2008 [1952], 9)

In Kashua's book Shadia reaches a point when she can no longer bear the sight of "ugly" Arabs who do not understand that they are not worthy of dancing in the company of the cultured Jew. They should not dance because they arouse revulsion:

> "This is my last shift here," Shadia says. "I can't stand the sight of this place anymore. I can't the sight of all these Arabs. They've destroyed the place, they've driven out the paying customers. The ugliest people in Jerusalem come here, good-for-nothings who think they're God. I swear I feel like calling in a few people from Nejaidat, just to come in here and knock these guys senseless, the little shits. Especially the one with the mustache." She giggles and covers her mouth with the back of her hand.
>
> (Kashua, 2004, 174)

The image conveyed by the two Arabs under the scrutinizing looks of the Jews fills Kashua with anxiety. Do I arouse the same feeling among Jews that the Arabs arouse in me? What do they think of me? Am I repulsive to them? In short – am I seen as I was in my first meeting with Jews in the boarding school? In this regard he writes:

> There's no way I can look like them. If I convey what these Arabs convey, I'm in serious trouble. But it's out of the question. People aren't scared of me, and they're not put off by me. Or maybe they are, except they manage to hide it.
>
> (ibid.)

There is no doubt that Kashua's fear of being viewed as "that kind of" Arab would not have arisen in a discotheque in Nazareth (assuming there is one). It arises only when he sees himself as an Arab. This means that he is an Arab only because of "a series of logical errors from which he needs to be extricated" (Fanon, 2008).

On the dance floor of the ruling Jew Kashua's racialized identity functions as code according to which the other organizes his perception and constructs his identity. Kashua is not only responsible for his own behavior, but also for the behavior of everybody who belongs to the "tribe" he comes from. This is the source of the discomfort and ambivalence regarding the collective identity.

Blackness as regression, whiteness as privilege: Reflection of the moment of national withdrawal in visual expressions

> The signing of the Oslo Accords officially marked the shattering of the national dream of liberating all of Palestine. The winds of citizenship blew like a storm. Demands for equality and full citizenship, expressed in the state-for-all-its-citizens discourse, were in fact a clear expression of the State as the sole sphere of action. The ambivalence and uncertainty that replaced the certainty of liberation after the 1967 defeat gave way, following the Oslo Accords, to the understanding that national liberation meant the establishment of a Palestinian state in the territories captured in 1967.

The dark rifle-bearing warrior fighting for the liberation of Palestine turned into a fighter for the establishment of a state in the 1967 occupied territories. In the eyes of many Israel turned from a colonialist state into one that breached international law by "occupying" the territory of the other. Thus the occupation became a tool for endorsing Zionist colonialism of historic Palestine. At the same time a sense of hope developed among the Arabs in Israel that the state was about to grant them full and equal civil rights. These hopes were fed by individual achievements of several Arabs; the first Arab citizen (Rana Raslan) won the Miss Israel beauty contest; the first Arab judge (Abdel Rahman Zuabi) was appointed to the Supreme Court; the first Arab Knesset member (Hashem Mahamid) was appointed to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee; and recently Raleb Majadele became the first Arab minister in the Israeli government. For the first time Arabs stood to become full citizens!

On a macro level the Arab discourse in Israel focused on intensifying demands of a state for all its citizens, and on the micro level individualists received symbolic (indirect) support for their desire to integrate in the country. Therefore, in the current citizenship discourse deeds that were previously labeled as unpatriotic, even treasonous, are now clarified as positive. The best example of this is the appointment of Knesset member Hashem Mahamid to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. One can claim that this is a civil achievement and a challenge to the Zionist structure of the state, but to the same extent one can also claim that, at the very least, it is an unpatriotic action.

The State of Israel is still the State of the Jews, but it has become more liberal in the absorption of the Arabs in its midst and the citizenship discourse has become the dominant one among the Arabs. In this way Arabs as individuals may enjoy the rights granted to Jewish citizens, under conditions of the system – i.e. in the context of Israel as being a Western-oriented, Zionist and white state.

Whitewashing has become a tool for the individual's transition to the privileged group. According to Allan Ginsberg (1996), the cultural logic of the transition is usually driven by the desire to discard the identity of the oppressed group and to allow its entry into the world of the economic and social opportunities of the ruling group.

A picture of Arab soccer player Sami Daniel on the cover of (the magazine) *Anashim* in 2000 is a riveting example of whitewashing as an option.[9] The player appears naked holding the Israeli flag, and the caption quoted him as saying, "*Do I look like a terrorist?"* He has green or blue eyes and brown hair and his fair skin and smile are the antithesis to the image of the dark-skinned freedom fighter, the Fedayeen. In his article on the construction of masculinity in Israeli soccer, Tomer Sorek writes:

> Daniel certainly does not look like a terrorist. […] Terrorists, as every child knows, are dark and hairy. Daniel is light-skinned and is far from hairy. […] Furthermore, the popular image of contemporary Palestinian terrorists includes conservative religiosity, and they are not expected to expose their naked bodies in public.
>
> (Sorek, 2005)

Sorek adds that the reader will soon understand that Daniel is an excellent soccer player who is also good in bed and totally blind to his national, religious and ethnic dimensions. (Ibid.). This blindness is designed to shed the markers of blackness, which in the Israeli hegemonic discourse are perceived as associated with terroristic, murderous and destructive Arabness.

In the present case black does not only refer to dark skin, but to a range of racialized national, social and cultural signifiers. Passing can take place only when the Arab discards these signifiers of blackness. This act of stripping is an important symbolic step by the soccer player on the path to whitewashing: thus, the Arab exposes to the suspicious Jewish observer that he is not carrying an explosive belt. Daniel's pleasant smile sends a message of peace and his love of life and serves to placate the observer; the flag is his insurance policy – I am white, cheerful, sexy and I love the country exactly as it is. Using his body, which is free of all signifiers of blackness, Daniel, the Arab, projects the social meaning of whiteness. The performative appearance and the symbolic messages conveyed by his body to the white person who will decode and interpret them in a way that is totally unconnected to the Arab's national and cultural heritage.

Rana Raslan, Miss Israel 1999, is another example of whitewashing as an option. However, her case is far more interesting due to the process that Raslan herself underwent. When she won the Miss Israel contest Raslan said, "I am totally Israeli and don't dwell on whether I'm an Arab or a Jew. … They wanted a beauty queen, not a political queen. We need to prove to the world that we can live in coexistence" (Al-Masry, 1999). Immediately after she won the contest Binyamin Netanyahu – the Israeli Prime minister at the time – said that Raslan's win proves that Israel is a democracy in which Arabs enjoy equal rights (Ibid.).

Several months later Raslan represented Israel in the *Miss Universe* contest. Many were astounded when she appeared on the stage in a white dress adorned with a large blue Star of David.[10] Raslan was the only contestant who wore a prominently displayed national/religious symbol, and the first Miss Israel who ever appeared on the international stage in a wedding gown adorned with a large Star of David.

Even though Raslan had already declared that her Israeliness was indisputable, that she was not interested in the politics of ethnic and national identities and that her Arabness was of no significance, her whitewashing would not have been complete without the performative prop consisting of symbols the other loves to see her wearing. She was thus simply a passive objectified body doing what others expected of it – wearing a dress adorned with the Star of David especially designed for the occasion. The dress turned Raslan into the perfect representation of the Arab by his very absence.

The entry into privileged whiteness thus requires first and foremost the shedding of signifiers of national blackness that were presented by national resistance poets like Mahmoud Darwīsh and Rashed Ḥusayn, and to renounce all other national signifiers of the self. Secondly, it requires adopting the values, world view and will of the other. The public presentation of the bodies of the Arab beauty queen or the Arab soccer player, which are presented as perfect, is an allegory for the Arab who has undergone non-violent whitewashing, the Arab who is pleased with his status as a citizen of the Jewish state and who is enjoying his individual triumphs – and mainly for the Arab as an orphan son of a dark father. The disintegration of the "black" Arab into the heart of the Jewish "civil society" is ratification of Jewish whiteness as well of Arab blackness.

Summary

The article examined the modes of representation of the color of the Palestinians in Israel at three separate national moments, in three fields: national poetry, autobiographic texts and visual representations. I propose that the representation of color among Palestinians in Israel was influenced extensively by the national and political context. In the period from the Nakba until the 1967 defeat the Palestinians presented themselves as dark or blackish, and their color served as an allegory for the color and quality of the land. As opposed to Jewish whiteness their darkness (Sammar) was proof of Palestinian indigenousness, their direct connection with the land. In the 1967 war developments in the social and national arenas – Arab and local – resulted in the collapse of the Palestinian national dream of liberating the homeland from the Zionist colonialism. The growing recognition of the 1967 borders that Israel drew as the borders of discourse trapped the Palestinians in an ambivalent situation in which they fluctuated between the ancestral dream of liberating Palestine and the objective reality. National ambivalence led to an ambivalent self-perception. Blackness as an indigenousness Identity Card turned into a source of discomfort and to a large extent into an inconvenience that is still impossible to shake off. The Oslo Accords led to the legitimization

of Arab citizenship in Israel – not due to negotiation but because the Palestinian leadership abandoned them. Misgivings about citizenship versus nationalism were resolved in favor of citizenship. The state became the sphere of action for the Palestinians living in Israel. The dream of the dark-skinned native dwindled and withdrew to the occupied territories, and front-page photographs of Arab celebrities started to appear that suggested the option of enjoying the privileges of the white, thus erasing the element of darkness.

Even though all three national and historical moments that were described here are characterized by a specific representation of color, they may also appear simultaneously. Various nationalistic and intellectual may re-construct the color according to their adopted ideology and their desired goals.

Notes

1 This article was first published in Hebrew in *Racism in Israel*, Yehuda Shenhav and Yossi Yona (eds.). Van Leer Institute Press and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2008.
2 Al-wasit dictionary can be found online at www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%B1/.
3 All poems were translated from Hebrew. Translation from Arabic to Hebrew was made by the Author.
4 All the poems in the article were translated from the Hebrew version. Translated to Hebrew from Arabic by the author, unless otherwise stated.
5 Fedayeen – Palestinian guerillas. Literal: – one who sacrifices himself).
6 A clear example of this is the novel *Season of Migration to the North* by Sudanese author El-Tayeb Salah. See Said (1997).
7 In 1976 Lebanese Christians, supported by Syria, besieged Tel al-Zaatar, a Palestinian refugee camp, for six weeks and cut off the supply of water, electricity and food. The siege ended on August 14. Between 12–14 August thousands of Palestinians were slaughtered and the camp was totally destroyed.
8 Many security guard positions in Israel are occupied today by Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union.
9 See photograph on the website https://cdn.atria.nl/ezines/web/S&FOnline/2007/No2+3/barnard/printtso.htm (Sorek 2005).
10 For image of Raslan with the Star of David dress, see www.upi.com/News_Photos/view/upi/f9bd7c8a3357cbe35d3626c875e845f7/Costume-portion-of-Miss-Universe-Pageant/.

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13 What color are Israeli Jews?

Intersectionality, Israel advocacy, and the changing discourse of color and indigeneity

Michael R. Fischbach

In early 2019, a special issue of the journal *Israel Studies* came out devoted to "Word Crimes: Reclaiming the Language of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." Edited by the president of the Association for Israel Studies, Donna Robinson Divine, the articles accused pro-Palestinian activists of waging linguistic warfare, of redefining and weaponizing words, in a way that Divine claimed reduced "the vocabulary of historical explanation" into "a crude moral idiom" and "linguistic alchemy."[1] Contributors Miriam F. Elman and Asaf Romirowsky lamented the particular fact that "[i]ntersectionality, the dominant paradigm in many fields of study in the humanities and softer social sciences, advocates treating oppressions as integrally linked, with the results being increasingly impoverished research designs that further defame Israel with preposterous accusations."[2] They blamed this on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, writing that anti-Semitism has been normalized within academia because since its inception in 2005, BDS has succeeded in "mainstreaming the demonization and delegitimization of the state of Israel and in denigrating and ostracizing its supporters."[3]

Beyond such general criticisms, the journal also contained articles that attacked specific examples of what the authors considered pro-Palestinian wordsmithing designed to delegitimize Israel. Again, they targeted the twin bogeymen of intersectionality and BDS. Elman and Romirowsky claimed the "obsession with Israel's supposed wrongdoings" has led to an academic atmosphere influenced by intersectionality in which "buzz words and catchphrases – apartheid, genocide, settler-colonialism, pinkwashing – abound."[4] Gabriel Noah Brahm wrote that scholarship inspired by intersectionality has "spawned a new sect of victimology and cult of micro-aggressed martyrdom at large."[5] John Strawson castigated the pro-Palestinian discourse that calls Zionism "colonial," writing "[t]he use of the term 'colonialism' by BDS supporters is not historiography but political rhetoric" and that comparing Zionism with colonialism is therefore "an act of political denunciation with the intention of de-legitimizing the State of Israel."[6] Ilan Troen and Carol Troen claimed that use of the word "indigeneity" by Palestinians "attempts to present Palestinian Arabs as the sole indigenous people of the country and thereby challenges the legitimacy of Jewish settlement and the establishment of a Jewish state," and is an example of "spurious scholarship" that "furthers tendentious narratives for partisan and polemical advantage."[7]

The special issue of *Israel Studies* was emblematic of an explosion of pro-Israeli writings in the waning years of the second decade of the twenty-first century from those both inside and outside academia, all blasting what they perceived as pro-Palestinian twisting of words and terminology. In turn, however, many of these writings themselves have resorted to redefining words in newspapers, blog posts, and other media platforms. A number of them particularly have focused on terms associated with Jewish racial identity, especially the word "white." Articles proliferated with titles like "Stop Calling Ashkenazim 'White European' Jews" and "Now They Call Us 'White Jews': A New American Antisemitism." Other writings denounced those who link the words white with "colonial" in accusations leveled against Israel, such as "Calling Israel a 'Settler-Colonial Project' is Itself Anti-Semitic." What led to this recent explosion of pro-Israeli writings, notably in cyberspace, and why have they focused specifically on defining or redefining words like white, color, indigeneity, and colonialism? Why have Israel advocates been attacking the Palestinian solidarity movement and its particular appeal to intersectional solidarity with nonwhites by asserting that Jews themselves are nonwhite and thus deserving of such support?

Partisans of Israel realized they faced a serious public relations problem by the teens of the twenty-first century: how to counteract the rising global perception of Zionism as an ethnically specific colonial movement that in the process of creating the Jewish state of Israel robbed and has continued to rob an indigenous people of color of their homeland. The rise of intersectionality as a tool by which minorities and others who view themselves as oppressed has deepened the links between Palestinians and other marginalized groups throughout the world in recent years. Pro-Israeli activists have lamented this phenomenon, which they see as part of a wider campaign to delegitimize Israel. Forces inside and outside of Israel accordingly have begun deploying new tactics recently to improve Israel's image and parry pro-Palestinian sentiments in the West, a process they call Israel advocacy (some use the Hebrew term "hasbara"). To do so some pro-Israeli partisans have resorted lately to ideological and linguistic warfare, notably by redefining terms used to describe Jews generally, and Israelis and Zionism specifically, in what are perceived to be more sympathetic ways that can serve Israeli diplomatic needs vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

This study examines the history of two examples of such twenty-first-century linguistic warfare. The first involves defining and redefining race/ethnicity, whiteness/blackness, and color more generally in the Jewish context. Israel advocates have begun asserting that Jews are a people of color, regardless of their immediate countries of origin or their cultural background. The underlying logic seeks to deny the Palestinians the exclusive right of claiming that they are of color and thus deserving of intersectional support by other peoples of color. The second example is a corollary to this, and states that Jews are not only nonwhite but indigenous to the Middle East generally, and Israel/Palestine specifically, no matter how long ago their ancestors may have lived there. Jews who moved to Israel/Palestine, so this argument goes, therefore cannot be considered foreign colonists but rather members of an indigenous people that has returned home after two

millennia. Yet the fact that these very words have been debated and contested by Jews in Israel and elsewhere underscores the fragility of these efforts, which may encounter serious resistance from Jews themselves.

The first wave: Color, decolonization, and Palestine solidarity after 1967

Israel's current public relations problem regarding terms like white and colonialism began five decades ago. When it defeated its Arab enemies decisively in the June 1967 Arab–Israeli War, global support for Israel soared. Already viewed sympathetically as the underdog in the Middle East, polls in the United States, for instance, revealed that Americans were virtually unanimous in supporting Israel. The percentage expressing sympathy for the Jewish state skyrocketed from about 60 percent in 1966 to 95 percent after the war.[8] Yet the war occurred during a decade of tremendous upheaval, revolution, and political activity in the United States and throughout the world. Even as supporters Israel basked in the afterglow of victory, forces demanding structural, even revolutionary change almost immediately began hailing the armed Palestinian resistance movement. They saw guerrilla groups fighting against Israel as part of a wider global Third World revolution waged by indigenous peoples of color against foreign, white colonial occupiers.

The era of decolonization after the Second World War was marked by a high degree of transnationalism. For example, activists in the American black freedom struggle were keenly aware of how their own struggle for racial justice was part and parcel of this wider global upheaval being waged by kindred peoples of color abroad. The pioneering Black Power activist Malcolm X, for instance, argued that a global revolution was underway pitting a white imperialist world against a much larger black world. Yet in using the word "black," Malcolm was careful to expand its meaning beyond a phenotype, noting in 1964: "… I mean non-white – black, brown, red or yellow" people.[9] For Malcolm, blackness (like whiteness) was a concept, a sense of place in the international racial hierarchy, not just a literal reference to skin color, and helped explain his strident attacks on Israel and support for the Palestinians.[10]

Others within the Black Power movement in America agreed. Two months after the 1967 war, activists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) began vocally including the Palestinian guerrilla struggle against Israel in the wider uprising against white imperialism being waged by peoples of color around the world. For these radicals, "blackness" and "color" once again were not literal references to skin color but referenced all those colonized peoples yearning to be free. In August 1967, SNCC's newsletter contained an article about the Arab–Israeli conflict that said black Americans were "an integral part of The Third World (Africa, Asia, Latin American, American Indians and all persons of African descent)," just like the Palestinians were, and therefore needed to know what "our brothers are doing in their homelands."[11] It also compared Zionism to colonialism, asking its audience if it knew that "Zionism, which is a worldwide

nationalistic Jewish movement, organized, planned and created the 'State of Isreal [*sic*]' by sending Jewish immigrants from Europe into Palestine (the heart of the Arab world) to take over land and homes belonging to the Arabs?"[12] Stokely Carmichael, the one-time chair of SNCC and the man credited with first uttering the term "Black Power" in public, later said "… the so-called State of Israel was set up by white people who took it from the Arabs."[13] The Black Panther Party's chief of staff, David Hilliard, once stated, "We want to make it very clear that we support all those who are actively engaged in the struggle against U.S. Imperialism and Zionism, which means to us racial supremacy."[14]

Other blacks developed the transnational theme of colored vs. white, of colonized vs. colonizer. Shirley Graham Du Bois, writer and widow of famed activist W.E.B. Du Bois, wrote in 1973 that

> [in the Middle East] it is "colored folk" battling with the "white folk" of Israel! … Surrounded as they are by an ocean of suntanned peoples, Israel has repeatedly, defiantly and arrogantly asserted its superior "whiteness." … Nobody was allowed to forget that the State of Israel belonged to the dominant, "enlightened" *white* world.[15]

At the Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers in 1969, the writer Howard L. Fuller blasted the Jewish state, writing "Israel is a settler colony. … We must understand that those Europeans who call themselves Jews moved into Palestine, took the land in 1948."[16] A few years later the black newspaper *Jihad News* agreed: "In short, Israel is a settler-state built on a foundation of oppression and discrimination of Arab peoples. In that regard it is similar to the South African or Rhodesian settler-states."[17]

Beyond the Black Power movement, some in the 1960s white Left in America agreed that Israel was a colonial power dispossessing an indigenous people of color. A publication of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) noted in 1967,

> To become more fundamental, the central issue in Southwest Asia is the fact that a Jewish state has been established in the midst of the Arab world without the invitation or consent of the indigenous population. The Jewish immigration occurred, and could only have occurred, under the aegis of Western colonial control.[18]

Two years later, another SDS publication published an article claiming that the Zionist displacement of the Palestinians was similar to the conquest of Native American Indians by white settlers. In the case of the Zionists,

> they chose to colonize "the heathen" who occupied the Arab lands in order to create a new Jewish homeland. … Thus the so-called birth of Israeli "socialism" was founded on the complete relocation of thousands of people of color.[19]

Nor was such anti-imperialist, pro-Palestinian sentiment restricted to the United States. Radicals in 1960s West Germany like the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund similarly hailed the Palestinian struggle, as did the armed militants of the Rote Armee Fraktion (a.k.a. the RAF or Baader-Meinhof Group) in the 1970s. In France, the group known as Gauche prolétarienne strongly supported the Palestinians. Even within Israel, leftists like those in Matzpen (the Israeli Socialist Organization) and the Israeli Black Panther Organization – who openly spoke of Mizrahi/Sephardic Jews in Israel as "black" and who copied the American Panthers' rhetoric and symbolism – were sympathetic with the Palestinian struggle.

Israelis and their supporters were caught off guard by this new and vociferous discourse labeling Israel as a powerful white aggressor and the Palestinians as underdogs of color. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir complained about this new image problem bitterly, defensively grousing in 1969 that "all of a sudden, all of the Arabs become poor Arabs."[20] Others cried anti-Semitism. In 1968, World Jewish Congress President Nahum Goldmann spoke of "new forms of anti-Semitism" coming from the New Left, and in 1972, Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban similarly accused it of being the "author and progenitor of the new anti-Semitism: anti-Zionism is neo-anti-Semitism."[21] Pro-Israeli writers across the American political spectrum agreed, going beyond charges of anti-Semitism to proffer accusations of anti-white racism more broadly. An official from B'nai B'rith in 1969 dismissed transnational black American Third Worldism as thinly disguised anti-white racism:

> Black racists … augment this age-old brand of anti-Semitism with a new "Third World" ideology which is essentially a pitting of the black against the white world, a code word for the world of color's racist hatred of whites. … They have gone further and successfully depicted the white Arab people as blacks and the Israelis as oppressive whites.[22]

Some pro-Israeli leftists agreed and denounced their fellow leftists' claim that the Palestinians were a people of color being oppressed by white Israeli imperialism. One writer excoriated Black Power militants and New Leftists as "inverse racists … imperialism being to them white [and therefore] any non-white movement is ipso facto right."[23] Others took issue with describing Zionism as a form of colonialism. Even though they admitted to the "Jewish colonization of Palestine," for example, Harvard academics Michael Walzer and Martin Peretz claimed Zionism was not an example of exploitative colonialism because, they wrote, it "differs from other colonizations in Africa and Asia in that the immigrant community was committed to do its own work … and not to exploit the Arab population."[24] Peretz later opined that therefore

> the orthodox notion of Israel as "imperialist" or as a neo-imperialist instrument makes sense only to those embittered rank-and-filers for whom the side in a dispute which engages the open and general support of Americans is *ipso facto* bound to be in the wrong.[25]

Other left-wing American Jewish supporters of Israel, however, fought back by adopting a different tactic that laid the basis for processes we see at work today. They decided to join the identity politics movement by redefining whiteness and color in the Jewish context: separating themselves from whites, highlighting their Jewish distinctiveness, and embracing American blacks and peoples of color overseas as fellow oppressed peoples. One left-wing Jewish student thus wrote in 1969 that "[t]he Jew must accept his identity, he's not just another white man."[26] That same year a group calling itself Haverim [Hebrew: comrades] of the Third World went further and essentially defined Jews as an oppressed Third World people, writing that American "Jews who are outside the Jewish Establishment [are] as equally oppressed as Blacks. Both must become protagonists in a larger Third World struggle."[27] This idea reached fruition later in the 1970s and early 1980s when certain Zionist feminists adopted this argument. They, too, demanded inclusion in the politics of ethnic identity just like blacks by differentiating themselves from whites and celebrating Jewish identity, Israel, and Zionism. "*To me*," the noted feminist Letty Cottin Pogrebin wrote in 1982 in a direct connection between Jews and American blacks, "*Zionism is simply an affirmative action plan on a national scale*."[28]

Yet other Jews quickly pushed back. Some radical feminists countered that the Jewish identity movement and the concomitant discussions about anti-Semitism within the women's movement betrayed a deeper need on the part of some Jewish women to be seen as nonwhite, as victims of ethnic prejudice themselves, much as blacks were. In 1982, the group Women Against Imperialism (WAI) produced a pamphlet that stated that Jews were part of a "white supremacist social order" in the United States which was, "like South Africa and Israel, is a white settler colony. … Equating anti-semitism with the oppression of colonized people lets white women evade our responsibility to oppose white supremacy." The group denounced Jewish women who claimed they were "'Third World' or at least not white," something which, the WAI claimed, ignored the fact that Jews were part of a "white supremacist social order," whether they liked it or not.[29]

Clearly, the question of whether or not Jews were white, and therefore in the same position of being oppressed (through anti-Semitism) as blacks, was a touchy issue that heightened the wider consternation among supporters of Israel that the Jewish state had lost its image as a brave little nation facing a sea of irrational, hostile Arabs. It jolted Israel advocates into action to defend it against accusations of being in league with white imperialism, and set the stage for more recent such efforts, just as it engendered pushback that revealed the fragility and contested nature of such efforts.

The second wave: Intersectionality and its discontents

Like the activism of the 1960s more broadly, Black Power, the Left, and the women's movement were greatly diminished by the onset of the neo-liberal backlash in America and elsewhere starting in the 1980s. Yet global support for the Palestinians and criticism of Israel continued to grow, notably in the first two

decades of the twenty-first century, as did the discourse pitting a powerful colonial Israel against a weaker colonized people of color, the Palestinians. This phenomenon has been the result of several factors. First, the BDS campaign was launched in July 2005 as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was stalling. Its open call for an international academic and cultural boycott of Israel spawned renewed international Palestine solidarity movements. It certainly put Israel and its supporters on the defensive once again, particular because of BDS's use of boycotts, which global activists had used against the white minority of South Africa decades earlier, not to mention BDS supporters' comparisons between Zionism and the racially based system of apartheid. The hostility to Palestinian aspirations shown by the new government established by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu in March 2009 only added fuel to the global Palestine solidarity movement worldwide. So did the outcry at Israel's seizure of the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" vessels that were trying to break the Israeli siege of Gaza in May 2010 and Israel's military strikes on Gaza in mid-2014 and thereafter. Then in July 2018, the Israeli Knesset adopted the Jewish "Nation State Law" which codified Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, wherever they may live, and the Jewish people only. Palestinians as a minority may live there, but the law stated it was not their nation. Knesset member Avi Dichter, the sponsor of the law, noted afterward that the law was designed to protect Israel's Jewish character and its demographic majority: "Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people and guarantees the majority without hurting the minority." Netanyahu was even more direct, stating "This is our state – the Jewish state."[30]

With this even staunchly pro-Israeli American Jewish groups like the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) objected, fearing the law would worsen Israel's growing image problem. In the words of the ADL, the law would "impair Israel's international reputation" by crystalizing the Jewish-first nature of the state.[31] The Jewish Federations of North America admitted that the law could give the impression that Israel was not committed to pluralism, claiming that the law "does refer to a national value of *Jewish* community building which some continue to view as discriminatory," and conceding that

> It has always been difficult to respond to claims that Israel discriminates on the basis of religion. As a nation established as both Jewish and democratic, the country does in fact distinguish on the basis of religion. Jews have an automatic right of citizenship; others do not.[32]

Some Israeli officials agreed that the law damaged Israel's reputation. Michael Oren, the former Israeli ambassador to the United States, stated that the law "is another arrow in the quiver" for those seeking to delegitimize the Jewish state. "The law gives ammunition to BDS activists and others who want to malign Israel," he claimed.[33]

Beyond the Middle East, other events also triggered an increase in intersectional and transnational support for the Palestinians which generated more alarm among Israel advocates as a result. In the wake of the August 2014 shooting death

of Michael Brown, a young black man killed by a white policeman in the American town of Ferguson, Missouri, Palestinians in the West Bank issued a statement of solidarity with Brown's family. Other Palestinians began sending tweets to black protesters confronting police in Ferguson after the killing that advised them on how to combat the effects of police tear gas and other practical lessons they themselves had learned from clashes with Israeli security forces. A photo appeared on the internet showing a young Palestinian in the West Bank village of Bil'in holding a sign in English reading "The Palestinian people know what it means to be shot while unarmed because of your ethnicity."[34] Palestinians and black Americans then began visiting one another, including a delegation of Americans associated with groups like Black Lives Matter and Dream Defenders who traveled to the West Bank in January 2015. Several months later in August, over 1,100 persons signed the 2015 Black Solidarity Statement on Palestine, among them noted activist Angela Davis. Thereafter the website Black Solidarity with Palestine noted that "we are making connections between the systems of violence and criminalization that makes Black and Palestinian bodies so easily expendable" and "no one is free until we all are free."[35] For its part the Movement for Black Lives issued a platform in 2016 that spoke of the need to "Coordinate direct actions of solidarity with South Africa, Palestine, Columbia [sic] and liberation movements across the globe."[36]

The year 2016 also marked the election of the Republican candidate Donald Trump as president of the United States. Trump's election presented pro-Israeli Jews with an odd conundrum. On the one hand, he took some of the most significant pro-Israeli steps vis-à-vis the Palestinians of any American president. Yet his open embrace of Netanyahu, a man many have accused of anti-Arab race baiting who is hostile both to Palestinians and African migrants in Israel, placed American Jews in an awkward position. So, too, did Trump's tolerance of white nationalism at a time when anti-Semitic attacks spiked in the United States. In short, many saw Trump as no friend of people of color. Trump's election not surprisingly generated a considerable rise in intersectional protest movements that brought together women and people of color, including some Palestinians. This was personified by the fact that Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian-American activist, was one of the two co-chairs of the 2017 Women's March – a protest against Trump's inauguration that has been described as the biggest one-day protest in American history.

All these factors led pro-Israel advocates in the United States and elsewhere to conclude that they faced a serious intersectionality problem by the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century that was draining support for Israel – many used the term delegitimizing Israel – and leading to further Palestine solidarity activity. Israelis were some of the first to respond. As far back as January 2010, the Reut Group in Tel Aviv produced a study entitled *Building a Political Firewall Against the Delegitimization of Israel*. Among other conclusions the report laid Israel's image problem – the perception that it is a powerful state oppressing a weaker people of color – at the feet of intersectionality among academics and activists: "Because of a discourse of intersectionality, the delegitimization movement has successfully been able to frame the Palestinian struggle against Israel as part of the struggle of

other disempowered minorities, such as African-Americans and the LGBTQ community…"[37] A later June 2019 Reut report noted that "anti-Israel groups utilize intersectional social circles by drawing parallels with their causes."[38]

The Israeli government decided to fight back. In October 2015, the cabinet tasked the Strategic Affairs Ministry with taking action on a matter of strategic concern to Israel, and the ministry formed the Campaign Against Delegitimization task force to work not just within Israel but assist Israel advocacy efforts abroad. Non-governmental organizations joined in. The Reut Group joined with the ADL to launch a joint enterprise in January 2016 called the ADL-Reut Collaboration, or ARC, to "fight the assault on the legitimacy of the state of Israel." ARC organized some 150 meetings in Israel and the United States to bring together governmental and non-governmental agencies to study the problem and develop plans in response. Among the experts who participated in the meetings were several Israelis, including the director general of the Strategic Affairs Ministry, Sima Vaknin-Gil, along with her deputy and director of intelligence; the head of the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), Tzahi Gavrieli, and an assistant from the ITIC; and several mention members of Israel's delegation to the United Nations.

Others in the United States joined the battle as well. A leading voice active in publicly denouncing intersectionality and the ways it brought together Palestinians and various minorities around the world was the former law professor Alan Dershowitz. Long a vociferous advocate for Israel, Dershowitz was busy by 2017 excoriating intersectionality as a "pseudo-academic" and "radical" concept that "has become a code word for anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic bigotry." In his typically blunt fashion, he lashed out at the "artificial coalitions" on American college campuses between "causes that have nothing to do with each other except a hatred for their fellow students who are 'privileged' because they are white, heterosexual, male and especially Jewish." The ultimate purpose of such an "umbrella of oppression," Dershowitz argued, was so that "extremists" could "hijack important liberal causes in support of their own bigoted agenda."[39]

Israel advocacy and the weaponizing of language: Jews, whiteness, and indigeneity

As in the 1960s and 1970s, however, another approach emerged. Rather than merely attacking the pro-Palestinian discourse of intersectionality Israel advocates have begun waging linguistic warfare to reshape global attitudes toward Israel and Zionism. The 2010 Reut report expressed this need succinctly: "Since the delegitimization movement is founded on intellectual arguments that challenge the foundations of Zionism, there is a need to systematically counter those arguments with equally appealing and sophisticated approaches." It further stated that "a pro-active and positive campaign aimed at generating a 'legitimacy surplus' for Israel is essential."[40] Along these lines the same report urged Israel advocates to "reframe the context through which people hear about Israel so as to associate it

with 'positive' values…"[41] In the United States, this strategy was summed up in 2017 by Josh Block, head of a media savvy Israel advocacy group called The Israel Project: "to build a communications infrastructure designed to fight delegitimization and anti-Semitism hidden in anti-Israel sentiment" in order to "fundamentally change public opinion on Israel and world Jewry."[42] One particular way that Israel advocates began doing this was to rebrand Israel by changing the perception of Israelis and their Jewish supporters around the world as powerful, privileged oppressors and instead portray them in a more sympathetic way, one worthy of intersectional support by progressive activists.

Part of this was stepped up public relations efforts to define Jews not as white but of color. As political scientist David Schraub has noted, by "[c]ontesting their Whiteness" some Jews felt they could help "elide Jewish enjoyment of White privilege."[43] One way Israel advocates have done this has been to highlight the fact that a majority of Israeli Jews are of Mizrahi/Sephardic (Middle Eastern and North African) background. The argument goes like this: because these Jews are of Middle Eastern/North African descent, they are people of color. So how then can Israel be labeled a white country if most of its Jewish citizens are of color? One of the leading voices in this public relations effort is the Israeli Hen Mazzig, himself a Mizrahi/Sephardic Israeli Jew. "I am the embodiment of intersectionality," Mazzig has stated.[44] In 2019, he characterized the discourse of Palestinians as a people of color suffering from Zionist colonialism as follows:

> Along with resurgent identity politics in the United States and Europe, there is a growing inclination to frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in terms of race. According to this narrative, Israel was established as a refuge for oppressed white European Jews who in turn became oppressors of people of color, the Palestinians.

Mazzig was having none of it. In criticizing black Americans like the activist Tamika Mallory and the academic Marc Lamont Hill who invoked intersectionality in their support of the Palestinian cause, he wrote "I believe their misrepresentations are part of a strategic campaign to taint Israel as an extension of privileged and powerful white Europe, thereby justifying any and all attacks on it."[45]

Israel's defenders across the seas have joined Mazzig in harnessing Mizrahi/Sephardic Jewry to the campaign to defend Israel against the charge of white colonialism. In Britain, this argument has been advanced by Lyn Julius, a Jew of Iraqi origin who maintains a blog dealing with issues relating to Mizrahi/Sephardic history, culture, and politics and who self-consciously views herself as "[c]hallenging the myth of 'white, colonial' Israel."[46] Julius similarly denounced academics, journalists, and members of what she called the "radical Left of the U.S. Democratic Party" who were "obsessed with identity politics." For her, Mizrahi/Sephardic Jews were an indigenous people in the Middle East and North Africa who themselves were victims of colonialism and imperialism: first, the

"Arab Muslim imperialist conquest" of the seventh century, and a later dispossession at the hands of Arab states and Iran.

Israel advocates doing linguistic battle with the Palestinian narrative of victimhood lately have adopted a new twist on this strategy. They argue that Ashkenazic Jews of European extraction are not white either. Julius sums up the recent trend of coloring Ashkenazic Jews: "Positioning Israel as a white European colonialist aggressor delegitimizes Ashkenazi Jews as interlopers. This canard denies the Levantine origins, genes, culture, religion and language of Jews from Europe and the Americas."[47] As part of his denunciation of "anti-Israeli leaders" in America like Linda Sarsour and Palestinian-American congresswoman Rashid Tlaib (who, he claimed, were calling Jews "white"), Joshua Robbin Marks claimed in 2019 that "We [Ashkenazic Jews] are Middle Eastern" and thus, not white. Citing DNA and genetic studies, he even blamed his fellow Ashkenazic Jews for falling into the trap of denying the colored, Middle Eastern nature of Jews in the United States. "The Ashkenazi Jews who call themselves white Jews," he opined, "have not acknowledged our Middle Eastern ancestry or don't want to." He went on to urge them to purge themselves of such false consciousness: "We [Ashkenazic Jews] need to decolonize our minds and return to our Middle Eastern roots in the Land of Israel."[48]

These arguments multiplied in 2018 and 2019. The American author and cultural critic Karen Lehrman Bloch wrote that "the DNA of Ashkenazim shows an irrefutable connection to the Levant – meaning we're not white." Calling Ashkenazic Jews white, she asserted, is a definition imposed on these Jews by others, "and not just by any others, but by others who have an agenda that includes, at the very least, the destruction of Israel."[49] Seth J. Frantzman, an American-born writer based in Israel, called labeling Ashkenazic Jews white a slur and another example of anti-Semitism: "The term 'white Jews' is anti-Jewish because no other group is subjected to this same slur of forcibly shoehorning them a false whiteness," he wrote, adding that "… the term 'white Jews' is designed to dehumanize, to package Jews into one monochrome and binary concept of race. … There are Jews. There are white people. One is not synonymous with the other."[50] Dani Ishai Behan wrote a blog entitled "Stop Calling Ashkenazim 'White European' Jews" in which he argued that

> [r]eframing Ashkenazim as "white Jews" in the 21st century carries an array of benefits to the anti-Semite. … Labeling the vast majority of Israel's [Ashkenazic] founders 'white European' reaffirms the premise of anti-Zionism (that Zionism is essentially a settler-colonial enterprise), thereby leaving Zionism vulnerable to attack. This, I assume, is the entire point of the term "white Jews," and accounts for why the term is so vigorously defended.[51]

A corollary of the recent "not white but of color" argument has been defining/redefining the term indigenous in the Jewish context. Israel advocates have begun writing that being of ancient Middle Eastern origin makes all Jews indigenous

to the region, and therefore their return to their ancestral homeland (through Zionism) cannot be considered colonialism. Indeed, one writer even boldly stated that just "[c]alling Israel a 'Settler-Colonial Project' is Itself Anti-Semitic."[52] Behan wrote in 2019 that Zionism was not colonial but in fact *anti-colonial*, noting "What Zionism DID do is uproot centuries-old power structures, restoring a native people back to its land and overthrowing a 1,000+-year-old colonial occupation."[53] Indeed, he argued that "we are (arguably) the world's oldest extant victims of colonialism …"[54] Behan also placed no time limits on the term "indigenous"; indigeneity lasts forever: "There is no sober intellectual or scholar who would argue that prolonged displacement and colonization is just cause for depriving a dispossessed indigenous people of their identity and rights."[55] That same year Mazzig wrote, "No matter where Jews physically reside, they maintain a connection to the land of Israel" and "Israel is a place where an indigenous people have reclaimed their land and revived their ancient language."[56]

Caveat: The complicated history of Jews, Zionism, and color

A major problem facing this recent Israel advocacy campaign of reimagining and redefining words is the effort's fragility in the face of the long and complicated history of how Jews themselves, both in Israel and elsewhere, have defined their relationship to words like white, black, color, indigeneity, and colonialism. Even those with a mere passing familiarity with fields like Critical Whiteness Theory recognize that these terms, notably the term white, are not stable but are mutable social constructs. Identifications by color therefore are not permanent, and self-definitions often involve negotiations over social and political currency. One of the pioneers in the study of whiteness, Ruth Frankenberg, expressed this succinctly by noting "Whiteness changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence … it is a complexly constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present."[57] Not all Jews are likely to accept the new colorized vision of Jewishness.

Given the prominence of American Jews in the recent efforts de-whiten and colorize Jews, it is particularly important to point out the changing and contested concept over the course of the past century of whether American Jews are white and what the implications of such an identity – whether self-defined or imposed by others – can be for individual and collective Jewish life.[58] Even though Jews were considered "free white persons" in the early American republic, by the early twentieth century many non-Jewish Americans considered them a separate race, or in the nation's black-white binary, off white at best. In recent decades this has changed. As Schraub noted, "… the figure of the Jew is currently imagined as White – certainly in the Anglo-American world, and perhaps globally as well."[59] Indeed, when statistics like a 2013 study by the Pew Research Center reveal that 94 percent of American Jews identify as white, Israel advocates' efforts to colorize Jews in a bid for intersectional support in their struggle with pro-Palestinian activists run the risk of backfiring badly.[60]

The history of Jewish self-identity in Israel also stands as testament to the fragility of recent efforts to portray all Jews as a people of color. First, many Ashkenazic Jews may object to being colorized. Since the influx of hundreds of thousands of Mizrahi/Sephardic Jewish immigrants to Israel in the first two decades after the foundation of the state in 1948, the binary between them, with their Middle Eastern and North African social attributes, and the Ashkenazic Jewish majority from Europe who established the state along Western lines has been stark. The Ashkenazic political and socio-economic elite looked down on these Third World Jews, and a clear cultural divide between what they considered a superior Western way of living and a more primitive Middle Eastern and North African way of living – an "Arab," "Levantine," or "Third World" way of living – existed, to the detriment of the latter. As Henriette Dahan Kalev, put it, "[t]he Ashkenazi (East Europeans) have set up white skin tone as the 'zero point of reference'…" in a post-1948 Israel marked by a "skin tone discourse [that] was still implicit but potent."[61]

Other scholars have affirmed that Ashkenazic Jews in Israel long have been considered white and socially superior. One wrote that

> [a]mong the Jewish population of Israel, however, the social category of "Ashkenaziness" can be deemed white, as it has many features in common with whiteness in the United States: both categories are associated with European ancestry [and] both are identified with power structures…[62]

In this sense whiteness is a "tangible good" that is "malleable and functions as a gateway to other forms of ownership, privileges, and access."[63] Ella Shohat has written that as a result "[t]he Sephardim, as Jewish Third World people, form a semi-colonized nation-within-a-nation," put in that place by an elite that maintains a "European hegemony."[64]

Sometimes these intra-Jewish distinctions were racialized overtly. Some Ashkenazic Jews called the new immigrants "shvartze hayes" – Yiddish for "black animals."[65] Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, went so far in denouncing their alleged cultural inferiority that he compared them to the Africans brought to America as slaves.[66] For their part, Mizrahi/Sephardic Jews themselves have resorted to racialized language as a means of pushing back. The violent July 1959 disturbances in the Wadi Salib district of Haifa, home to many Moroccan immigrants, saw some of the latter march into an Ashkenazic neighborhood crying "you screw us because we are Black."[67] In the early 1970s, the Israeli Black Panthers openly embraced the term black in referring to themselves vis-à-vis the Ashkenazic elites. More recently, Israelis of Ethiopian descent similarly have constructed what one scholar calls a "hybrid identity that meshes Israeliness, Jewishness, and blackness" in contrast to what they call "franji" (white) Ashkenazic identity.[68]

Given this history, Mizrahi/Sephardic Israeli Jews also may object to this new colorizing discourse positing that Ashkenazim are not white. For decades they have felt like second class citizens of color in a white Ashkenazic-dominated society, and

to see Ashkenazic Jews suddenly claiming to be of color no doubt will strike them as an example of privilege: using the privilege of being part of a white power structure to deny being part of it. Dahan Kalev in fact has written of the process of "turning Mizrahiness and black skin assets into political capital."[69] This could be an example of that: in the bid for intersectional support, Ashkenazic Jews could be appropriating the discourse of all Jews being of color as political capital. On the other hand, however, some Mizrahi/Sephardic Jews in Israel recently have been outspoken in insisting that they – and indeed, all Israeli Jews – *are* in fact white. In June 2012, Interior Minister Eliyahu "Eli" Yishai (who is of Tunisian heritage) complained about the influx of Muslim African migrants into Israel by stating, "Muslims that arrive here do not even believe that this country belongs to us, to the white man."[70] The color of Israeli Jews therefore is clearly a contested issue.

History also shows that Jews have not always objected to calling Zionism a colonial movement. Indeed, some have freely admitted to it. Most of the founders of Israel were Ashkenazic pioneers self-consciously described Zionism as a colonial movement. The Palestine Jewish Colonization Association, formed in 1891, included the term in its name. So did the Jewish Colonial Trust, a bank established by the Second Zionist Congress in 1898. Theodor Herzl, widely acclaimed as the founder of modern political Zionism, also used the term and referred to the new Jewish settlements in Palestine as colonies. When trying to secure support for Zionism within the British empire, for example, he informed the British banker Leopold de Rothschild in 1902 "I want to ask the British government for a colonization charter … I want to found a Jewish colony in a British possession."[71] The history of changing Jewish attitudes toward the word colonial also underscores the fragility of Israel advocates' new strategic of linguistic warfare.

Conclusion

In the special 2019 edition of *Israel Studies* dealing with "word crimes," several authors offered words of caution that, while directed at pro-Palestinians whom they accused of linguistic warfare, could equally apply to those pro-Israeli partisans who weaponize words as well. Ellman and Romirowsky noted, "The distortion of crucial terms has become so pervasive that we no longer can even recall how they were initially used."[72] Divine was correct when she asserted, "Words have histories. If meanings are not stable, they are altered for a reason."[73] While Divine wrote those lines as part of a wider critique of how post-Zionists and partisans of the Palestinian cause allegedly have changed the meanings of words to serve their political agenda, the impact of her words corresponds precisely with how Israel advocates themselves have altered the meanings of words for their own purposes in recent years. In their zeal to defend Israel against global intersectional support for the Palestinians, Israel advocates risk gliding over the often painful history of Jewish attitudes toward race and color, thereby not only weakening their arguments but also antagonizing some of their base constituencies: Jewish communities in North America and Israel, who themselves long have wrestled with these words.

Notes

1 Donna Robinson Divine, "Word Crimes: Reclaiming the Language of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (March 2019). The version of this and other articles in the issue viewed by the author online did not contain page numbers.
2 Miriam F. Elman and Asaf Romirowsky, "Postscript: BDS." *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (March 2019).
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Gabriel Noah Brahm, "Intersectionality." *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (March 2019).
6 John Strawson, "Colonialism." *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (March 2019).
7 Ilan Troen and Carol Troen, "Indigeneity." *Israel Studies* 24, no. 2 (March 2019). Their article specifically focused on use of the term by Palestinian Bedouin citizens of Israel.
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27 From an article that appeared in various Jewish newspapers in December 1969. For example, see *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, December 12, 1969.
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