Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal Conflict: The Yemenite Babies Affair

Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber

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Dedicated to the memory of my father, Aharon Madmoni, who inspired me to research this story.

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INTRODUCTION

The Personal, the Political, and the Theoretical

The day my aunt Hammama emigrated from Yemen to Israel in 1949, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. When she returned from the hospital to the immigrant camp in Rosh Ha'ayin, the nurse who had accompanied her in the ambulance took her baby in her arms and told my aunt to step down. When my aunt turned her back, the ambulance and her baby disappeared, never to be seen again.

My father, himself a Jewish immigrant from Yemen, said he and the rest of the family rushed to the scene minutes later when they heard my aunt's cry. He told me this story when I was a little girl, but only years later did I understand the magnitude and ramifications of this traumatic event. When I became a reporter, I heard similar stories from other families of Yemenite and other non-European ethnic groups. I learned that hundreds if not thousands of Jewish families in the state of Israel were carrying this tragic narrative in their memory. This narrative is known in Israel as the Yemenite Babies Affair. Through extensive research and interviews with dozens of families and activists, I discovered that while the Israeli government and the public had tried to forget and silence this Affair, the Yemenite families concerned continued to suffer from the pain of their terrible loss.

During the mass immigration to Israel from 1948 to the early 1950s, hundreds if not thousands[1] of babies disappeared from immigrant absorption camps and transit camps throughout Israel and from the transit camp, Hashed, in Yemen. According to the testimonies given to the Kedmi Commission (1995–2001) investigating the Affair, the absorption policy governing Yemenite Jews required separating children from their parents because the stone structures housing the babies, called baby houses,[2] were

in better condition than the tents and tin structures that sheltered the parents (Shifris 2003). Most babies were taken from the baby houses without parental knowledge or consent. Parents who were present and refused consent reported that camp authorities forcefully took their children from them, even acting with violence.[3] Later testimonies revealed that a typical scenario was as follows: a baby was taken to the hospital despite parental assertion that the child was healthy. The baby was then taken to one of several institutions around the country, such as Wizo, an international women's organization with centers in Safad, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv. The parents were told that their baby had died, even as state institutional workers later testified in such cases that these "parents were not interested in their children" (Shifris 2003, 15).

LOOKING FOR A CHILD WITH A BEAUTY MARK ON HER CHEEK

In May 1950, Said and Miriam Ovadiya and their daughters, Simcha and Zohara, immigrated to Israel from Yemen. A nurse from the Jewish Agency, who had stayed with them at the Hashed Transit Camp in Yemen for five months, accompanied them to Israel. The nurse insisted on holding Zohara for the entire flight, and this was the last time that the Ovadiya family saw their daughter. Miriam recounted, "We had Passover in Hashed,[4] and after the holiday, we were told to pack for Israel. When I went to the baby house to get Zohara, the nurse refused to give her to me. I went to speak to the camp director, who came to talk to her, but the nurse insisted on keeping the baby, so I had no choice. On the airplane, I tried to sit behind the nurse and my baby. Even when my milk was flowing and I begged her to let me feed my crying baby, the nurse would not let me. She sent me to sit with everyone else. I cried more than my baby."[5]

* * *

The mass immigration to Israel of the 1950s brought together Jews from all over the world. The two main ethnic groups were Ashkenazi Jews (of European origin) and Mizrahi Jews (mostly from Arab countries and the Balkans). The term "Sephardic," which specifically indicates a Spanish extraction,[6] was frequently used until the late 1980s to refer to Jews from Arab Muslim countries and the Balkans in addition to Spain.[7] In this book, I use the terms "Mizrahi Jews" or "Mizrahim" when referring to Jews of Arab descent, as distinguished from "Sephardic." The term "Mizrahim," widely accepted since the 1990s by both theorists of Israeli society and activists, is also a political and cultural category, a third world

coalition of Arab Jewish descendents who continue to occupy the margins of Israeli society.

What makes the ethnic divisions in Israel a particularly interesting case study is that the oppressed community, unlike elsewhere, represents the majority. Demographically, Mizrahim in Israel currently constitute approximately half of the country's population.[8] When considered ethnically Arab, and taking Palestinians who are Israeli citizens into consideration as well, Israelis of Arab descent constitute the majority of the population and can be viewed as part of the first world/third world problematic encounter (Shohat 1988, 1989; Lavie 1991, 2007).

As Barbara Swirski (1995, 1) noted, "This so-called 'family reunion' took both sides by surprise." The Zionist vision of creating a European bastion in the Middle East conflicted with the fear of an Oriental "numerical takeover." Over the years, many Zionist leaders openly expressed racist opinions about Mizrahim, an attitude that was intended to keep them marginalized and numb. In 1950, Golda Meir, then a member of the Israeli parliament, asked whether Jewish immigrants from Arab countries could be "elevated to a suitable level of civilization" (Shohat 1988, 5). In 1970, an Israeli Air Force general said, "Arabs don't have a good sense for dealing with advanced technology. Even in Israel, Jews who came from Yemen and Iraq are not good material for becoming pilots"[9] (Bar-Yosef 1980). Often, Zionist leaders were asked to maintain confidentiality when dealing with "sensitive" issues, such as the discussions about selection regulations governing immigration from North Africa.[10] In one meeting, Zionist leader Giyora Yoseftal said,

> No one will dare to characterize this immigration the way it is . . . in this closed forum, I will speak differently. This country is in danger. The country's moral and social existence is in danger because of this immigration . . . life in this country is getting a more Levantine character . . . I live in fear that I can no longer attract the person that doesn't have to immigrate.[11]

For years, Mizrahim were perceived as lazy[12], criminal, stupid, and incapable of achieving, learning, or making progress. Sociologists such as Noah Eisenstadt and Karl Frankenstein published academic studies supporting this claim, helping to "put the stamp of 'non-developed' onto Oriental immigrants" (Swirski 1989, 27). Ella Shohat (1988) argued that within Zionist discourse Mizrahi Jews were represented as in need of rescue from their Levantine countries of origin, redeemed from their Middle Eastern culture, and infused with modernity and progress.[13] As such, Mizrahim were expected to appreciate Zionist ideals and be grateful for Israeli policies rather than be critical of them. However, while early sociological research marked Mizrahim as "the problem," they were also viewed

as a people who would never fully achieve modernity "due to their inability to internalize such categories of thinking" (Levi 2007, 49). This view of Mizrahim as "incapable" and "underprivileged" turned them into infants in the eyes of the Ashkenazi absorbers; thus, taking over every decision regarding Mizrahim and their children seemed natural.

* * *

Miriam felt restless and unable to eat or drink on the flight. She had a bad feeling about what was going to happen. "When we arrived at the airport in Israel, I ran out of the plane to look for my baby, but people told me that they saw the nurse getting into a taxi with my baby," she said. "I was running around crying but they had already left. I cried so hard at the airport, but only God could hear me." When the Ovadiya family was taken with other immigrants to Rosh Ha'ayin's absorption camp, they received blankets and a bed for their daughter Zohara, so they were sure that the nurse would bring her back. "We talked to Badihi, the camp director," Miriam said, "and he promised that she would be found and it will all be fine." Two days later, the camp director notified the family of Zohara's death; they never saw her grave or death certificate.

* * *

Although Jews have historically been victims of anti-Semitism, there are Jews who have committed and still commit acts of racism against other Jews as well as non-Jews. In Israel, Mizrahim have faced racism from the state authorities, media, and society.[14] Social and political discrimination has created a deep structural imbalance, which reinforces Mizrahim's marginalized social standing within Israeli society. As Ammiel Alcalay (1993, 43) noted, "This highly imbalanced encounter between the newcomers [Mizrahim] and the veterans [Ashkenazim] saw the breakup of families and communities . . . due to a complete dependency on a system in which practically all forms of expression and exchange were tied to the Zionist party-based institutions."

To this day, Ashkenazi Jews dominate the Israeli economic, political, and judicial systems, the academia, and the media. Smadar Lavie (2002, 1) pointed out how in the academia, for instance, public universities did not reflect the demographics of Israel's taxpayers: "The rank and file of full and associate professors in Israel consists almost completely of upper-middle-class Ashkenazi men." Moreover, Lavie said that only 8.8 percent of full professors were women, and "they are all members of the Ashkenazi wealthy elite."[15] At a rally condemning the demolition of 30 Mizrahi

homes in Kefar Shalem, Lavie noted that Mizrahim constituted the majority of Israel's welfare recipients and prison inmates:

> We've been the precarious tenants in Israel's gainful employment zone . . . Most of us still believe that if we work hard, we, too, can make it and become part of the elite. But aside from the handful of Mizrahim splendidly and repeatedly PRed by the public media, we are the majority in the long welfare lines, the long NGO food-for-the-hungry lines, and the long lines at the forced employment agencies. Likewise, we are always the majority in the occasional marches, sit-ins, and demonstrations of the homeless.[16]

Educational and economic[17] gaps between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews continue to grow. According to the Adva Center for the Equality of Israeli Society, in 2005 nearly 70 percent of students from affluent towns in the center of Israel (mostly populated by Ashkenazim) graduated from high school, passing the state matriculation exam (*Teudat Bagrut*). In the development towns (mostly populated by Mizrahim), however, only 46 percent of high school students passed the matriculation exam. In higher education, there were similar gaps. Researchers from the Adva Center (2007) noted that while the state of Israel did not institute an official discrimination policy, representation of Mizrahim, Arabs, Bedouins, and Ethiopian Jews was still low in all universities and colleges due to a variety of factors. Despite the substantial expansion of academic institutions during the early 1990s, which brought more students to universities and colleges, access to higher education today is directly correlated with economic ability. According to the Adva Center (2007), economic ability in turn is directly correlated with cultural background. Ultimately, access to higher education becomes even harder for underrepresented groups for a variety of reasons. As Swirski (1998, 4) noted, these social and educational gaps demonstrate the current face of elitism in Israeli society: "Perhaps the state of Israel lost its former urgent call to invest in the education of Mizrahi and Arab youths, since it got new 'ready made' educated adults who recently immigrated from the former Soviet Union. After all, so many Israeli officials have defined them as 'the best thing that happened to Israel in the last 50 years.'"

* * *

The Ovadiyas came to settle in a small village north of Tel Aviv. Several months later, on her way to work, Miriam saw her daughter's nurse on the street. "Do you remember me?" Miriam asked. "You took my baby from my hands. Where is she?" The nurse told Miriam that Zohara was in a baby house in Tel Aviv and gave her the address. When Miriam and her

husband rushed to the address, they found an office building. They were told that there never had been a baby house at that address.

This testimony was given to the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission back in 1968. None of the three commissions investigating this Affair, however, made an effort to locate the nurse. After he had filed a complaint with the police in 1983, Said was told that his daughter was among 20 children considered missing. Thereafter, the Ovadiya family received several conflicting notifications from Israeli authorities. One note said that Zohara had left the country in 1963, and another said that she was buried in the Segula graveyard near Petah-Tiqva.

* * *

The Yemenite community, while marginalized, has never been silent, and dissent over the Babies Affair escalated from a few isolated protests to broad public outcry and appeals to the government. Despite accusations that these babies had been kidnapped for adoption in Israel and abroad, the state of Israel failed to properly investigate the matter.[18] The government only responded in the face of considerable public protest, and then in ways assured to create little actual progress.

In Israel, the state can commission two kinds of bodies to conduct public investigations: a commission of inquiry *(Va'adat Bedika)* and an official public investigative commission *(Va'adat Hakira Mamlachtit)*. The latter is by far the more powerful of the two. It must be appointed by the prime minister, has subpoena power, and holds discussions open to public observation. A commission of inquiry, in contrast, can be initiated by any minister, have no subpoena power, and hold closed-door discussions with no public oversight to assure balanced representation. Where the public investigative commission has teeth from subpoena power and public oversight, the commission of inquiry is essentially a state-sanctioned back room decision. The choice of commission is the first indication of how seriously the Israeli state intends to pursue an issue. In the case of the Yemenite Babies Affair, the state did not invoke even a commission of inquiry for decades.

The first official response, the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission (1967–1968), was a commission of inquiry —constituted only after heavy pressure from the Yemenite community. The commission examined the cases of 342 missing children and determined in closed-door discussions that 316 of the children had died, 4 were placed for adoption under legally questionable circumstances, and 22 cases remained under investigation. Only the most circumstantial evidence from camp and government officials was produced to counter eyewitness accounts from the Yemenite community, and the 22 cases under investigation were never resolved. In

the end, the commission served as little more than an empty gesture to placate those calling for investigation and justice.

In 1988, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir appointed a second commission of inquiry in response to massive pressure from the Yemenite community. The Shalgi Commission dragged its investigation for six years and did not release the results until prompted by the Rabbi Meshulam revolt in March 1994.

Rabbi Meshulam led a group of Yemenites to protest against the Israeli government's handling of the Affair. He and a host of his followers established a weapons cache at his house in Yahud, a small town near Tel Aviv, in an attempt to force the Israeli government to appoint a public investigative commission to properly investigate the kidnappings.[19] In response, Israeli police and army personnel surrounded Rabbi Meshulam's home for more than a month, finally mounting an armed attack on May 10, 1994. During the attack, police shot and killed Shlomi Asulin, a 19-year-old student of Rabbi Meshulam. The rabbi and several others were arrested and served prison sentences for about five years.

In response to the considerable negative media attention this incident generated, the Israeli government released the Shalgi Commission's findings and finally invoked a public investigative commission shortly thereafter. The Shalgi Commission's findings revealed that of the 301 new cases investigated, 14 involved disappearances from the Hashed Transit Camp in Yemen, 222 children had died, and the fate of 65 remained unknown. No efforts were made to locate these children or to pursue the commission's recommendation of conducting investigations abroad.

In light of the violent incident in Yahud, the government created the Kedmi Commission (1995–2001) to investigate the issue still further. The president of the Supreme Court, Meir Shamgar, appointed retired judge Yehuda Cohen to head the commission, whom Judge Kedmi later replaced.

Although called a "public investigative commission," the Kedmi Commission was not what many Yemenite parents had hoped for. First, only one lawyer was assigned to file legal action in the first few years of the investigation, reducing the commission's progress to the ability of one man to work. Second, although the commission had the power of subpoena, it was not used with certain critical witnesses, such as Rabbi Menachem Porush, a former senior government official involved in the absorption processes of the 1950s. In September 1997, Porush told the press that Yemenite children had been systematically taken from their parents and that some individuals responsible were still alive; however, he said that he would not reveal their identity for fear of retaliation. The Kedmi Commission's response was decidedly cool. Rather than taking the initiative to pursue the validity of these claims, the commission spokesperson

declared to the press that if Porush had something to say he should speak before the commission of his own volition.

By the same token, Yemenite witnesses eager to present solid, and often eyewitness, evidence, such as the Ovadiya family, were given short shrift. Adding insult to injury, as Shoshi Zaid (2003) noted, according to witnesses, the first chair of the commission, Judge Yehuda Cohen, who was over 70 years old, developed a history of falling asleep during hearings.

The Kedmi Commission took another six years to release its findings. This delay in an investigation already five decades too late puzzled and disappointed the Yemenite community, which again found itself without recourse in the face of deliberate government cover-up. The state, for its part, surely knew that stringing the investigation along would weaken the case against it, as the primary witnesses, parents directly affected by the kidnappings, were old or no longer alive.

Among the 406 new cases examined by the Kedmi Commission, about 20 involved disappearances from the Hashed Transit Camp in Yemen. The commission claimed that 391 of the babies had died, 14 were still missing, and one possibly had been discovered. Of the 20 babies missing from Hashed, 7 had died and 13 were still missing.[20]

* * *

In 1996, the Ovadiyas hired a private detective, Michael Raz. While researching documentation in the interior minster's office, Raz found indication that Zohara had left the country in July 1963. As Raz continued his search, Said received another letter (this time from the population registry within the interior ministry) that discredited the document Raz had discovered. It stated, "Your daughter Zohara is still registered as an Israeli citizen . . . there is no basis to the claim that she had left the country . . . this is not the information we gave you."

Conflicted, saddened, and deeply disappointed, Miriam Ovadiya said she lost all trust in state authorities: "We trusted them blindly when we came to Israel but they used us. All these years, they continued to lie to me and provide me with false information."

* * *

Racism flourishes in Israeli society, despite claims to the contrary. It was created, integrally and deliberately, by the way in which Mizrahi immigrants were absorbed[21] at the very beginning, and it continues today. Many acts of discrimination and exclusion discussed in this book are simultaneously symptoms and causes of a deep social and economical divide between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. In *All Men Are Equal~~But~~*

Some Are More, Sammy Michael provides a stark example in the arrival of an Iraqi Jewish family to Israel and its reception:

> Despite my father's certain expectation, my brother Shaoul didn't wait for us at the end of the runway. Pretty flight attendants didn't welcome us, either. Instead, we saw a group of faceless clerks coming towards us. Father looked at them for a minute from the door of the plane at the top of the stairs, and then he started to get off the plane, slowly and with dignity . . . we all knew he was hiding his disappointment because of the importance of the moment. It was an impressive but useless effort on his behalf. In just a few moments the new land had turned my father from a proud vigorous man at his peak to a humiliated, useless old man. As he was coming off the plane, when we were all excited to feel the charm of the land of Israel that we were dreaming about, one of the clerks came over to us with a big spraying machine. Before we could understand what was going on, a big cloud of DDT shrouded Abu-Shaul [the father], a formerly respectable citizen in the community of Baghdad. Through the cloud we saw dad reaching with his hands to the sprayer; it was a silent miserable protest. The DDT powder got into his open mouth. His hair moustache and eyelashes turned white. His silk tie, his ironed shirt and fine suit turned into a dusty looking floor cloth. After this humiliating moment without a word, not even hello, after they treated him like he was the leader of the herd, I saw dad going into his last battle for keeping his dignity on the face of the earth: he refused to sneeze. The tears started to fall, his face muscles twitched into a tortured mask; it all looked ugly, ugly and sick. The fight went on for a few seconds. Father won; he did not sneeze. I was a witness to dad's last victory. The creature that then left the airport was not my dad but just what was left from his pride.
>
> (1976/1995, 18–19)

The image of an Iraqi Jewish man, in shirt and tie, shot in the face with DDT in lieu of an actual greeting exemplifies the establishment of racism in the Israeli state and the complex state of Mizrahi identity. The Mizrahim, understandably, were outraged about this sort of treatment, but it is their "sensitivity," not racism, which remains the focus of discussion. Since their mass immigration to Israel and accusations of disrespectful treatment, Mizrahim were perceived as sensitive when it came to their pride.[22] This feeling about Mizrahim has intensified, along with the Orientalist stereotype that Arabs can act irrationally and even kill when their pride is at stake. Moreover, much like Arabs, Mizrahi Jews are often perceived as a people who are motivated by their emotions rather than reason. As such, they cannot participate in rational Western dialogue. The description of the Iraqi Jewish father's pride being crushed by the Israeli clerks and the serious implications of this incident for the young Mizrahi generation is often taken out of context in public discourses. This has led

to racist discourses in the media initiated by politicians, journalists, or other public figures. For instance, Ori Orr, Knesset member and former general of the Israeli Army, stated in *Haaretz*,

> The problem is that I can't talk to these people [Mizrahim] the way I talk with others who are more Israeli in their character[23]. Every time you say something to them, they immediately start to jump, to claim that they are hurt and insulted. They are too sensitive and have all these honor problems so you can't have a decent conversation with them.
>
> (July 29, 1998)

Orr gave this interview to *Haaretz* because he thought that Ehud Barak, at that time chair of the Labor Party, and his "forgiveness speech," in which he asked for forgiveness from Mizrahim, "didn't change a thing." Barak's speech had been delivered on behalf of the Labor Party a year before this interview as a reconciliatory gesture against past racism.[24] As Michael (1976/1995) described in his book, in the public memory the Labor Party (then *Mapay*) was responsible for racist acts against Mizrahim from the early days of Zionism in Palestine, during the mass immigration to Israel, and throughout the first three decades of the country.

Orr then explained that by "Mizrahim" he referred mainly to Moroccans: "They are the biggest and the most problematic ethnic group. I am sad because these people do not have the curiosity to know what is going on around them and why." Or's interview was given during the Labor Party campaign for the 1999 elections. What triggered his reaction was the realization that Mizrahim still tended to vote for the Likud and the Shas.[25] Other Labor Party leaders also heavily criticized the "forgiveness speech." Shimon Peres[26] said in the same article, "What are we apologizing for? For establishing this great country?"

The overwhelming support of Mizrahim for Menachem Begin and the right wing Likud Party in 1977 was tied to the complex process of identity destruction and reconstruction under Zionism. As Lavie (1991, 89) said, Mizrahim still "buy into the Zionist state ideology based on the religious distinction between Jews and non-Jews." This is partially because it was a way to differentiate between what was perceived as the dehumanized-hated Arab enemy and their own identity, which contained Arab components as well. The right also offered Mizrahim respect for their orthodox religious beliefs and an alternative home simply by virtue of opposing the Labor Party. Begin's rhetoric was perceived as a viable alternative also because he was someone who understood marginalization and humiliation, as he was despised and had been humiliated by the Labor Party many times over. Of course, as Abarjel (2005) noted, Mizrahi marginal social status continued and even worsened under the Likud Party.[27]

Nevertheless the simplistic depiction of Mizrahim as right wing fanatics continues, many times prompting public attacks as the one mentioned above.

Referring to counter racist discourse in a blunt attack is a tactic shared by many other Zionist leaders, past and present, especially when the issue of discrimination against Mizrahim is brought up. Peres' reaction is typical in that it reflects the tendency of the dominant group to refuse to recognize a different point of view, especially one that threatens Ashkenazi dominance. This stance resurfaces again and again in the following analysis of the Yemenite Babies Affair. For instance, Ahuva Goldfarb, the national supervisor of absorption camp baby houses in the 1950s, asked, "What do they want? We did a great job taking care of the new immigrants. Maybe we did them a favor, some of them were not rushing to get their babies back" (Madmoni 1996).

* * *

When Miriam and Said Ovadiya were accompanied by cameramen from the television show *Uvda* (1996) on a visit to the Segula graveyard in Petah-Tiqva, they were not shocked to discover that information given to them about their daughter's burial place was false. The gravestone that the Kedmi Commission had said was their daughter's was actually that of a boy named Shara'abi. The host of *Uvda*, Ilana Dayan, discovered a gravestone nearby with the name "Zohara Said," but it indicated that she had died several years before the Ovadiya family had immigrated to Israel.

Miriam's devastating loss never left her: "Since Zohara was taken away from me, I have no life," she said. "I know she has a beauty mark on her right cheek and she looks like my other daughter, Ge'ula. I have no moment of rest. We are old people already, all we ask now is that the state will correct this injustice."

Miriam noted that doubts and questions about events described in the media only added to her family's pain: "Today when I hear people say this never happened,[28] I tell them, 'why don't you look into my eyes first? I want you to dare look into my eyes and tell me I don't know what I am talking about.' I am old now, but I will never forget how they kidnapped my daughter from my hands. And I know who did it."

* * *

The case study of the Yemenite Babies Affair raises questions about identity, racism, narratives, and collective memory within Israeli society. It points to state policies that ignored differences in the name of unity—to create what Benedict Anderson (1991) called "imagined community." It

forces an examination of such concepts as justice, power, violence, and human rights as it challenges the Zionist notion of rescue and unity. In Israel, unity has often been perceived to be sacred—something that must rise above any conflict or controversy. Attempts to deconstruct this unity have historically been seen as efforts to fragment Israeli society. As Anderson said, "Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7).

This book uses a cultural studies approach to examine these issues as evident in the mainstream media discourse on the Yemenite Babies Affair. Through content analysis of this discourse[29] and interviews with key media professionals and social activists,[30] I examine the narrative of this Affair and discuss its effect on the future of Israeli society. I use Stuart Hall's notion of representation (1989, 1997), locating contested narratives while pointing to the connection between ideology and power, which ultimately motivated and dictated the news coverage of this Affair. I examine how, for example, the testimony of nurses and doctors working in the 1950s absorption camps were screened and processed by journalists, what kind of information made it to the front pages, what information was blocked, and what was the journalistic treatment of such testimony as "maybe we did them a favor" or "we had the best intentions" (Madmoni 1996). I argue that media networks through the framing and silencing of this Affair ultimately worked to maintain the facade of Jewish unity and the image of Jews as victims.

CRITICAL THEORY AND MEDIA DISCOURSE: A CULTURAL STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between race and nationality are at the center of Israel's defense narrative, its violence, and its domination of people and land. Usually, a discourse of violence and a concept of victim in a nation's logic conjure up images of penetration of borders and land, especially in the case of the nation-state of Israel. The focus of this book, however, is on the country's internal rather than external conflicts, on the people and not the land. It does not trace the evolution of the state but analyzes its society in terms of babies and identities, narratives and memory, knowledge and censorship. Understanding this Affair is to reconsider questions of how Orientalism, as a practice of knowledge and violence, works. In my analysis I employ Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) and the way it was revisited and expanded to the analysis of Israeli society by Ella Shohat (1988; 1989). I follow Shohat's framework, breaking the most commonly used categories of Arabs vs. Jews and examine Israel beyond the divisions of East vs. West and first vs. third worlds.

Shohat's major contribution is the deconstruction of the East/West and Arab/Jew dichotomies that dominated public discussion in Israel until the late 1980s. Previously, scholars such as Shlomo Swirski and Debora Bernstein had used a Marxist framework. They claimed that Mizrahim were economically disadvantaged by European Jews and intentionally placed on the periphery of the country and at the bottom of the social scale.[31] What was new in Shohat's analysis was looking beyond the category of class to also address questions of race, colonialism, and identity. Shohat's work located the Mizrahi question as already beginning with the Eurocentrism of Zionism, whose project of creating the "new Jew" meant aligning all that is Jewish with the West and all that is Arab with the East, generating a new binarism and therefore a new dilemma for Arab Jews.

Shohat also examined the oppression of Mizrahim in relation and in the context of the dispossession of Palestinians, although emphasizing their linked yet different histories. In contrast to previous studies on Mizrahim, her work examined the encounter between Middle Eastern Jews and Ashkenazi Jews as part of a broader pervasive Eurocentric attitude toward the East on the part of the Ashkenazi ideologues. Throughout her analysis she called to go beyond "a nation-state framework of analysis," cautioning about simply representing the Arab/Palestinian issue as "outside" and the Arab Jew/Mizrahim as "inside." In Shohat's formulation Jews from Arab Muslim countries cannot be seen as simply outside or inside, but rather as "in-between." She argued that the "East/West dichotomy" was "overtly schematic and misleading," calling for an approach that would "transcend binarism to demonstrate flexibility and an eye to syncretism" (1999, 3).[32] For Shohat, binary concepts, such as us/them, Arab/Jew, and East/West, do not capture the complex coexistence of deeply entangled identities, (multi) cultures, and narratives, which therefore require a cross-border analysis.[33]

The case study of the Yemenite Babies Affair demonstrates how the media has placed Yemenite Jews precisely in the category Shohat defines as "in-between." Broadcasts and newspaper articles deliberately or subtly, remind audiences that Yemenite Jews are a distinct ethnic community and the Babies Affair is their own distinct problem. While the story of the Babies Affair received coverage, at times even extensive, the reports lacked urgency and a call for action; they focused on a Yemenite story, keeping it distant from the national agenda. Furthermore, despite attracting some attention, especially in the mid-1990s, and public sympathy for individual stories, the Affair never gained enough political momentum to bring about a fair investigation.

The media coverage of this Affair exemplifies the Israeli media's self-appointed role as defender of public unity rather than a watchdog for

democracy and justice. By deliberately introducing potentially explosive material as questionable or vague, or simply burying and ignoring it altogether, the media maintained Zionist hegemony and played an active role in silencing the Affair. As a natural consequence, the media was instrumental in shaping both the meaning and public memory of this Affair.

As Hall (1997) reminds us, the meaning of events depends on what people make of them, and what people make of them naturally depends on how events are presented to them. The representation of an event must therefore always be considered part of the event; how the public sees the incident becomes the truth for all except the smallest handful. Fifty years of media coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair was essentially a struggle about defining the fundamental concepts and boundaries of this event in relation to the Zionist ideology. Some critical questions go unanswered even today. What actually happened to the babies? Where did these babies disappear? Gone? Kidnapped? Can we investigate numerous accusations about babies kidnapped from the Hashed Transit Camp in Yemen before 1948? And what about similar occurrences within other ethnic groups?

THE RELEVANCE OF ANTI-COLONIALIST DIALOGUE TO ISRAEL STUDIES

Said's *Orientalism* marked the beginning of an academic interest in colonial discourse. His work stressed the connection between culture and imperialism and has been followed by postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Chandra Mohanty. The crux of postcolonial theory, driven by both Michel Foucault and Said's work, is that power and knowledge necessarily imply one another. Foucault (1980) located these two concepts as the central features of discourse analysis. In *Orientalism,* Said refers to the forced Western imperial power over the Orient and the production of knowledge about non-Western societies. Said also focuses on the complexity surrounding the Orient, stemming from the knowledge produced about it by the West:

> Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory are thus critiques of the process of production of knowledge about the other. As such, they produce forms of knowledge themselves, but other knowledge, better knowledge, it is hoped, responsive to Said's question: How can we know and respect others?
>
> (Williams and Chrisman 1994, 8)

While postcolonial theory is a consideration in this book, there are also questions about the way it has been applied to Mizrahi studies in recent times by some Israeli scholars. One important aspect of postcolonial theory is looking at the colonized subject and its binary opposite, the colonizer,

and the extent to which these categories affect hybrid identities. Shohat studied the relevance of colonial discourse to the Mizrahim, while also examining the problematic ways in which postcolonial theory has recently "traveled" to the Israeli academic context, having an impact on Palestinian and Mizrahi studies.[34] Some Israeli scholars have recently jumped on the postcolonial bandwagon, especially privileging Bhabha's approach by extrapolating it for an analysis of the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi conflict.

In the essay collection *Mizrahim in Israel* (2002), editors Hanan Hever, Yehuda Shenhav, and Pnina Motzafi-Haller as well as other scholars reject Said's notion of West/East. Instead, they use Bhabha's approach to the analysis of Mizrahi identity, arguing that "the repressed [is] imitating the behavior of the colonizer and adopting parts of the hegemonic identity, just as much as the colonizers attempt to develop practical behaviors of the colonized" (106). While the process of imitation has been much discussed in the critique of colonialism, it can be hardly considered mutual and must be examined as such. The problem with employing Bhabha's approach is that it shifts emphasis from Ashkenazi oppression of Mizrahi culture, overlooking current Ashkenazi domination in every aspect of Israeli cultural life. As Ammiel Alcalay (1993) noted, Bahbah's terminology "obscures the fact that people are still colonized, albeit in new and different ways" (13). How can we even begin to talk about a mutual process of mimicry and identification when describing an encounter between dramatically unequal forces such as Mizrahim and Ashkenazim?

Shohat cautions that the leap from Zionism to post-Zionism and postcolonial theory is problematic if one does not address the colonial dimension of Zionist discourse.[35] In overlooking the link between power and knowledge, this approach fails to offer alternatives. As Ann McClintock (1994) argued, part of the problem is that postcolonial theory is organized around the concept of time rather than power. This theory encourages an early celebration of the time after colonialism, while many different forms of imperial power still exist, such as military, political, economic, and cultural.

Moreover, an eagerness to adopt the new era of hybrid identities is at the expense of recognizing that it is manifested differently in different places and histories. In "Notes on the Post-Colonial" (1992), Shohat argued that hybrids vary depending upon time, place, and historical moment. The key point then is to differentiate between the various forms of hybridity:

> A celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence . . . Negotiating locations, identities, and positionalities in relation to the violence

> of neo-colonialism is crucial if hybridity is not to become a figure for the consecration of hegemony . . . As a descriptive catch-all term, "hybridity" per se fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence. (109–110)

It is methodologically and theoretically misleading to view works such as Said's and Shohat's as theories that offer fixed binaries of East/West colonized/colonizer, when in fact they offer deconstruction of the fixity of colonial discourse. Shohat combined her awareness of earlier anticolonial thinkers such as Aime Cesaire, Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon along with Said, but also pointed to "the anomalies of Zionism" (1989, 1999) as both a national and colonial movement.[36] Thus she provided a complex analysis not only of Zionist discourse but also of Mizrahim's situation in their rupture from the Arab/Muslim world and entrance into Israel.

One of the major contributions to the understanding of how these dichotomies function in producing racist discourses is Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1968). As Hall (1989) pointed out, Fanon's work highlighted the complexity of black identity and the effects of racist discourses on the construction of this identity. The Black is not only Black, but "he must be Black in relation to the White man." In other words, the process of black skins shading into white masks must be examined in relation to the political oppression and cultural colonialism; especially because, as Hall pointed out, we only now begin to understand how racism functions. The complexity of Fanon's analysis is a great contribution to Israel's ongoing discussions about racism and colonialism—especially, as Shohat pointed out, his claim that "free will" is irrelevant for colonized people, a point that is often lost when concepts such as hybridity and mimicry are emphasized.[37]

To arrive at another way of perceiving Mizrahi identity and culture, one must first deconstruct the power and discrimination embodied in the colonial discourse, as Fanon suggests. There are no shortcuts: these power struggles continue to exist in the present. As Etzioni-Halevy (1997) has demonstrated, Israeli society is extremely elitist even in comparison with other Western urban societies today. This model of social elitism continues to propagate and maintain itself due to the existing power relations between the East and the West within Israeli society. No premature "hybrid party" can hide this reality.

It is true that many Mizrahim gladly adopted aspects of Ashkenazi identity, as some scholars claim in *Mizrahim in Israel* (2002), but this is precisely the stage of racism that Fanon talks about in *Black Skin White Masks*. Under the Zionist "melting pot" ideology, Ashkenazi Israeli culture

was forced on Mizrahim and was presented as the only option in the way of becoming Israelis. As Sami Chetrit puts it in the documentary *Kadim Wind* (2002), as kids "we accepted upon us elements of Ashkenazi identity with love . . . the state turned us into socialization agents, working against our parents."

Growing up in Israel, I, too, mimicked Ashkenazi ways. I believed that I needed to distance myself from my Yemenite ancestors. Many second generation Mizrahi Israelis like myself developed the "Israeli" identity largely by resenting and denying the "Arabness" of our parents. This process known in Hebrew as *lehishtaknez* (to become Ashkenazi) led to emotional gaps between Mizrahi parents and children.

> Sephardim in Israel were made to feel ashamed of their dark olive skin, of their guttural language, of the winding quarter-tones of their music, and even of their traditions of hospitality. Children, trying desperately to conform to an elusive "sabra" norm, were made to feel ashamed of their parents and their Arab countries of origins. At times the Semitic physiognomies of the Sephardim led to situations in which they were mistaken for Palestinians and therefore arrested or beaten. Since Arabness led only to rejection, many Sephardim internalized the Western perspective and turned into self-hating Sephardim. Thus not only did the "West" come to represent the "East," but also, in a classic play of colonial secularity, the East came to view itself through the West's distorting mirror. Indeed, if it is true, as Malcolm X said, that the White man's worst crime was to make the Black man hate himself, the establishment in Israel has much to answer for.
>
> (Shohat 1988, 25)

This powerful drain on Mizrahi identity must be recognized as detrimental, hardly an innocent and mutual process of mimicry. Indeed, for Shohat the act of physical kidnapping must be seen as part of a broader kidnapping of historical memory.[38] Given this history, it is perhaps not a coincidence that the radical critique of Ashkenazi colonialism was only made possible outside Israel when Sepahrdi/Mizrahi intellectuals, such as Shohat, Lavie, Alcalay, Chetrit, and Behar, to name a few, began to write in the United States. Maybe this is the time to allow for other memories and histories to be acknowledged and to sit at the academic discussion table not as masters and subordinates but as equals.

Theory and practical political implications are integral to this book, resulting in a multitiered analysis that includes a historical perspective, political ideology, discourse, and power. In the tradition of cultural studies, a specific story exposes unresolved social and political problems within Israeli society.

As the product of a working-class family of Yemenite descent, it is my hope that this book contributes to the broader discussion about Israeli

society that began three decades ago. As a former journalist who covered the Yemenite Babies Affair, I want to add voice to the mothers and fathers who lost their children and to acknowledge their sorrow and tears, which I cannot forget.

* * *

This book has six chapters. Chapter 1 is a historical review of the Zionist ideological and practical practices and Zionism's relationship with Mizrahim. Conflicting stories reveal an ongoing tension between the Zionist concept of unity and the reality of racism and oppression of Mizrahim. The chapter examines in particular the relationship between Yemenite Jews and Zionism, revealing examples of exclusion and racism.

Chapter 2 maps Israeli media pointing to power, ownership, and discourse. Examples of Mizrahi representation in the mainstream media are discussed, as are a variety of perspectives about Mizrahi issues and the nature of Mizrahi representation. Of particular note is the collusion of media organizations and personalities who support Zionist ideology.

In Chapter 3, the Yemenite Babies Affair is reiterated as it appeared in the media from the 1960s to 2001, when the Kedmi Commission submitted its findings. The Affair was officially laid to rest by the government after information gathered by this final commission was disseminated.

Chapter 4 analyzes competing narratives about the Affair and the relationship between discourse and power via an examination of media text and in-depth interviews with reporters, editors, and social activists.

Chapter 5 focuses on Rabbi Meshulam's 1994 revolt, which was the only substantial protest against the government's handling of the Affair. This chapter traces the historical background of Mizrahi protests in Israel while focusing on media formulas that contributed to the language of conflict.

Chapter 6 examines the debate between advocates of community and advocates of multiculturalism and diversity as it applies to Israeli society. It explains that although the cornerstone concept of unity is central to Israeli national identity and Zionist ideology, the reality—epitomized by the oppression of Mizrahim and Palestinians—is different. The consequences of overlooking internal conflicts are enumerated and alternatives that focus on diversity and inclusion are suggested.

CHAPTER 1

PRESENT BUT ABSENT: OFFICIAL NARRATIVES AND THE UNTOLD MIZRAHI HISTORY

ZIONIST DISCOURSE: PRACTICE AND IDEOLOGY

> We need people who are born workers. We have to pay attention to the local element, the Oriental Jews, both the Yemenite and Sephardic. Their standard of living and their needs are lower than the European workers are. They will be able to compete successfully with the Arab workers.
>
> (David Ben-Gurion 1911)[1]

The continued tension between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews is rooted in the early days of Zionism. Unlike conflicts that have been acknowledged and addressed (e.g., between the religious and the secular or between Palestinians and Israelis), the tension between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews is still considered "explosive" and often pushed aside despite gaining prominence and momentum. The essence of the ethnic problem is this: Israeli Zionist leaders intend to make Israel part of the Western world, simultaneously refusing to recognize Israel as a Middle Eastern country, although at least 60 percent of the Jewish population is culturally Arab. The state of Israel, through its Ashkenazi leaders, chooses to suppress both the Arab and Arab Jewish cultural presence in its immediate environment.

In a powerful political critique of Israeli cinema, Ella Shohat (1989) revealed the demographics essential to an understanding of the East/West power struggle:

> In purely demographic terms, a majority of the Israeli population can be seen as Third World people or at least originating in Third World.

> The Palestinians make up about 20 percent of the population, while the Sephardic, the majority who came, within very recent memory, from countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and India, countries generally regarded as forming part of the Third World, constitute about 50 percent of the population, thus giving a total of about 70 percent of the population as Third World or Third World driven. European hegemony in Israel, in this sense, is a product of a distinct numerical minority within the country, a minority whose interest is to deny Israel's Easternness as well as its Third Worldness.
>
> (4)

After the state of Israel was established in 1948, its first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, intended to turn Israel into what he called the "Switzerland of the Middle East." Mizrahi Jews were perceived as the major obstacle in turning his vision into a reality. In a 1954 article in *Netzah Israel* (Israel's Glory), Ben-Gurion wrote,

> The Jewish people about whom Hertzel was thinking and whom his Zionist policies and activities depended, were in fact European Jewry who neither wanted nor were able to remain in Europe. This is what carried the Zionist movement on its shoulders . . . thus, the state did not find the people for whom it was created.[2]

Similar public expressions about Mizrahi Jews were heard from other politicians and in the media. In November 1951, *Haboker* (The Morning) described Jews from Muslim countries as "people with no will for work . . . [They] lack any understanding and patience to get over the necessary conditions here." A leader of the Jewish Agency, Giyora Yoseftal, characterized Mizrahi immigrants as having "no morals, they are Levantine with dark lives." And specifically the Moroccans, he said, "are primitive people and a backward ethnic group." Other leaders referred to Mizrahi immigrants as "inferior human material" and "blacks and primitives." Prime Minister Ben-Gurion even admitted, "Yes, there is discrimination, we are compelled to do so."[3]

These early views within Zionism informed future power relations between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. Officially, the state of Israel was created to liberate and unite the Jewish people. In practice, however, the Zionist movement has not valued cultural diversity or equality. In subscribing to the "melting pot" philosophy, Ben-Gurion predicted that the new Jew would emerge free of traces of Diaspora. This new Jew envisioned by Ben-Gurion, however, was a secular, cultured Westerner with light skin who was attached to his land; he was newly settled from Europe with no traces of Mizrahi image, culture, or history.

When Ashkenazi Jews encountered Mizrahi Jews in Israel in the 1950s, their experience was akin to that of other Western colonizers. As Mizrahi

Jews (culturally distinct people) were organized and controlled by the West, the notion of white supremacy was ultimately reinforced.[4] Mizrahi Jews, who looked and talked like Arabs, had no idea that they would become second-class citizens. They didn't know that Hebrew with an Arab accent would be misconstrued as a lack of education and considered unsuitable for the broadcast media.[5] They didn't know that their only entry ticket to Israeli society would be through hating the "Arab enemy" whom they resembled.

To maintain their ruling position, the Ashkenazi elite intentionally marginalized the majority of Mizrahim by situating them on the outskirts of the country. European Jews were located in the center of Israel, closer to white-collar employment, academic institutions, medical facilities, the government, and cultural landmarks, and were given better housing. Mizrahim, on the other hand, were situated on the periphery where education facilities were minimal, medicine and housing were of inferior quality, and residents were isolated from any active participation in the developing Jewish state. Once located in outlying areas, subsequent generations tended to remain near their families. To this day, discrimination exacerbated by unfavorable location plays a part in the social status of Mizrahim in Israel, many of whom live far from commercial and academic centers.

Israeli sociologist Shlomo Swirski was one of the first researchers in Israeli academia to demonstrate this social and economic marginalization. He claimed that the division of labor in Israel was ethnically biased from the beginning. Swirski (1981) wrote, "In the very same years that Mizrahi Jews turned into seasonal salaried farm workers and simple construction and industrial workers, Ashkenazi Jews turned into work managers, professionally skilled 'white-collar' workers and owners of small and medium factories"[6] (54).

Swirski challenged the oppressive nature of the social divisions as well as the unjust distribution of resources and power, insisting that Mizrahim were in the periphery because of the way in which they were absorbed into Israeli society and not because of their "natural" Arab character or culture, as commonly claimed by academicians. For example, Karl Frankenstein asserted that Mizrahim and Arabs were in fact intellectually inferior.[7] Swirski concluded that a change in the status of Mizrahim in Israel would be possible only through a major reconstruction of Israeli social structure. One of the major obstacles in closing these gaps, according to Swirski, was the lack of proper education available to Mizrahi children throughout Israel.

To this day, Mizrahi schoolchildren cannot study their parents' history in schools,[8] where their culture is still considered inferior. In fact, according to Chetrir (1999), 95 percent of the authors of history textbooks for school curriculum are Ashkenazim, who often erase Mizrahi history or present aspects of it in racist and distorted ways. The following is a description of a Yemenite boy by a nine-year-old Hungarian girl, Mira. This story is from

the history textbook *A Journey through the First Colonies* published by the Ministry of Education in 1992:

> One day we saw a little boy in our street. He was darker and skinnier from all the kids I have ever seen . . . This boy walked from house to house and yelled Cheese! Cheese! [The Hebrew word for cheese, "Gevina," was written in the original text using Yemenite accent making it read "Jebina"]. His accent was strange, a little Arab, a little Hebrew, something unclear. All the neighbors closed the doors before him . . . Mother looked at him and said that this boy arrived in Jerusalem a few days ago along with 200 people. All of them were dark and skinny like him. These people say they come from a far away land, Yemen. But in Jerusalem people don't believe them. "Why don't they believe them?" I asked. Mom lost her patience with me and said: "Tell me Mira, since when there are dark skinned Jews?" When they boy left, everyone was out in the street. All the people were against him. They said that he was Arab, that he was wearing a custom, and all kinds of things I don't remember. The rumors were so bad that at night mother locked our door twice, just to be on the safe side.[9]

Zionist discourse developed into what Stuart Hall (1992) referred to as "the discourse of the West and the Rest," noting power relationships between the West and the rest of the world. The West has used its economic hegemony to construct this treatise, maintaining what Edward Said (1978) identified as a "flexible positional superiority," which postulates that the West always maintains supremacy without risking its privileged position. According to Said (1978), the West has not only controlled information about the Orient, it has invented the essence of the Oriental image, especially through academic discourse and the media.

ORIENTALISM AND ZIONISM

Said defined Orientalism as a style of thought based on the ontological and epistemological distinctions related to the East and the West as well as a Western institution that rules and has authority over the Orient (1978). Through colonialism, Eurocentric and Western systems of thinking dominated the cultures they controlled. Although desirable products and concepts from these cultures might be sanitized and adopted by the West (e.g., algebra and certain medicines), rarely were they accepted as equal or preferred systems. Accepted systems of thinking in areas such as medicine, music, or tradition were often regarded with suspicion or a patronizing appreciation of the "quaint."

Said argues that the knowledge produced by the West about the East is not innocent or objective, but in fact reflects Western interests to dominate the East.

Said claims the lenses of Oientalism distort the actual reality of these places and people, often making the people of the Middle East appear different and threatening. Said's critique of Zionism (1997) shows how Zionists have become oppressors of both Arabs and Mizrahim. To borrow Said's words, Zionism "appeared to be an uncompromisingly exclusionary, discriminatory, colonialist praxis" (24–25).

In a theoretical dialogue on Said's work, Shohat (1989) challenged and deconstructed the myths of Zionism, pointing to the ways in which Orientalism could explain how Zionism oppressed Mizrahi Jews. She claimed that Mizrahim were not active partners in the European Zionist desire to "end the Diaspora" and even actively disputed Zionism and did not participate in the early stages of the Zionist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1920, for instance, Palestine's Sephardic community joined an anti-Zionist petition organized by Palestinian Arabs. In 1929, the Iraqi Jewish leadership cooperated with the Iraqi government to stop Zionist activity in Iraq (Shohat 1988).

The Zionist movement created a dream reflective of a European sensibility. And when Mizrahim attempted to participate in the development of this dream, they were denied equality or partnership:

> Sephardic Jews were first brought to Israel for specific European-Zionist reasons, and once there, they were systematically discriminated against by Zionism, which deployed its energies and material resources differentially, to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent detriment of Oriental Jews.
>
> (Shohat 1988, 1)

Mizrahim were not only discriminated against, but were also seen as a major obstacle in the process of turning Israel into a European country; they constituted the internal "Arab" trouble, which was seen as adding to the already problematic dominant Arab cultural presence in Israel and the surrounding area. Since the Zionists viewed Mizrahim through Orientalist lenses, the knowledge that was produced about them, as Said explains, included not only stereotypes and misconceptions but also fear.[10] In fact, Zionist leaders feared that the majority, Mizrahi Jews, would turn Israel into a Levantine country.

One of the most racist results of this fear were the selection regulations governing immigration from North Africa, effective from 1951 to 1956 (Malka 1998).[11] These regulations favored laborers as well as young people and were biased against older people. Only about 100,000 of the 240,000 Jews left in Morocco were given permission to immigrate to Israel over an eight-year period. The rest were denied entry even though their safety at the hands of the new Islamic government was in question.

As historian Yaron Tzur (1997, 172) noted, although at that time Jews in Morocco faced the risk of persecution from the government, the Israeli government kept selection regulations in effect; this despite reports of harm done to Moroccan Jews and their fear about their country's upcoming independence. And while the Moroccan upheaval was in full swing, the Jewish Agency was happy to accept a greater number of Eastern European Jews to Israel. Bar-Yehuda, then minister of the interior, said,

> We may have lost 120,000 people that could have immigrated from North Africa and we didn't let them. But with the immigrants from Poland and Hungary, it is clear that if we will not get ready to accept them, it might be one chance only. We will lose these Jews. From this aspect there is a difference between the Jews from Hungary and Poland and the Jews from Morocco and Tunisia.
>
> (Malka 1998, 198).

The fear of Israel being turned into the Levant still exists among the Ashkenazi elite, but in an age characterized by the rapid spread of information, a more "politically correct" point of view prevails. It is understood that some topics are intended for public consumption and others are not.[12] Nevertheless, in the Israel of today, some public officials are known to have made racist comments that denigrate certain cultures, similar to comments made in the 1950s. In 1994, for instance, when Alisa Shenhar, a professor from Haifa University, was selected by Shimon Peres to be the Israeli ambassador to Moscow, she expressed joy about the recent immigration from Russia:

> I think it is a great immigration, a cultural immigration. We were in danger of becoming Levantine and this immigration saved us . . . This [the Russian] is an immigration of cultural people in the true sense of the word. Intellectual immigration, many people who are doctors, engineers, musicians, artists and writers. I think it would be very helpful and very healthy for the state of Israel and I hope it continues.[13]

If Russians were "cultural people in the true sense of the word," the implication is that other immigrants were not. Appreciating them for saving Israel from becoming "Levantine" meant that Israel needed to be rescued from such a fate. These comments received no public challenge.

ZIONISM, EQUALITY, AND THE YEMENITE JEWS

To understand the Yemenite Babies Affair one needs to first comprehend the relationship between the Zionist movement and Yemenite Jews. One must be willing to reconsider the official Zionist narratives and acknowledge

victimization and colonization of "other" Jews. As Lavie (2007) said, "Ashkenazi Zionist project has devoted a tremendous effort to erasing these histories, due to their volatile nature" (9). Only in the early 1990s did a more critical discourse emerge, as radical scholars, some of Mizrahi descent, provided an alternative voice.[14]

One of the few early texts to analyze the relationship between the Zionist movement and Yemenite Jews from a non-Zionist viewpoint is Yosef Meir's book *The Zionist Movement and the Yemenite Jews* (1983). This book examines Shmuel Yavnieli's mission to bring Yemenite Jewish workers to Israel in 1911 and the relationship between the Yemenites and the majority of Ashkenazi settles in Palestine at the time.

Meir criticized Zionist historiography as well as revisited and deconstructed myths about Yemenite Jews that were deeply ensconced in Israel's public memory. While according to the official Zionist narrative Mizrahi Jews were rescued by Zionism and brought to Israel as part of the revival of the Jewish nation, Meir demonstrated that bringing Yemenite Jews to Israel was a calculated effort to exploit them for labor.

Later, scholars such as Iraqi Klorkman (2006) deconstructed the Zionist narrative of "rescue" and showed that in fact the Yemenite Jews had lived a relatively peaceful life under their Arab rulers.

> Modern anti-Semitism was not known in Yemen . . . the Jews were not persecuted by the rulers of Yemen or by the local population . . . under the Muslim faith the Jews were protected. They were given the freedom to practice their religion and were also granted . . . a full personal protection as well as protection of their assets.
>
> (300)

Moreover, Klorkman claims that exaggerated stories of persecution in Yemen were the Yemenites only "entry ticket to the Zionist story" (329), a tendency that, she says, was empowered later by the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

YEMENITE JEWS AS WORKFORCE

According to Lavie (2007), of the roughly 600,000 Jewish settlers in pre-1948 Palestine, the "Yishuv era" in Hebrew, the majority, about 450,000, were Ashkenazi settlers arriving mainly from central and eastern Europe, including Holocaust survivors. The rest comprised families that had always lived in Palestine and immigrants from the Balkans and Muslim countries, including about 40,000 from Yemen.

Yemenite Jews were brought to Palestine to solve what the Zionists called "the Arab work problem." They were brought to Palestine as second-class

settlers and were destined to become the permanent working class of the new state to be. "Zionism's main goal was to colonize Palestine in order to establish a Jewish state" (Lavie 2007, 9). And while Zionists asserted that Jewish labor should be used to build Israel, they claimed that European immigrants were incapable of working the land. Since Palestinian laborers were Arabs, that left the Yemenites, who the Zionists claimed were "natural workers"—people who were accustomed to difficult conditions and could sustain land work without complaining for the rest of their lives. Yemenite Jews fitted this need for labor perfectly. "So in 1882, fifteen years before the first World Zionist Congress in Basel, Ashkenazi Zionists organized the first wave of Arab Jewish labor migration from Yemen to Palestine called E'eleh ba-tamar" (Lavie 2007, 9). The wave of Yemenite immigrants in the pre-1948 era became the first days of "institutional intentional discrimination against non-Europeans. Yemenite workers, for instance, received two *grush* [the Palestinian currency at the time] while the Russians received ten grush" (Kimmerling 2004, 101).

Despite the inherent contradiction between Zionist socialist philosophy and Zionist discriminatory practices, leaders had no problem implementing this approach.

As Dr. Yaakov Tahon, a Zionist leader, said,

> It is doubtful if the Ashkenazi Jews are qualified to work in anything other than city work. On the other hand, we have the Oriental Jews and especially the Yemenites and the Persians who are good in agriculture work. This is because they need very little; they can be compared to the Arabs, and in this aspect they can compete with them even though the quality of their actions will not be better than the Arabs.
>
> (Meir 1983, 43)

In 1909, the newspaper *Hatzvi* (The Gazelle) published its impression of the new Yemenite immigrant:

> It is a simple worker that can do anything, with no shame, no philosophy and no poetry. And Mr. Marx is of course not in its pocket or his mind. I don't mean to say that the Yemenite element should stay in its wild barbaric stage . . . later on they will be able to compete with the farmers. They will be able to take the place of the Arabs.
>
> (Meir 1983, 48)

In another article, published in the newspaper *Hayishuv* (The Settlement), Yehuda Yaa'ri admitted that the Zionist institution initially rejected suggestions to bring Yemenite Jews to Israel. However, the urgent need for cheap labor eventually sent the Zionist missionary Shmuel Yavnieli to Yemen in 1911: "This mission was not to liberate the Yemenites from life in the

Diaspora," Meir wrote, "but to find a good source to take over the work in the colonies that didn't succeed with the Ashkenazi workers" (58).

Meir claimed that over time, Yavnieli revised his own version of the purpose of his mission. Before leaving for Yemen, he had said that he planned to "organize a systematic immigration and direct it to the colonies." Almost 40 years later, he colored his story by adding notions of rescue and unity. The purpose of his mission, he said, was "to bring to our brothers, the Israelites of Yemen, the news from Israel, the news of revival, the news of the land and the work" (65).

The latter is the official narrative in history books and schools. Mizrahi children are educated to believe that Zionism rescued their parents and grandparents from the danger of extinction in their Arab countries. Indeed, even some Mizrahi scholars have conformed to this version of events. Nitza Druyan's book *Without a Magic Carpet* (1981), for instance, reviewed the first Yemenite immigration to Israel prior to the establishment of the state (1881–1914). Although her book marks an important documentation of Yemenite history (usually given in one paragraph or less in regular history books), her approach is apologetic overall. When analyzing institutionalized discrimination, Druyan claimed that well-known Zionist leaders such as Arthur Ruppin "innocently thought" that if the physical conditions for the Yemenites were hard, they were not harder than what these people had known in Yemen. She explained Yavnieli's mission to Yemen as Zionist in nature, in clear contradiction of the documents she reviewed.

Zionist teams, including doctors, were ostensibly sent to Yemen to check the health of potential immigrant Jewish populations. In reality, they surveyed a potential labor pool. When describing Yemenite Jews in his letters, Yavnieli referred to them as "elements." They were seen as "good" or "bad" material for work rather than as equals. To be categorized as "a good element," a Yemenite Jewish man needed to be in good health, willing to work the land, and preferably able to pay for his family's travel expenses. Meir compared Yavnieli's health reports of Yemenite men to that of the slave trade in the United States. Yavnieli's notes evoked these images:

> The Jews of Dalaa are healthy. Their bodies are always exposed to the sun, they have nice tan, they are strong and solid, strong legs. The eyes are always bright and healthy for the old ones and the young ones . . . After the strong people from Habil, the Jews in Kataba give a bad impression. Their faces are slim, their hands are thin and their eyes are soft . . . The Jews from Kiari look like the Kataba Jews with their weak bodies and their loose muscles.
>
> (68)

RAMIFICATIONS OF RACIAL PROFILING

The abovementioned descriptions reduce individuals to a group status on the basis of racial characteristics. Worse, these racist views were only the first steps in a dreadful and humiliating experience for Yemenite immigrants in the dominant Ashkenazi settlement in Palestine before 1948 and after the coming into existence of Israel. Yemenite Jews had no idea where they would be situated or what they would be designated to do. New immigrants were treated at times with hatred and hostility by local Ashkenazi farmers, who claimed the land; they lived in inhuman conditions, often in stables and cowsheds (Meir 1982). Druyan (1981) agreed that Ashkenazi farmers received Yemenite Jews in a hostile manner. While she did not cast the action as racist, she acknowledged that the Yemenite's dark skin, different language, and Arab resemblance caused Ashkenazi farmers to distance themselves from them. Some farmers did not even want to employ Yemenites and ignored them completely.

Most Yemenite women worked as domestic help and were "liked" by the Ashkenazi farmers' wives, especially for cleaning and doing the laundry. Lavie (2007, 9) said some Yemenite workers used Jerusalem as their base and some lived roofless on the fields in the colonies. Others lived in barns and cowsheds or "built wooden shacks that later became Yemenite ghettos. None were allowed to live inside the zones of the Ashkenazi colonies." Most women worked throughout their pregnancies, and farmers frequently relied on child labor of Yemenite girls working 12 hours a day and with no time off. According to Lavie, "A common Ashkenazi term for a working Yemenite girl was *behemat bayit ketana* (little domestic beast)" (11).

Some Yemenites, man and women, were physically abused. Field owners and supervisors beat them for wrongdoings, large and small. A woman in the Petah-Tiqva colony, for instance, was brutally beaten and dragged over a field for collecting twigs for firewood (Druyan 1981, 106). In the colony Hadera, a farmer beat a Yemenite woman hard enough to damage her spinal cord and kill her (*Afikim* September 1990, 70). In Hadera again, a Yemenite guard was beaten in his sleep by his supervisors because they believed that he encouraged other guards to stop working: "The truth was that this man stopped working since he didn't get paid for three months. When this matter was brought to the Ashkenazi judges in the colony, they equally blamed the attackers and the attacked" (Meir 1983, 98).

Most of these cases engendered little or no public awareness or outcry. One particular case of physical abuse was so extreme that the story was carried in *Hapoel Hatzair* (The Young Worker), a daily socialist newspaper. Yonatan Makov, a farmer from Rehovot (a city south of Tel Aviv), found three Yemenite women collecting twigs for firewood in his field. Makov

bound their hands, beat them, tied them by their wrists to a donkey, and dragged them over rocky ground back to the main settlement (*Afikim* September 1990, 70).[15] Yemenite settlers outraged by this brutality and with the help of their few supporters generated sufficient pressure to take Makov to court. He was found guilty, but only assessed a small fine. In response to the verdict, *Hapoel Hatzair* wrote, "It is hard to agree that the punishment was as hard as the sin, but the trial within itself is a proof that we the people of Rehovot will not remain silent to such brutality" (*Afikim* September 1990, 68). There was no recognition of the need for retribution or the development of policies and protections.

THE PROTEST AND THE RESPONSE

In 1990, Dan Almagor, a famous poet and writer, wrote a protest song over the twigs affair. The song was performed on Israeli Independence Day in a television special celebrating Yemenite immigration. The subsequent controversy disturbed people, who were surprised about the "sweet, quiet Yemenites" protesting.[16] Gideon Makov, grandson of the abusive farmer and manager of a successful soft drink company in Israel, was upset,

> When we heard that there is going to be a show about the Yemenites we were very happy, because we live together . . . but when I heard the introduction and the song I resented it. Why now they have to say things like that, on Independence Day and the celebration of hundred years of Rehovot? I don't remember in all these years hearing about such a story.
>
> (*Afikim* September 1990, 70)

Another descendant of the colony aristocracy, Gill Samsonov, who was spokesperson for the Likud Party in 1990, was outraged by the show: "This show was too much, one can say even racist," he said in an interview to the newspaper *Hadashot*.

> They presented the Yemenites as if they were the blacks in America. What is this story about the farmer from Rehovot, are we in Harlem? Where from did they invent this story? So the Yemenite arrived at the beginning of the century and they were skinny, emaciated and miserable, so what? Should they have become Prime Ministers immediately?[17]

The veracity of such one-sided remarks is obviously questionable. Oppression, humiliation, and hatred were compounded by attempts to silence Yemenite storytellers or delegitimize their narratives. Acts of racism against Mizrahim were labeled as "innocent mistakes," while a simple act of protest was perceived as racism. Even today, the fight for legitimacy and acknowledgment of Mizrahi history within Israeli public memory and

discourse, which is especially evident in the Yemenite Babies Affair, continues. Mizrahi history is now taking up its first battles toward becoming legitimate and an integral part of Israeli public memory.

PARTICIPATION AND EXCLUSION: THE YEMENITE SETTLERS OF KINNERET

The systematic cultural attacks initiated by the Zionist movement against Mizrahim must be understood as a multilayered and complex effort. These acts were complex because the dictating theme was controlled simultaneously by the duality of participation and exclusion. As Druyan (1981) noted, the Yemenites were excluded from receiving "Zionist credits" as Israeli settlers. And while their contribution was minimized or ignored altogether, their efforts to protest, or criticize racist policies, were brutally blocked by the Ashkenazi elite and the media, even decades after the events took place. One story that demonstrates the imbalance between using Mizrahi immigrants as the workforce while excluding them from equal partnership and denying their right to be remembered is that of the Yemenite settlers in Kinneret.

In November 1912, a group of ten Yemenite families arrived at Kinneret Farm, established in 1908, to take part in creating an agricultural settlement. Upon arrival they received two rooms in the "motor house," which was a way from the farm and had a large pump intended to water the agricultural land in the Jordan valley. These rooms were built for storage and were not suitable for housing people, especially young children, due to the loud noise and oil fumes from the pump.

The Yemenite settlers were agricultural workers, struggling against nature, malaria, and lack of water. And while other workers came and left, the Yemenites were a constant presence (Nini 1996). After 20 years, however, they were forced by kibbutz Zionist leaders to move to Rehovot, a city south of Tel Aviv. Despite arriving in Kinneret before the Ashkenazi settlers and their leader, Benzion Israeli, who got the Kinneret Farm at the end of 1913, and despite their considerable contribution to the development of the area, the Yemenites had no say about their future. Finally in 1930, after losing many family members and friends to harsh conditions and disease, the Yemenites, humiliated, hurt, and tired of protesting, were forced to leave.

NARRATIVES AND CRITICISM

In 1996, Yehuda Nini, a Yemenite professor from Tel Aviv University, published the only in-depth research on Yemenite settlers in Kinneret. Although an important book, Nini's overall approach uses the "old

historian" framework.[18] While providing overwhelming evidence for acts of oppression, discrimination, racism, and at times even cruelty (i.e., denying them water and milk for their children) against the Yemenite settlers, Nini's analysis remains loyal to the Zionist point of view.

In the foreword, Nini establishes that no Zionist settlers in Kinneret were "infected with discriminating racist tendencies." Aharon Shidlovski, one of Kinneret's first settlers, said, "Benzion would have done this to anybody he would have found as not suitable for Kinneret" (12). Such rationalizations serve as a way to steer the discussion away from topics such as race and ethnicity, which are so crucial to analyzing these historical events.

Benzion's authority to expel "unsuitable people" extended to anyone he deemed unsuitable. Since his dedication to the Zionist cause was considered unquestionable his choice was held to be the best action for Kinneret. This had two immediate implications. The first was that expelling the Yemenites became by definition the correct action. The second was that Benzion's authority could not be questioned. In any event, the Yemenites' dark skin, Arabic language, and foreign mannerisms were likely contributing factors to their relegated status as unsuitable settlers. Moreover, as Raz-Karkotzin (1997, 119) argued, if Benzion had wanted to expel an Ashkenazi group, they still would have been an integral part of the decision-making process and most likely would never have been deported. "What can be determined with a great deal of certainty is that if this even had happened to another group, instead of the Yemenites, it would have been represented historically."

Historian Anita Shapira also justified Benzion and his comrades' behavior toward the Yemenites. In Ayelet Heller's documentary *The Unpromised Land* (1993), she stated that we should not judge these Zionist pioneers with today's norms because "according to their values and belief system, they did the right thing." Shapira also uses the popular claim that any unsuitable group—not just the Yemenites—would have been treated that way by Benzion. As Amnon Raz-Karkotzkin (1997) noted,

> It isn't enough to claim that within their belief system they acted right. This is a claim that can't provide any explanation or a justification, and could be similarly valid for an SS officer . . . [19] The value system of the research subjects is the central issue here, and especially the way in which this value system continues to guide the present and define its values. We shouldn't judge the people of another time but ourselves, since the discussion about the past is always a discussion about the present.
>
> (117)

Raz-Karkotzkin linked the past to the shape of the present and future, stressing the importance of diverse points of view. By eliminating Yemenite representation, he claimed, Shapira denied them their right to be an

integral part of the present and future of Israel. The effects of these actions on the identity of the second generation of the Yemenite settlers is detrimental. Failure to acknowledge these acts of racism and discuss them as such only contributes to the ongoing feelings of rejection and humiliation for second and third generations, especially in light of the tendency to minimize Mizrahi stories and tragedies and glorify Ashkenazi narratives, as clearly was the case in Kinneret.[20]

Nini takes the first view when describing how Zionist ideology came to develop and accept the term "natural worker" to describe the Yemenite immigrant. He shows the discriminating conditions in which the Yemenite people lived, including receiving less than half the land and earning half the money of Ashkenazi workers. However, while he seems to be reaching the conclusion that these individuals were treated as second-class settlers, he ends with a vague statement citing an abstract entity he called "lack of choice" that absolves the Zionist leaders of responsibility.

Nini notes that what turned the Yemenites into "natural workers" "was the great ideologist that characterized the face of a society and people as individuals: the lack of choice. What made them 'natural workers' was the impossible situation they were in" (47). While his statement has several possible interpretations, none of them attempt to address the wider problem of inequality in Israeli society, past and present.

Yemenite settlers under Benzion's direction were even denied water. Ashkenazim in Kinneret, who controlled the sources of distribution, were directly ordered to withhold milk and drinking water from the Yemenites in an effort to induce them to leave. As kibbutz member Haya Rotberg wrote, "The Yemenites who lived nearby came and were begging for some milk for their dying children, and I refused because I was told to do so. Finally they were yelling and cursing until I gave them some" (Nini 1996, 118).

Nini stated that conflict between socialist values and practical inequality was "only a temporary contradiction between the new society and the idea of social unity; a contradiction that was especially prominent in the meeting between the members of Kibbutz Kinneret and the Yemenite settlers there" (48). Nini overlooks the fact that the gap between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim is not a story of the past; it is very much part of the present and largely a result of the contradiction he choose to label as "temporary." Nini neglects to ask some crucial questions. How could a society that took pride in building a state based on the principles of freedom and socialism demonstrate such contradictory behavior? Why did Zionist settlers of the kibbutz not consider inviting the Yemenites to be part of the kibbutz as equals? If these pioneers were all about uniting the Jewish people, as they often claim, why is exclusion the main motif of this story?

THE FIGHT OVER MEMORY

In Ayelet Heller's documentary *The Unpromised Land* (1993)[21], a group of children listen to their teacher's story about the pioneers who came to Lake Kinneret prior to the establishment of Israel. "And where did the *Halutzim* [pioneers] come from?" asks the teacher. The children reply without hesitation, "From Europe!" When the director asks the teacher, "Were there only European pioneers in Kinneret?" the teacher replies, "If you are talking about the Yemenite settlers in Kinneret, then I am sorry but I am not going to mention them now . . . I have my reasons."

The teacher's casual deception of her students is perhaps the most disturbing part of this scene. She clearly knows there is information she is withholding, but her reasons are mysterious. At the same time, we watch the students taking her presentation at face value, reinforcing the Zionist party line as accepted fact. The viewer is watching the degradation of information and the loss of a group's identity in the process.

Further, this movie postulated that people who had spent their entire lives on Kibbutz Kinneret did not know much—if anything—about the history of the Yemenites there. When the 40-year-old daughter of an Ashkenazi settler was asked about Yemenite settlers, her response was, "The Yemenites, oh, I am not sure . . . yes, I heard once or twice something about them but I don't really know much. My parents never told me anything, and I guess I never asked" (*The Unpromised Land* 1993).

In the late 1980s, members of Kibbutz Kinneret built a site commemorating its first pioneers, who they defined as solely the Ashkenazi settlers. Yemenite workers evicted in 1930 were not mentioned.

Children of Yemenite settlers wanted their predecessors to be recognized as well. After a long and frustrating negotiating process, the kibbutz members agreed to place a plaque recognizing the Yemenite contribution to the establishment of Kibbutz Kinneret, near the old motor house. In 1994, however, when the work to turn the old motor house into a museum was completed, Benzion's son and other kibbutz members removed the Yemenite plaque (Mudahi and Shubeli 1997).

This time, the Yemenites turned to the Supreme Court, but the court denied their petition on a technicality ("improper preparation"). The court reserved the Yemenites' right to resubmit a properly prepared petition stating that their request to place a commemorative plaque "should not be too hard to answer, if the Kibbutz members will act with good will, considering the Yemenites' ambition to commemorate their pioneer fathers" (Nini 1996, 310). Members of Kibbutz Kinneret refused to place the sign back on the pump house. No reason was given.[22]

The Ashkenazi settlers, universally preferring the word "remove" over "deported," justified the forced depopulation of Yemenites saying, "We did

this for them, they were dying like flies . . . They will be better off elsewhere" (Nini 1996, 313). This notion brings to mind Kipling's "White Man's Burden," where without a trace of irony he describes the colonizer's sacrifice in his effort to better the ungrateful people he controls. "Take up the White Man's burden . . . Go bind your sons to exile [a]nd did the sickness cease [in] your new-caught sullen people . . . Half devil and half child . . . The blame of those ye better/The hate of those ye guard."

Entertaining the claim that the Zionists did the Yemenites a favor by moving them, shifts the focus of the discussion from the suffering of the weaker of two groups to praising the stronger, a sort of call for glory and patriotism. The notion that Ashkenazim took everyone's best interests to heart was widely accepted and evident in statements made later by doctors and nurses when discussing the Yemenite Babies Affair. As nurse Ahuva Goldfarb told me in an interview, "Maybe we did them a favor" (Madmoni 1996).

Descendants of Yemenite settlers continue to feel the sting of this rejection. The denial of a memorial plaque containing the Yemenites' story, from their standpoint, symbolizes a continued Ashkenazi Zionist powerful control over memory and history and its effect on shaping Mizrahi identity in Israel today.[23]

Absorption and Rupture: The Mass Immigration from Yemen to Israel

The discriminatory relationship between the Zionists and the Yemenite community, since the end of the nineteenth century, set the tone for the Yemenite community's absorption in Palestine at the end of World War II and after the establishment of Israel in 1948. Viewing the Yemenites as "natural workers" with minimal needs and fewer rights led to the marginalization and discrimination of the Yemenites culturally, socially, and economically.

The overwhelming oppressive control of the Yemenite community led to three major thefts within the bigger context of cultural oppression. First, the theft of Yemenite culture and religious values. This was evident in violent attempts to secularize children during the immigration to Palestine and their stay in transit camps Ein-Shemer and Beit Lead mostly during the waves of immigration between 1943 and 1945, but also after 1948.[24] Second, the open theft of valuable religious and personal materials during Operation Magic Carpet, including handwritten Torah books and other literature, antique Judaic artifacts, and the unique handmade Yemenite jewelry and embroidered clothes. And third, the separation of babies from their parents during the absorption into Israel after 1948, as the first step in the disappearance/kidnapping of these babies.

ABUSE IN GE'ULA[25] CAMP

Camp Ge'ula, the transit camp established by a U.S.-based Jewish organization, the Joint (AJDC), in Aden, Yemen, incorporated paternalistic and abusive power relations from the start. In 1945, Yemenite Jews started to flee the areas of northern Yemen, stricken by hunger and poverty. They were going on a journey by foot to the port city of Aden, which was a cosmopolitan thriving place controlled by the British (Lavie 2007). According to Levitan (1983) the camp was built for about 500 people but housed an estimated 5,500 Jews in harsh conditions for over three years, until the massive airlift starting in December 1948. Lavie (2007) said the transit camps were tightly guarded and fenced with concertina wire. Moreover, as requested by the Joint (AJDC), the British posted numerous roadblocks "in order to prevent the Yemenites from trying to escape into Aden" (200).

The Israeli daily *Ha'aboker* (The Morning) confirmed Lavie's assertion about the camps. Amid stereotyped descriptions of Yemenite immigrants, it was clear the camp's organization and architecture permanently separated the Yemenites from the Ashkenazis, from the city of Aden, and from their children. Buildings for camp personnel were fenced with "good thatch," while the mostly tents for Yemenite immigrants were surrounded with "concertina wire . . . established for safety reasons as well as keeping them from 'escaping' to the city of Aden" (*Ha'aboker* March 16, 1950). The paper noted concertina wire around the Babies House in the camp as "especially thorough and spiny . . .this is because Yemenite mothers and fathers still do not accept the fact that their babies are taken away from them—even if it is only for health reasons—so they come in the middle of the night and 'steal' their children." There are no questions or analysis regarding the separation policy, and ironically, the accompanying picture shows seven babies in a giant bassinet, without any sort of explanation.

Camp Ge'ula personnel of the highest authority, including directors and doctors, routinely humiliated and abused immigrants physically and morally. Levitan (1983) noted that several Jewish Agency visitors wrote letters of protest after witnessing such abuse firsthand. Director Ben-Zion Cohen "used to beat the immigrants with cruelty" (138), and Dr. Olga Finberg who "beat them . . . and punished them [the Yemenites] by denying them their Shabbat meals" (133). Jewish Agency representative Shlomo Dori said camp authorities in Aden characterized Yemenite immigrants as "extremely primitive people who will not obey unless you hit then with a stick and a whip."[26]

Harris (1988) said the Yemenite Jews in Camp Ge'ula were disrespected daily and were forced to perform unnecessary labor tasks during

Shabbat, in direct and deliberate contradiction of their orthodox religious beliefs. Dr. Elkana also starved immigrants and had them beaten or forced to violate religious codes to control and humiliate them (53–55). One Yemenite observer from the Jewish Agency, Ovadia Tuvia, wrote a letter to the Jewish Agency calling Dr. Elkana a sadist. He claimed Elkana was "beating people breaking their teeth . . . and even beating children."[27] Nisim Gamlieli (1978, 196–209) said Elkana used starvation to discipline the Yemenite community; he also caused bloodshed and even turned in Jews to the Muslim and British police.[28]

THE THEFT OF CULTURAL POSSESSIONS

The majority of the Yemenite community was air lifted from Yemen in December 1948 in what is known in Israel as Operation Magic Carpet—a name that already exemplifies the Orientalist views regarding the immigrants as well as stresses the "rescue" motif, which is central to the Zionist ideology.[29] Until September 1950, about 50,000 Yemenite Jews arrived in Israel. As part of a process that Lavie (2007) describes as a "civilizing mission," the Yemenite Jews were stripped of their culture, including numerous attempts to secularize them in Aden and in Israel. They were also stripped of their cultural possessions, including Torah books and jewelry, which were sent to Israel by boats in May and June 1950. A Yemenite activist I interviewed said Jewish Agency representatives at the transit camps told them they must give their possessions, otherwise the airplane would not be able to take off.[30] Unfortunately, some Yemenites who had already lived in Israel chose to help the establishment communicate with the new Yemenite immigrants. They were called *mashtapim*, a term as derogatory as the English translation "collaborator." These early Yemenite veterans were used by Zionist institutions, such as the Jewish Agency, to deploy oppressive practices, for little political gains, such as instructing Yemenite immigrants to separate from their most valuable religious and personal possessions, their Torah books, jewelry, and clothes in the transit camps in Yemen.

While the Yemenite community leaders were pleading to get their possessions back, the state of Israel transported them to museums and archives and even sold them to private collectors in the West. Lavie (2007) claims the state and private people made economic and academic gains from this theft.[31] "Only recently the Israeli public gained some access to Israeli archives with these handwritten holy books. Some Yemenite activists say this was possible because the Statute of limitations had passes and the Yemenite community can no longer press charges" (201).

ABSORPTION AND SEPARATION

Upon arrival in Israel, the Yemenite immigrants were situated mainly in three absorption camps: Bet-Lid, Ein-Shemer, and Rosh Ha'ayin. As evident by the testimonies given before the Kedmi Commission, the overt policy with regard to the Yemenite immigrants called for separation of babies from their parents. The official explanation was that conditions in the baby houses were better than in the tin houses and tents where the rest of the family resided. "The Jewish agency gave clear instruction to take the babies to the Baby Houses . . . The control over the babies was taken from their parents and was given to the staff in charge of the Baby House . . . This disconnect created a situation where the staff could have had the impression that parents deserted their babies, thus it created the need to provide them with a different arrangement" (Commission Report 2001, 38–39).

Toward the end of the 1950s and after the state closed the absorption camps, most immigrants were moved to temporary settlements called *Ma'abarot*, which were mostly populated by Mizrahi immigrants. Some camps, such as Rosh Ha'ayin, were turned into *Ma'abarot*. These settlements contributed to governmental control over every aspect of the immigrants' life while simultaneously weakening their ability to resist. From this point on, babies continued to disappear from hospitals around the country and Wizo recovering centers in Safad, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. While in the period of absorption camps (1948–1950) babies disappeared only from Yemenite immigrants, from 1951 to 1954, babies disappeared from hospitals, and documented cases point to babies from other Mizrahi ethnic groups as well. Avraham Shterenberg, one of the head physicians in the absorption camps, confirms the reality of separation of babies from their parents. In his book *When People are Absorbed* (1973, 76–77), he states,

> It was not possible to return the children from the hospitals to the camps because they could have gotten sick again. Dr. Yosef Israel transported tens and hundreds of babies from the hospitals to Wizo recovery houses in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Tzefat. Sometimes they stayed there for many months. They were transported with ambulances accompanied by nurses. It was a great and important help during hard times . . . this is also the source for the rumors that the Yemenite Babies disappeared.

As many Yemenite activists and scholars point out, one of the biggest mistakes in the approach of the Kedmi Commission investigating the matter was its refusal to examine the Babies Affair as part of the overall oppression of Yemenite Jews throughout the different waves of

immigration to Israel/Palestine. In the historical background laid out in the commission's report, there was no mention of the theft of books, Judaica, jewelry, and hand-embroidered clothes or the physical and emotional abuse in the transit camps in Aden and well as during the absorption into Israel.

Rafi Shubeli (2007, 175) argued that despite the Yemenite Babies Affair being one of the most traumatic events in Israel's history, so far, it had a marginal place even within the new radical Mizrahi discourse. "The great power of the Ashkenazi hegemony," writes Shubeli, "allows it to turn its doubtful version of even into 'facts.' All the while turning families' narratives, through a violent discursive process, into 'Mizrahi imagination.'" The struggle that lies at the heart of this Affair, then, is first and foremost a struggle about narratives and memory. It is a struggle over the representation of this Affair and the production of meaning, which, as Hall (1997) said, always occurs at different cultural sites and always affects identity. Surprisingly, even during the age of post-Zionism and the rise of the New Historians, challenging and deconstructing Zionism, this narrative is still absent.

CONTESTED HISTORIES: OFFICIAL NARRATIVE AND NEW CRITICISM

As historians process and record the events leading to the establishment of Israel, opinions vary between two approaches. At one end lies the straight Zionist party line, essentially accepting every action as necessary and justifying discrimination as necessary or as "innocent mistakes." At the other end are opinions voiced by critics, who assert that the position of Mizrahi as "natural worker" or as uneducated, lower-class labor stock should be acknowledged and discussed as the product of elitist and racist Zionist policies.

As Raz-Karkotzkin (1997, 118) noted, history is always written from the standpoint of the majority, the winners. Therefore, he claims, the important and relevant question we should ask is, "How, in our analysis of history, should we relate to the victims?" His approach offers a critical analysis that allows us to examine narratives from the standpoint of the victims as well as the "winners." It lets us discuss the past in light of the present while offering an alternative for the future.

Israeli public memory, as Sami Shalom Chetrit noted (1999), has historically recognized Mizrahim only in reference to Zionism, a movement they have had little to do with.

> Today my main interest, together with my friends and partners, to the new pedagogy of "Kedma" [a new school system for Mizrahim] is not to prove

> how we were more Zionist than everyone, but to tell our story. To write our history ourselves, and to make it the legacy for the next generation, both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi.
>
> (Chetrit 1999, 126)

Especially in the last two decades, new radical Mizrahi artists, authors, and academic thinkers have claimed a place in the Israeli public sphere they have never before occupied. Chetrit's point is important in understanding new voices of Mizrahi criticism in Israel. Even if this position might incur temporary isolation from Ashkenazim and separation from the Zionist context, it will allow new voices to be heard. The state's consistent denial that the Yemenite Babies Affair even occurred typifies this struggle, especially the state's considerable efforts to deny the Yemenite community a fair investigation. As a result, the state has simultaneously denied Yemenite narratives and tried to refute the newly raised critical voices in an effort to preserve the integrity of the state-sanctioned narrative. As Raz-Karkotzkin (1997) put it, "The main question is then, not the events themselves but their systematic denial in historical writing" (119).

THE NEW HISTORIANS

In the last two decades, a wave of New Historians in the Israeli academia, both within Israel and abroad, have challenged mainstream Zionist ideology by confronting Israel's past and deconstructing its meta-narrative. Such historians include Ilan Pape, Baruch Kimmerling, Uri Ram, and Amnon Raz-Karkotzkin who used a critical approach in their analysis of Zionist history. These theorists wanted to disengage from a false national narrative that called up to help the national Zionist ideology (Kimmerling 1997). As Yoav Gelber (1997) stated, "The main issues were not the success stories of Zionism but rather, its prices and failures" (84).

Uri Ram (2006) pointed out that while some of the "old historians" acknowledged the duality of past and present as what dictates the tone of any historiography, they didn't use it to form criticism. In analyzing the work of Ben-Zion Dinur, an important Zionist historiographer, Ram said, "For Dinur, writing the history wasn't just a profession, it was his historical mission. And like many of his colleagues in the Hebrew University he didn't separate between his political persona and his academic one" (224). Furthermore, Dinur admitted that part of his role as historian was to encourage people to develop a strong national identity. He perceived himself as one of the writers of the foundation of Israel's national memory. Zionist historiography and the Zionist meta-narrative, as Ram says, are so widely accepted that they are part of the common sense that constitutes Israeli

society. Challenging this well-entrenched "common sense" of Zionism is the mission of the new critical voices in Israel's public discourse.

The New Historians, however, mainly focused on the relationship of Zionism to the Palestinian and Arab worlds, as well as to Zionism during the Holocaust. Few scholars, Raz-Karkotzkin, Kimmerling, and Ram among them, recognized the connection between colonizing another nation (i.e., the Palestinians) and colonizing other Jews (i.e., Mizrahim).

TERMINOLOGY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

In "Notes on Zionist Historiography and the Idea of Transfer in the Years 1937–1944" Benny Morris (1997) claimed that the transfer of Palestinians from Israel in 1948 was rooted years earlier in Zionist thought. Morris claimed that Zionist leaders such as Ben-Gurion attributed the potential damage to the Zionist movement inherent in this decision. They therefore tried to publicly downplay the notion of Palestinian transfer.[32] Later, the same silencing was seen in the vagueness characterizing the writings of Zionist historiographers, who joined the effort to hide unflattering moments in Zionist history:

> Anita Shapira, in her last book, *The Sword of the Dove*, 583 pages long, dedicates only a page and a half to the issue of transfer in the Zionist thought. She wrote that in the 1940s, Ben-Gurion objected to the concept of forced transfer and looked at the whole idea as some utopian dream that would never come true . . . What the lay person might understand from Shapira's book is that Zionist leaders did not seriously think about the idea of transfer, and viewed it as something temporary, marginal and unrealistic, during the 1930s and 1940s.
>
> (Morris 1997, 197)

Shapira's book exemplifies Zionist historiographers' role in silencing events that could damage Zionist heroic image. They ignored stories of marginalized groups victimized by Zionism, such as the examples stated earlier. Morris claimed that these distorted versions of history could in part be attributed to methodological problems, since the historians relied heavily on politicians, censored materials, and edited protocols rather than on original, uncensored documents.

But a closer reading of their work shows a greater problem than research methods. The old historians were committed to justifying the Zionist ideology. As Kimmerling (1997) claimed, Zionist historiography is part of the political hegemony, as put forth by Gramsci: "[And] even if this justification wasn't direct and conscious, it certainly actively ignored raising issues that might hurt the legitimacy of Zionism" (262).

THE THREAT OF CRITICISM

One of the main problems with accepting criticism, in Israeli academic and media discourse, is that breaking with the conventions of Zionism is seen by some as a threat to Jewish unity and the very justification of our right to be in the land of Israel. As Ram (2006) and others point out, the "we" created and propagated by the Zionist narrative is what people perceive as our voice of unity, while neglecting to see that the "we" is really a European voice that systematically ignored others. This "national we" is an artifact and contributes to Zionist hegemony, a notion that is easier to identify with as we get further away from the events leading to the birth of Israel.

In the Israeli public memory, Zionists are heroes and acknowledging exploitation of Palestinians and Mizrahim tarnishes this image. Questioning the integrity of the first Zionists is perceived by some as betrayal that borders on treason. Shapira (1997, 391), for instance, accuses the New Historians of distorting history:

> The myth of the establishment of the state of Israel, according to "the new historians," holds the view that Mapai [the leading party] and its leader Ben-Gurion deported the Arabs, did not save Jews [from the Holocaust], and oppressed Mizrahi Jews. Only the diligent reader that goes back to papers of the "old history" will find out that by the way, [Mapai] also established a state, won the war, and gathered all the Diaspora of Israel.

What Shapira refuses to acknowledge is that these achievements were made possible at the expense of oppressing and humiliating others. Omitting and ignoring the Mizrahi point of view only deepens the rift between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim and perpetuates the marginalization of Mizrahim in Israeli society. As Raz-Karkotzkin pointed out, Shapira's analysis of the forced transfer of the Yemenites in Kibbutz Kinneret, for instance, conveyed the Ashkenazi pioneers' perspective on the story but omitted the Yemenite point of view. The Yemenites remained outside the story, a position that served as a way to perpetuate their stereotypes as "nice" and "quiet": "[This] demonstrates the Orientalist image given to them by the Zionist ideal. They are Jews from the Orient that were defined, unlike other Mizrahi Jews, as exotic, authentic, hard working and especially quiet" (118).

Ram (2006) critiques Shapira's research approach, claiming that expressions of pluralism contribute to Israel's democratization and that oppressed groups should tell their stories in the public sphere (186). A rendering of history that allows for pluralism helps to deconstruct the myth that Israeli and Ashkenazi identity are equivalent, by replacing it with a more complex definition that includes various non-European cultures.

Shapira (1997), on the other hand, alleged the New Historians' lack of emotional identification with the creation of the state of Israel:

> The sensation of a miracle that was beating in the hearts of the generation that stood by the cradle of the vulnerable new state and that worried over its difficulty breathing, is strange to [the New Historians]. For them, it is a state like any other state, with advantages and disadvantages, especially disadvantages, and those should be criticized while raising the public opinion against these disadvantages.
>
> (371)

Shapira even went so far as to call the establishment of the state of Israel "an act of historical justice that can't be explained in conventional terms," claiming that Israel is not "a state like any other" (371). Shapira is so immersed in stories of miracles and glory that she overlooks the dangerous notion projected in her statement: in the name of historical justice we can overlook injustice.

Most historians, however, new or old, will agree with Shapira on one matter: this is indeed a struggle about shaping the public memory.[33] The challenge, however, is to shape a public memory that allows for inclusion of both Palestinians and Mizrahim, granting them equal ownership of the "public space." To borrow Raz-Karkotzkin's (1997) suggestion, the point is not to disqualify Zionist values or put them on a "historical trial," but to analyze the events and values critically and from the point of view of the victim. Otherwise, the historians actively play a role in silencing other groups, as was clearly the case with regard to the Yemenite Babies Affair. As Raz-Karkotzkin (1997) noted, the Yemenite Babies Affair is a striking example of stifled public discussion: "Here too, the breaking of the silence is seen as a total threat, and only a violent protest led to a legal investigation of the matter" (119).[34]

CHAPTER 2

Israeli Media: History, Ownership, and the Politics of Mizrahi Representation

In the opening scene for the TV documentary *Al Tikra Li Shahor* (Don't Call Me Black)[1], which explores Mizrahi discourse and representation, host Emmanuel Rosen called prominent Mizrahim in politics, media, and entertainment, asking them to be interviewed for the show. The refusal of most was overwhelming. The official explanations were "We are all Israelis," "Don't get the ethnic demon out," "It was a thing of the past" (Channel Two August 9, 2008).

This show demonstrated that representation remains a place of struggle. Any random samples of TV shows, commercials, or newspapers still reflect white supremacy in Israeli society; yet many people would rather push the "demon" away. Articulating and analyzing Mizrahi representation is a complex task, especially in light of the almost "violent" rejection of the public discourse about Mizrahim.

My aim in this chapter is to outline a brief history of the media in Israel, pointing to what Stuart Hall calls "the dirty crossroad . . . where power cuts across knowledge." To examine the representation of the Yemenite Babies Affair, one must first understand what constitutes the normative discourse about Mizrahim and how power operates in the constant tension between ideology, economic control, and media discourse. As Hall said in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1994), the connection between domination and representation is vital for understanding the detrimental effects of colonialism. It isn't only that dominant forces of representation turned Mizrahim to the "other" of the dominant discourse. This power also "subjected them to the 'knowledge,' not only as a matter of imposed will and domination,

but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm" (Hall 1994, 395).

MAP OF ISRAELI MEDIA

NEWSPAPERS

The history of the written press in Israel can be traced to the mid-1800s. Shoshana Halevy (1998) acknowledged the contribution of Elieze Ben-Yehuda and then Ben-Yehuda's son, who edited the newspaper *Hatzvi*, as pioneers who paved the way for the modern press in Israel. Since the early days of the Israeli press in the mid-nineteenth century, owners seeking commercial profit independently ran newspapers. The politically oriented press, however, was the dominant force. By the early twentieth century, most Israeli newspapers had a specific political affiliation. Political parties had full control over content and strict control over the editorial board. According to Dan Caspi and Yehiel Limor (1992), by the 1970s and 1980s, Israeli society had changed: its citizens had developed more complex social and political needs and turned to the independent press. Due to loss of readership most of the politically oriented newspapers were closed during the 1960s.

In the mid-1980s, Israeli readers could choose from 911 publications. While this number could be considered substantial for the output of a small nation, the pluralistic image of the Israeli media has been misleading. Limor and Caspi (1992) noted that what seemed to be pluralism of publications was something of an illusion. In practice, approximately three to four daily newspapers and two to three weeklies have successfully established themselves as significant and stable sources of information.

The five national daily newspapers in 2008 were *Yediot Aharonot* (Latest News*), Maariv* (Evening News), *Haaretz* (The Land), Globes (economic newspaper), and the latest addition, *Israel Hayom* (Israel Today), established in 2007 and owned by the billionaire Sheldon Adelson. *Yediot Aharonot*, Israel's most popular newspaper, was read by about 37 percent of the population; *Maariv* was read by about 15 percent; *Haaretz* by about 7 percent; and Globes by about 3 percent (TGI 2008).[2] *Israel Hayom*, which is distributed for free, is gaining popularity, reaching a daily readership of over 20 percent, surpassing *Maariv* and becoming the second most read newspaper.

Maariv and *Yediot Aharonot* deliver the news in a rather sensationalist manner. Large fonts in red or black ink are typical, for example, and graphic pictures dominate the front page. Articles and news reports are carefully crafted to appear neutral and free of ideological influence (Lehman-Wilzig and Schejter 1994), but the dominant voice is conservative and

pro-establishment. *Haaretz*, which uses the slogan "A Newspaper for Thinking People," is associated with a more intellectual readership. As Caspi and Limor (1999) pointed out, *Haaretz* is "in many ways the internal newspaper of the different elites in Israeli society" (55).

The media analysis of this book relates primarily to *Yediot Aharonot* and *Maariv*, since they represent the bulk of Israel's mainstream print media in the last five decades. Despite its relatively small market share, *Haaretz* is also considered because the majority of its readers are educated, influential, and academically inclined. *Haaretz* is considered by researchers on the media to be a newspaper of note "that not only mediates between the public and the government, but also between the political, economical and social elite" (Caspi and Limor 1999, 55).

In addition to daily and weekly newspapers, Israel has an impressive number of local newspapers, economic newspapers, and newspapers in others languages, including Arabic, Russian, and English (Gilboa 2008). There are also a number of glossy magazines, which cover a variety of topics, including news and politics, women's issues, parenting, the military, advertising, culture, and art.

RADIO

The first radio station was established in Jerusalem under the British mandate in 1936 (Gil 1998) and later developed into what is now *Kol Israel* (The Voice of Israel). From the beginning, *Kol Israel* was supervised directly by the prime minister's office under what was known as the Broadcasting Authority Law of 1965. Information disseminated to the public was limited and tightly supervised by the political elite. *Kol Israel* is an umbrella broadcast organization composed of seven radio channels, with Channel B, which broadcasts news and political talk shows, being the most popular with a rating of 27.7 percent (TGI 2008).

Galei Tzahal is owned by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and operates two channels: one focuses mainly on news and political talk shows and the other on popular music. The army station has the highest rating with 45.2 percent of the adult population, and *Kol Israel* has listener ratings of 41.6 percent of the adult population (TGI 2008).

The expansion of the broadcast map in Israel allowed for local radio stations to broadcast starting in 2005 and now includes 12 local stations (Gilboa 2008). Before local radio developed, pirate radio stations were broadcast into Israel. The most well known was *The Voice of Peace*, first aired in 1973, which was broadcast from a boat in the Mediterranean Sea. The boat and broadcast unit were owned by businessman and peace activist Abi Natan. In 1988, Channel 7, also pirate, broadcast mainly religious Hasidic content and Mizrahi music.

TELEVISION

Despite well-known objections of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion against the establishment of television, this medium was fully operating by 1969 following the BBC model. Until the 1980s the electronic media centered on one government-controlled radio station, *Kol Israel;* an army radio station, *Galei Tzahal;* and a government-controlled television station, Channel One. As Caspi and Limor (1992) pointed out, this control maintained "hegemony almost without any competition" (26).

Channel Two, which in 1993 became the first fully operational commercial channel, is the main competition to Channel One. An additional commercial channel, Channel Ten, has been operating since January 2002 and now has its own news company. In 2008, the evening news program of Channel Two led the ratings among the 25 most watched programs with 20 percent, followed by 13 percent rating of Channel Ten (Gilboa 2008). Channel One's news program was watched by 12.2 percent of Israeli homes and was losing viewers.

During the 1990s Israel was transformed from relying on information from one channel to a significant increase in access to dozens of local and international stations mainly through cable television (*Hot*) and the satellite station (*Yes*). Though Israelis are no longer exclusively dependent on government-influenced news sources, much of the population relies on the televised evening news and the major daily newspapers as the primary sources of information.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

Some alternative newspapers and magazines that challenged mainstream media have been published in Israel over the years. Even though Mizrahi Jews constitute at least half of the Israeli population, their perspective has rarely been given appropriate media exposure. Most alternative newspapers and magazines that have been created and distributed by young Mizrahi visionaries have failed, usually within a few years, due to lack of advertisers and resulting financial difficulties. Those that survived for some time include *Pa'amon Hashchunot*, *Bamaracha, Iton Aher,* and *Hapatish*. One monthly magazine, *Afikim*, which was first published in 1964, is still published by Yosef Dahoh-Halevi, and *Mitzad Sheni* (News from Within) is still published by the Center for Alternative Information.

In response to the distorted mainstream media coverage of Mizrahim, activist Beni Zada, from the Hatikva neighborhood of southern Tel Aviv, started a local newspaper in 1985. His intent was to give voice to the problems of people from the periphery. In an interview to *Zeman Tel Aviv*, Zada claimed that the predominantly white media ignored Mizrahi issues: "The only newspaper that didn't use racist expressions was *Hadashot*[3], all

the rest described the blacks [Mizrahi Jews] as criminals or trash" (January 21, 2000).

Pa'amon Hashchunot (The Neighborhood's Bell) covered stories and places previously ignored by the media with blunt language and "in your face" style. An article about a southern neighborhood with a high rate of crime and social difficulties, for example, was entitled "The Hole in the Ass." The paper challenged the mainstream, protested state-perpetuated racism, and got public attention. That newspaper lasted four years.

Next came *Hapatish (*The Hammer) with the slogan "The Newspaper That Will Crack Open Your Head." The newspaper's staff was comprised of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi activists and journalists from Tel Aviv neighborhoods. Their mission was to create an alternative social discourse that would change images and perceptions about Mizrahi people and culture in Tel Aviv, the city that set the tone and trends for journalism.

Hapatish's innovative perspective sharply criticized the mainstream from the start. Some of its most memorable columns include: "Bus #16," a column about Hatikva neighborhood life; "A Hebrew Criminal Dictionary," definitions of Mizrahi slang; and "Sea of Tears," a Mizrahi music critique. Ben-Dror Yemini, a columnist for *Maariv,* who was the newspaper's first editor, said that he wanted to establish agendas that would otherwise go unnoticed. "Issues that were published for the first time in *Hapatish* got picked up by the big newspapers and became big scoops, and got a much greater public exposure," he said (*Zeman Tel-Aviv*, January 21, 2000).

Despite the paper's popularity, the controversial subject matter made advertisers wary. Financial difficulties and politics within the paper caused the publication to fold after about ten years. Hanna Kim, a prominent journalist and one of the editors of *Hapatish*, summed up difficulties the newspaper faced in an editorial on the paper's one-year anniversary:

> A year ago we started *Hapatish* . . . against all the odds. Like then, today we know that if we will not do it, no one will publish a newspaper that deals with social issues. Like then, today we understand that our biggest problem, aside from not having a rich father, is how to "sell" social justice.
>
> (*Zman Tel-Aviv*, January 21, 2000)

In October 2000, an alternative satellite television channel called *Briza* went on air. The channel, which lasted for about three years, was available to approximately 400,000[4] subscribers of *Yes* satellite network. According to its executive director, Ron Cahlili, *Briza* was formed in response to a market research that illustrated the need for a Mizrahi venue. The channel's directors were committed to presenting other points of view about Mizrahim in Israel. The channel's flagship program was *Zeman Shaul* (Borrowed Time), which was hosted by prominent Mizrahi journalist

Shaul Bibi. This one-hour show used a documentary format to explore Mizrahi identity, culture, and history. In an interview, Bibi said that *Briza* didn't make it because it took over the image of the network. Despite broadcasting for a relatively small audience, Bibi said the channel attracted a lot of attention, influencing a new Misrahi discourse: "The investors put a lot of money into *Briza* thinking they were going to get Mizrahi folklore, they were not prepared for this kind of in-depth examination of Mizrahi identity and history" (Interview, summer 2008).

Both Bibi and Cahlili say that Briza was perceived as "too Mizrahi" by some. "Ironically," said Cahlili, "the channel replacing *Briza* now is called *Israeli* . . . This is what they wanted, for us to all feel Israelis, it is a much more comfortable for TV executives who want to make money" (Interview, summer 2008).

MEDIA OWNERSHIP

In 1993, when Channel Two was launched, new media partnerships were formed creating centralized and crossed media ownership in the small Israeli media sphere. The major newspapers maintain economic control over the press and electronic media, which has led to a shift in control of policy and content. The three prominent media corporations are respectively owned by three families: Moses, Nimrodi, and Shoken. In addition to the daily newspapers, they also own local newspapers, magazines, book publishing companies, music companies, and shares in the companies operating cable television and Channel Two (Caspi and Limor 1992, 20). *Maariv* and *Yediot Aharonot*, for instance, each own up to 24 percent of two companies that operate Channel Two (Lahman-Meser 1994). *Yediot Aharonot* was even declared a monopoly by the Israel Antitrust Authority. Economic control of commercial communications media, however, in no way indicates an alternative viewpoint. The editorial policies and personnel decisions continue to align with, and even facilitate, government control through regulations, nominations to supervising committees, and right of refusal for powerful executive appointments (Lahman-Meser, 1994).

Over the last few years, some foreign, non-Israeli citizens, investors are getting more involved in the Israeli media market (*Ha'ayin Hashviit* November 2006[5]). For instance, an investor such as Vladimir Gusinski owns 27.19 percent of *Maariv* and Domont Shauberg owns 25 percent of *Haaretz*. Most experts, however, agree that so far it has been hard to differentiate between the influence of Israeli and foreign investors on media content.

Israel is a small country with a population of about seven million citizens as of 2008. Concentrated media ownership such as that described above presents a threat to freedom of ideas in the press and the public's

right to know. Moreover, it demonstrates that the diversity of new media outlets has not meant diversity of new voices. As Yossi Dahan (2004, 7) argued, "The public press, which was supposed to be independent, is run by politicians . . . and the private press is run by a small group of wealthy people."

Dissemination of information is thus centralized, which has an impact on the content of information. It is easier to convince media owners to stifle, overlook, or minimize unflattering information when the possible reward is increased advertiser investment in electronic and print media. In the end, as argued by Moshe Negbi (1999), information can be blocked completely by all major media outlets. Thus the main question with regard to media coverage should be "not if what is written in the press is true, but what isn't covered and why?" (Lahman-Meser 1994, 186). This question is central to my analysis of the media coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair.

CENSORSHIP AND INFORMATION CONTROL

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

There are several levels of information control on the Public Broadcasting Authority's Channel One. The first is the Managing Council, composed of seven political representatives. This was intended to minimize government control over the media; however, in practice, members of the council were politically affiliated, representing their party's interests (Negbi 1999). Additionally, it was the role of the minister of education to nominate the executive director of the Broadcasting Authority. As Negbi (1999) stated, past Israeli governments used this control to serve their political interests. Some council representatives have openly admitted to being driven by political interests. One member who was affiliated with the religious right wing party *Mafdal* said,

> You would be stupid to expect us to behave like objective people with no interests. Of course I am serving a political goal. Do I understand anything about the media? No one in this council including myself is a media professional. None of us were chosen because of our qualifications.
>
> (Negbi 1999, 160)

Although the council is in charge of separating political agendas and content, in practice, it sometimes does just the opposite. Arafat's speech (in November 1988) exemplified such political machinations. The then minister of defense Yitzhak Rabin and the council decided not to broadcast Arafat's speech, which declared a Palestinian government in the Diaspora (Negbi 1999, 161). "In an un-presidential action, the electricity was cut

off from the Palestinians in the territories so they too could not watch the speech."[6]

Negbi noted that withholding electricity from Palestinian citizens, though a severe action, was within Rabin's authority as minister of defense, but interfering with television programming, however, was not. He claimed that the intervention occurred because the Broadcasting Authority's executive director was the prime minister's political nominee. Rabin's decision to control this information was not viewed by him as a matter of political alliance.

THE EDITORS' COMMITTEE

While the politically appointed Managing Council is a government-media hybrid, the second level of information control, called The Editors' Committee, exists entirely within the media. Formed in 1942, this committee's intention was to create a unified Jewish press against the British mandate (Lavi 1998).

The Editors' Committee constitutes a body unique to Israel, probably with no equivalent in the democratic world. It is composed of representatives from all the Hebrew daily newspapers; the *Jerusalem Post;* and Channels One, Two, and Ten; committee meetings are held behind closed doors with no available protocols. What little research is available on the committee is based upon testimonies of former members who were willing to cooperate.

Ben-Gurion was the first prime minister to use the relationship he developed with this committee to move his agenda forward. He discovered that making The Editors' Committee privy to state secrets was the safest way to prevent leaks of vital information (Lavi 1987). Subsequent prime ministers successfully followed Ben-Gurion's formula.

CENSORSHIP BY THE PRESS

While the government-media structure as well as economic control[7] ensures strict regulation of information, as needed, voluntary censorship within the press is usually all that is necessary. When I interviewed journalists, representing several newspapers and TV, they claimed that censorship has rarely come from the highest levels of owners but voluntary censorship widely existed among editors and reporters. Generally, Israeli journalists and editors have been characterized by media researches such as Negbi (1999) and Eli Avraham (1993, 2003) as conformists who go along with the Zionist ideology. Editors with this point of view have been inclined to reject anything they perceive to be threatening. As a result, controversial material, such as the Yemenite Babies Affair, is rarely reviewed at the higher echelons of media empires or rejected at lower levels.

A former journalist from *Haaretz*, for instance, said the editors claimed that social issues were not "sexy" enough. Other journalists who wanted to cover Mizrahi-related topics said they were often rejected by junior editors. Yet strict information control mandated by the highest levels are occasionally exercised as well. For example, Yossi Dahan, a professor at the Open University and a columnist for *Yediot Aharonot*, wrote an article about media ownership that was censored by the editorial board in his newspaper: "They censored this column even though it was not directly connected to *Yediot Aharonot*, because it was touching a sensitive nerve" (Interview, summer 2001).

Esther Hertzog, a professor of sociology and a columnist for *Maariv* and now for *Ynet* (the internet edition of *Yediot Aharonot*),[8] said that despite relative freedom she was censored at *Maariv* several times for material that her editor perceived as "too much." Known for critical views of the establishment, Hertzog was thought to be crossing the line when she criticized welfare authorities or supported Rabbi Meshulam's[9] struggle. Hertzog also claims that part of the censorship is a result of what she defines as a "close personal circle that blocks criticism on several fronts":

> When I wrote columns criticizing the welfare system and social workers I was surprised to see how information was blocked because the social worker was the wife of a politician or a close friend of this judge who was linked to an editor at the paper. I saw how this worked on the ground. It is very simple to expose these links, everybody knows about it.
>
> (Interview, summer 2008)

Yemini, a longtime columnist for *Maariv,* defined the level of control and censorship in the Israeli media as "liberal terrorism":

> Of course, there is censorship. In *Yediot Aharonot,* for instance, they will not publish any article against the state attorney's office. There is an oppressive discourse. It has been a while now that I am publishing and exposing injustice in the state attorney's office and no one in the media joins me. I challenge them solely on the legal aspects based on facts, charges and verdicts. In *Maariv,* Dankner joins me but the media, as a whole, is still a homogenized closed institution. Issues like the judiciary system or the Yemenite babies that challenge this hegemony have no chance of being addressed properly. There are a few journalists that rule over all power positions in the Israeli media and this "liberal terror" is very effective. I am always making them mad when I say that I want to politicize the media so that we at least get fair representation.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Amnon Dankner, a longtime columnist in the press and a former editor of *Maariv*, supported Yemini's assertion. He said that *Haaretz* once censored

his colleague, prominent Ashkenazi journalist Dan Margalit, when he criticized the verdict of former Shas minister Ariye Deri:

> Margalit told me he was censored in *Haaretz* and that I should read the verdict. I spent a month studying the Deri verdict and I could not believe my eyes. Where are all the lawyers and journalists that never even bother reading this material? I always thought that the Supreme Court is like God, so I was shocked to discover all these legal problems with this verdict. After I published the first article about this, I was interviewed in the radio and the interviewer treated me as if I was a criminal because I criticized the Supreme Court.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

ISRAELI MEDIA AND THE POLITICS OF MIZRAHI REPRESENTATION

ASHKENAZI DOMINATION IN THE MEDIA

Researcher Eva Etzioni-Halevy (1997) claims that in Israel, the relationship between elite factions of society is especially closed in comparison with other Western societies. Bluntly, she says Israeli society is elitist in nature. The homogenized cultural background, common interests, and operational integration of the founders and their descendants encouraged a complete disconnect from the lower classes in society.

The media elite reflects a similar imbalanced ethnic/class division as in society, which makes the media an integral part of the structure it is supposed to critique. As Avraham (2003, 93) pointed out, the similarities or differences between the media and the groups it covers affects "the nature of the coverage and the access of these groups to the media." Dahan (2004, 8) argued that in recent years the media market has become a class-based market containing two main groups. "One group of reporters-celebrities, the 'talented elite' who enjoy high salary and great benefits . . . and below them, a large group of 'proletarian-reporters,' earning low salaries . . . and therefore have very little power or professional independence."

A 2001 media survey compiled by senior journalist Shelly Yechimovich found that only 9 of the 100 most influential people in the media were of Mizrahi descent.[10] My interviews with established journalists confirmed this conviction. Ilana Dayan, a prominent journalist, said,

> There is a slow process of change now but it is not a breakthrough. Women and Mizrahim are still far from the financial center or the decision-making power. I still come across forms of racism in the high level, it is just more hidden now.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

While there are currently more journalists of Mizrahi descent in the mainstream media, the majority of media owners, editors, and influential journalists are still Ashkenazi. As Mizrahi producer Ron Cahlili said, "There are more Mizrahim in the media now, but it is more of a Mizrahi aroma, real Mizrahiness is still not there" (Interview, summer 2008).

Ashkenazi domination in the media is also maintained through keeping the few coveted positions in the popular army radio station *Galei Tzahal* mostly to family members of the Ashkenazi elite. The army station is also by far the most prolific incubator of future Israeli media stars and is part of the reason why this club remains so "tightly closed." Those lucky enough to serve in this most desirable army assignment receive significant national exposure. This essentially widens the government's sphere of influence over the media, as it is indirectly responsible not only for censorship, but also for ensuring the hegemonic ideological and cultural background of future reporters. It helps maintain what Douglas Kellner (1995, 61) calls "the system of domination."

Positions within other army media outlets, such as the army newspaper, *Bamahane,* and the IDF public relations office, are also highly desirable. The majority of recruits assigned to work at the army station are offspring of affluent and influential Ashkenazi families. A feature front-page article in *Ha'ir* exposed the ways in which the Israeli media elite has been nepotistic: "With God's help: how and why are sons and daughters of [famous people] accepted to serve their Army duty in Galatz and as IDF spokesman?" (June 18, 1999).

This article served as a review of family connections of soldiers assigned to the army station for the past decade, essentially demonstrating Etzioni-Halevy's claim about the closed elitism in Israeli society. The author identified more than 100 soldiers working at *Galei Tzahal*, the IDF public relations office, and *Bamahane* as belonging to well-known Ashkenazi families. Previous station commanders have openly admitted to being pressured to accept the children of friends, politicians, and celebrities, leading to hiring decisions not based on merit. For instance, Lilach Barnea was most likely hired in deference to her father's position and became a nationally recognized radio personality. A committee member who viewed her record explained,

> She passed the exams well, but we were not sure about her. One of the committee members said that he knows her family well, and would find out more details about her. It was easy to gain more information about her that helped us reach a better decision than with an anonymous candidate.
>
> (*Ha'ir* June 18, 1999)

Another journalist interviewed said entry to the club was exclusive and primarily determined by personal connections. Shosh Gabay, a former

journalist with 20 years of experience, said she always felt like an outsider in the mainstream media despite her achievements:

> The press is a very dominant Ashkenazi environment. Only in *Hapatish* I felt at home. I did not have to pretend; I could just be myself. One of the first things I wrote about was about Indian cinema, an article that no other mainstream paper would have let me publish. I couldn't believe my creative freedom. I wrote about racism in advertisements, a feature article about Zohar Argov, the king of Mizrahi music, and so on. In the mainstream press I could publish isolated items about Mizrahi issues, but they were never followed up and they were edited so they appeared very sterile.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

These themes recurred throughout interviews I conducted with both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi journalists. Prominent Ashkenazi journalists such as Ilana Dayan, Shelly Yechimovish, and Amnon Dankner described what bell hooks (1992, 15) called "cultural homogeneity." This is not to say, of course, that the ethnicity/race of the reporters alone will guarantee the text they produce. After all as hook explains, distorted images may be "constructed by white people who have not divested of racism, or by people of color . . . who internalized racism" (1992, 1). In any event, an overwhelming Ashkenazi domination, as described here, operates in what Hall (1997, 259) terms the "regime of representation." This regime, as he said, has the power to stereotype, "mark, assign and classify."

Mizrahi journalists felt that they were kept outside the Ashkenazi media club, especially if they didn't conform to the cultural hegemony of the majority.

Hanna Kim, a prominent journalist, described her experience:

> For years, Mizrahi culture was not legitimate and accepted in the mainstream. I remember when *Hapatish* was first published and I was interviewed on the radio and they asked to pick a song and I asked for a Zohar Argov[11] song; they laughed at me and said that they didn't have any Argov songs. My colleagues were constantly wondering if I really liked this song or was joking. I was always asked why a serious journalist like me is dealing with Mizrahi issues as if the two are a contradiction. The attitude towards anyone who wrote about Mizrahi and social issues was condescending and disrespectful. My editors, unlike me, always thought that social issues are not sexy enough. Just like Mizrahi culture is considered inferior and not worth reporting.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Iris Oded, a former prominent Mizrahi journalist who worked in both print and electronic media, described a similar experience:

> Racism still exists in the media but now it is more hidden. If 15 years ago they could call someone from a development town "primitive," they will not

> say it now, but they still think that. I had to fight a lot. When I worked for *Ha'ir*, they didn't censor me, but the editor let some terrible racist articles be published. I felt frustrated because it stood against everything that I was doing. They tried to turn me into a development town reporter while my title was Media Critic. I was accused of hating Asheknazim, of hating men; in the end I left. There is more openness now but overall, the media is still a closed Ashkenazi club. In *Ha'ir*, for example, Shaul Bibi and me were the only Mizrahi reporters at the time.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

Many Mizrahi journalists and columnists said they are a token minority voice heard only in small doses. Dahan, a columnist for *Yediot Aharonot,* said he felt insignificant in comparison with the Ashkenazi voices dominating the newspaper:

> I was asked to write a column about social issues in *Yediot Aharonot* because I fit this category for them but I am just a drop in the sea. The entire oped page in the weekend is written by Ashkenazi columnists, many of them expressing freely racist views as often as they like. Only in Israel can you come across racist people who are proud of their racism.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

Amnon Danker, a prominent Ashkenazi journalist,[12] agreed and described what he calls "the media Ashkenazi tribe":

> I was going through a long process of change, when I realized that things are not black and white and I started to think through the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi conflict. I finally realized that behind the so-called liberal principles, there is an ugly hatred. I started to see that it is hate and fear. I started to be suspicious of myself too because I was part of this process and part of this group for so long. It is a group of people who are constantly thinking together; a terrified tribe in constant paranoia that the country is going to be taken away from them. It was the first time that I dared leaving this tribe, and it felt good. Reactions to my new writings, especially from the left, were targeted towards me personally. They said that I am corrupted, crazy, becoming fundamentalist religious and so on. They did not want to deal with my argument.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Most Mizrahi journalists I interviewed felt marked as writers of poverty, crime, and neglected neighborhoods. Some said they were labeled as angry or militant by their Ashkenazi colleagues. Saul Bibi, a prominent Mizrahi journalist, acknowledged his reputation as a troublemaker. He felt misunderstood by colleagues and intellectuals:

> The Mizrahi issue is perceived as threatening. I am called militant, and I was never even in the army; I do not even have a driver's license. I was even

> approached once by a Shabak [Israeli secret service] agent who claimed I was causing damage to society. Israeli intellectuals ignore the Mizrahi story and that is why I do not see myself as part of them; I never went to the university because I am not connected to this kind of intellect.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

After she became a television editor, Gabay was called a "fighting tiger" in relation to her social agenda. This image haunted her after she produced a television series about the history of Mizrahi music. She said critics ignored the show's content and attacked her directly. The press sustained such a vicious barrage of personal insult against Gabay that she had to leave the country for several weeks.

> When the series aired I was attacked as if I had started a war. I was just talking about music, and the headlines were talking about the "Ashkenazim from the bunker."[13] It was as if there is no room for a dialogue: it is "us" or "them." I felt like an illegal immigrant in my own country. I am the eternal "other" that will never be fully incorporated into society professionally and otherwise.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Personal attacks were a recurring theme in the experience of Mizrahi journalists I interviewed. Most offered parallel stories to Gabay's. They demonstrated what Edward Said (1978, 7) defines as "cultural hegemony at work." A power that clearly marks the boundaries of "us" and "them" not only in terms of what can be said but also in terms of who has a right to speak. As Gayatri Spivak said in the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), "Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways." Often attacks, as evident in the testimonies above, suggested Mizrahi radicals were displaying counter racism. As hooks (1992, 15) pointed out, these claims meant to deflect attention away from the detrimental effects of white supremacy and show that most people don't understand the mechanism of racism. "The prejudicial feelings some black folks may express about whites are in no way linked to a system of domination that affords us any power to coercively control the lives and well being of white folks."

VOICES OF AUTHORITY AND THE MIZRAHI ACCENT IN THE MEDIA

Mizrahi and Ashkenazi accents can be distinguished by differences in inflection of vowel sounds and the pronunciation of specific letters. The Mizrahi accent has Arabic roots. It is viewed as inferior by the Ashkenazi cultural standard and mostly associated with poor education, lower social class, and lack of sophistication, in addition to the pervasive Israeli bias

against the Arabs. A Mizrahi who speaks like a Mizrahi—similar to an Arab—has these faults by association and is summarily unfit for a broadcast position. The Ashkenazi accent is considered educated and almost universally preferred for broadcast.

In addition, Mizrahi Jews exacerbate an ongoing tension about the cultural blending of Arabs and Israelis. This issue surfaced repeatedly in my interviews with Mizrahi journalists, who claimed the accent was consistently a major obstacle to working in television, radio, or on the stage. Some felt it even interfered with everyday interactions, such as dealing with bureaucracy over the phone. At the time of this writing (2008), there are no journalists with Mizrahi accents in prime time, mainstream television, or radio.[14] In "Broadcast Orientalism" (2005), Penslar showed that despite the radio's official policy to employ the Sephardic pronunciation, most announcers speak in the socially preferred Ashkenazi accent. Moreover, this cultural preference is reflected in the content of shows as well, for years keeping Mizrahi music and culture marginalized.

Yael Tzadok is one of a handful of journalists on Israeli radio with a Mizrahi accent. She claims to have experienced many challenges with regard to her accent, including claims that no one "talks like this today." In one case, these challenges followed Tzadok to the commercials' arena:

> My first commercial was also the last one. I was asked to read a jingle for a fashion company. I received the text and started the recording. Suddenly the producer enters the studio, stops me and says: Look, it won't work. I strengthened the volume of the music over your Het and Ayin as much as I can, but we can still hear it.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Despite the professional price she paid, Tzadok said she doesn't regret making a conscious decision to remain authentic. "I may have lost some professional opportunities but I gained myself," she said.

Yosef Shiloah, a famous Mizrahi actor and activist, said his accent has been a constant obstacle in his career. Typecast as a Mizrahi character in films, he has struggled to attain parts on stage: "Israeli directors just assumed that Shakespeare could only be acted in Ashkenazi accent," he said. "I could only get good parts from foreign directors and from Hanoch Levin[15]" (Interview, summer 2001).

Yosef Dahoah-Halevi, a teacher, Yemenite activist, and publisher of the journal *Afikim*, claimed that the Mizrahi accent has been crucial to the portrayal of Mizrahi people as uneducated, primitive, and barbaric:

> They did not let Mizrahi journalists with Arab accents be heard on the media. I have struggled with radio executives over the issue of the Mizrahi accent and in my personal life; my children had a hard time in schools

> because kids would make fun of their accent. Once I wrote an article to *Haaretz* about this issue and they refused to publish it; only after I complained to someone I knew at the editorial board, they publish it. The Ashkenazim are so captured in the European culture that they think all other cultures are inferior. This is racism in the full sense of the word.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

HISTORY OF MIZRAHI REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

As previously mentioned, representation of Mizrahim in the media, at least in the first four decades of the state, were mainly associated with crime and violence, or at best with quaint ethnic stupidity. A more balanced representation existed, especially during the 1970s and 1980s in newspapers like *Ha'olam Haze* and *Al Hamishmar*, and of course in the alternative media. *Kol Israel*, for example, which during the first two decades of the state was the only broadcast medium, featured programs "merely responding to its Askenazi listeners' taste" (Penslar 2005, 191).

Veteran Mizrahi activists such as Sami Shalom Chetrit, Yossi Dahan, and Vicki Shiran agree that a breakthrough in Mizrahi cultural identity occurred in the 1970s with the rise of the Israeli Black Panthers. Prior to that time, Mizrahi protests (such as Wadi Salib in 1959) were condemned as acts of violence. Although the Black Panthers were recognized as protesters rather than traitors, they were also depicted as violent Moroccans who deserved to be jailed.[16]

Generally, Israeli mainstream has perceived the Mizrahi struggle as an ethnic rather than a national concern, or at worst, a petty and disruptive attempt for attention. It has been characterized as divisive in its attempt to drive a wedge between the two major cultural groups at a time when the precarious geopolitical situation calls for unity. This attitude was evident in countless examples such as the coverage of the alternative education school system of Kedma (1994–5) and of course in Rabbi Meshulam's protest (1994) of the state's mishandling of the Yemenite Babies Affair.[17]

Vicki Shiran, professor of criminology at Beit-Berl College[18] and a prominent Mizrahi activist, described the discourse of the 1970s as that of "haves" and "have nots." The term "welfare" was frequently used to imply "lazy" and "freeloading."

Although Mizrahi protest has existed since the late 1950s, media coverage has been mostly derogatory or nonexistent. In an interview, Shiran (2001) claimed that the media was a very difficult fortress to penetrate: "When we fought against unfair Mizrahi representation in the TV historical series 'Amud Haesh,'[19] we got no coverage; there was one article in *Yediot Aharonot*, but it was mostly the TV producer's perspective on the matter" (Interview, summer 2001).

Beni Torati, film director and former alternative press writer, said Mizrahi culture is a key concept to the construction of Mizrahim identity. He bemoans the lack of fair coverage of Mizrahi culture from the 1960s through the late 1980s. What finally appeared in the media about Mizrahim, he said, was stereotypic and disrespectful:

> If they wrote something about it in the mainstream media, it was written with ridicule. Music critics, for instance, wrote that Mizrahi music flourishes are whiny. It was a result of ignorance and disrespect. I always claimed that the war is first of all cultural. The oppression is cultural, we were born to a world were our cultural feathers were taken from us so we will forever slip. That is why I dedicated my film to my parents' generation.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

Tikva Levi, a veteran Mizrahi activist, agreed, saying that she has seen little change in the Mizrahi media image. She stated that growing up in Israel she consumed only negative images of her culture. Now, she finds that her young daughter wants to have blond, straight hair:

> The typical image of Mizrahi Jews in the media is of primitive people that are motivated by emotions, uneducated and ugly. The model of what is good, smart and beautiful is always a European. The current discourse on Shas that is so central to Mizrahi discourse shows that nothing changed. If the media can stereotype such a large group of people as stupid and irrational, then we have a long way to go.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

MIZRAHI REPRESENTATION IN CURRENT MAINSTREAM DISCOURSE

As Avraham (1993; 2003) demonstrated, the media constructs and reflects social relationships between the center and periphery of society, in this case, between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. In his study of Israeli media, Avraham showed how Orientalism[20] has fundamentally influenced the portrayal of Mizrahi Jews in the media. Images synthesized from an Ashkenazi viewpoint have usually reinforced negative stereotypes. Avraham (2003, 62) characterized the discourse about Mizrahim as typically relying on the notion that Mizrahim equals impoverished, trouble, and poor.

In a research examining TV representation of minorities, Avraham and Anat First (2004) found that minorities, including Mizrahim and Palestinians, were marginalized in both the quality and quantity of the coverage. Mizrahim still mostly appeared in association with negative news, such as crime, poverty, and violence, whereas the overwhelming majority of TV hosts, reporters, and experts were still Ashkenazi secular men. A more recent research examining the representation of minorities in the

news program on Channel One came up with similar findings. Bar-Lev (2007) found that minorities were mostly connected to "news of disorder," which contributes to their marginalization and identity as different.[21] As Gabay said, "In the media and in the hearts of many people, Mizrahim still equals vulgar. Many Ashkenazi and Mizrahi journalists in the media think this way and with this view they design the programming on TV and write articles in the newspapers" (Interview, summer 2001).

To this day, Orientalist elements provide a solid ground for new discourses and a core for identity formation for new Mizrahi generations. As Said claimed, once these Orientalist images dominate the public perception, as it is in the case for Mizrahim, it is almost impossible for people to receive knowledge, through the media, books, and movies, that is not colored by these stereotypes. This process of discourse construction can explain why despite a breakthrough in the presence of Mizrahim in the media, the main characteristics of their representation haven't changed (Shiran 2001; Avraham and First 2004).

For example, in an interview for *Yediot Aharonot*, Karin Dunski, a former well-known Ashkenazi supermodel, used a slanderous term when referring to Yemenites. She was presented as being an aristocrat in the Levant. When she was drafted and army authorities sought to clarify her date of birth, her mother said,

> "I am not coming from Yemen," because the Yemenites never knew their date of birth. She said, "I didn't arrive on a carpet[22]; I know my children's date of birth." Many Yemenites used to come to the pharmacy where she worked, so she knew them by the head cover. She really loved the Yemenites because they are very nice.
>
> (*Yediot Aharonot* October 19, 1997)

Typically, this article relied on what Said (1978) identified as well-known public images and characteristics attributed to people from the East by the West. In the public's view, Yemenite people arrived in Israel on a "flying carpet" from a primitive world, so it makes perfect sense that they wouldn't know their children's date of birth.[23] Starting with the misconception that Yemenite parents don't bother to track their children's birthdays, it is not a big leap to assume that they do not take good care of them.

Even government agencies depict Mizrahi Jews negatively. A 1999 welfare department advertisement (*Haaretz* June 3, 1999), asking the public to adopt deserted children with disabilities featured a dark-skinned baby. The potential adoptive parents appeared to be middle class Ashkenazi. The implication was threefold: (1) Mizrahi children are prone to disabilities; (2) Mizrahi parents abandon their children in the face of difficulty; and (3) the noble Ashkenazim will help the children, despite the burden.

More importantly, the media's power is evident not only in the production of distorted images and stereotypes but also in their ability to obscure the coverage of social issues thereby reinforcing the power imbalance in society. For example, a story about the *Hila*[24] campaign protesting the overuse of Ritalin in schools demonstrates this mechanism:

> We had a family that was fighting for their daughter who suffered from many side affects of the drug Ritalin. In this campaign, we used a big article from the *New York Times*. A reporter that interviewed the family for *Ha'ir* said that they were holding an article from the *New York Times* that they could not even read, playing on the notion that we cannot have a sophisticated and grounded objection to policies; we cannot possibly be politically aware and of course, and we can not read English. It was all so cynical and condescending. Nothing have changed. We are still perceived as politically unaware; we are the ultimate masses. Sometimes I feel that the distance between Mizrahi issues and Ashkenazi journalists is so big that it can't be bridged.
>
> (Tikva Levi, Interview, summer 2001)

Shlomo Swirski, professor of Sociology and veteran activist, shares Levi's observations about the nature of media construction. In 1994–1995 Swirski worked extensively with Kedma, an alternative school project in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv where he continually encountered media distortion. Information contrary to mainstream ideas was twisted to align with unfavorable but familiar stereotypes. When Mizrahi activists in the Kedma schools advocated for equal opportunity in education, the media presented the school as divisive to the educational system and discredited it as a place for children with learning disabilities:

> The media presented us as people who advocate for separation between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. Since the concept of separation never sounds good, the media and the public's attitude toward our project was mainly negative. The concept of equality was replaced with the concept of separation. Also, the education system, especially in Tel-Aviv, advertised in their informational booklet that Kedma is a school for kids with learning disabilities. We tried to stop it but it didn't help; it created problems not only with our image to the public but with Mizrahi parents who rightfully did not want their children labeled as disabled. There is an apparatus in the media that translates every Mizrahi protest for equality to an attempt for separation while at the same time presenting Mizrahi people as low level and low class.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Dahan, professor of philosophy, columnist, and Mizrahi activist, agreed saying stereotypes still dominate Mizrahi discourse, denoting that common

use of the term "Mizrahi" is relatively new. This word, which for years was perceived as threatening, only gained currency as a legitimate political term in the mid 1990s. Dahan stated that the media continues to use simplistic terms such as "us and them" and "good and bad":

> There is the bad Mizrahi, Shas, and the good secular Mizrahi that must be saved from Shas. There is still a big gap between reporters and the people they report on. The majority of owners, editors and journalists are Ashkenazi middle class people. The average Ashkenazi reporter from Tel Aviv, what does he knows about what is going on in the development towns? In order to write in depth about social problems, the historical context is vital but it is never represented this way. The stereotypical Mizrahi in the media is still inarticulate, irrational and whiny.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Shelly Yehimovitz, former journalist for Israeli radio,[25] is one of few prominent Ashkenazi journalists who has consistently covered Mizrahi issues in the media. Sensitive to racist attitudes toward Mizrahim since childhood, she said she is aware of the media's obligation to cover these issues with an open mind:

> Mizrahi discourse didn't exist in the mainstream media until a few years ago. This is the way Israeli society is coping with issues of minorities. Whoever is trying to construct this discourse, there are ways to stop them. About four years ago I did a survey that examined the media elite in Israel and I found only 9 percent Mizrahi People and 91 percent Ashkenazi people. I looked at publishers, editors and senior journalists. My colleagues hated this item;
>
> I deal with Mizrahi discourse a lot. I brought up issue like selection in clubs, separation between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in religious education and the Ashkenazi elite in general. This elite is no different then any other elite in the Western world. The elite and the media elite is included, usually is dominated by secular Ashkenazi veteran men. And all the different elites are helping to keep each other in control and to stop other people from penetrating into them; it is 'a natural' sociological process. There is a slow process of change but it is insignificant and happens only in the margins.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Jacky Levi, a performer, columnist, and host on both radio and TV, is a rising Mizrahi star who recently made it into the mainstream. In an interview with *Yediot Aharonot* in 2007 Levi said that despite the recent breakthrough in Mizrahi presence, it is a drop in the bucket in relation to Ashkenazim who still dominate the important positions in the media. He claims that while there are more Mizrahim winning *Cochav Nolad* (A Star Is Born, the Israeli version of *America Idol*), when it comes to shows that set the tone and raise important discussions about social and political

agendas, Channel Two, for instance, features two Ashkenazi journalists, Immanuel Rosen and Ben Caspit, supposedly representing two sides of an argument. "These are supposed to represent diversity in Israeli society? . . . The only difference between them is how they like to spice their Sabich [a popular Arab dish]" (*Yediot Aharonot* December 12).

Levi claims that most people have a misperception about what diversity and pluralism means. Despite claims that new Mizrahi faces, such as Oshrat Kotler and Ya'akov Ailon[26] represent the end of imbalanced Mizrahi representation, Levi said they are really culturally Ashkenazim. "The only Mizrahi thing about them," Levi says, "is their ethnic origin, otherwise they are Ashkenazim; they are like trained bears in a circus" (*Yediot Aharonot* December 12).

When I meet Levi for an interview he said some of the resentment to Mizrahi culture is so powerful that it took him a long time to understand this rift. "I like Ashkenazi culture", he said, "the only problem I have with them is that they have a problem with me."

> I remember driving one day and listening to a radio talk show, they put on a great song by Amir Benayun and then interviewed Tomi Lapid [an Ashkenazi media icon and a Knesset member]. When he was asked what he thought about the song he said 'it was disgusting and repulsive, they say that we occupy the Arabs, but they really occupy us.' I was so shocked I almost got into an accident. This was not just a private person making a stupid comment. This was an influential key media figure. I think only then I started to understand what other Mizrahim, like Avihu Medina, are talking about, (Interview, summer 2008)

When First and Avraham released their findings (2004)[27] on the poor representation of minorities on channels two and ten, CEO's of both stations rushed to the media with a list of Mizrahi TV personalities proving the contrary. "Only talented people make it to the media,[28]" they proclaimed. Their response demonstrated Levi's observation, described above. While improving the diversity among reporters and editors to better reflect the diversity in the population is definitely a good start, this condition alone, will not necessary guarantee a more fair representation reflected in the final product. As Hall (1989) said, "Films are not necessarily good because black people make them, they are not necessarily 'right-on' by virtue of the fact that they deal with the black experience" (443–444).

The journalists and activists I interviewed agreed that the mid-1990s marked a breakthrough for media discourse about Mizrahim. This period saw growth in alternative media outlets such as *Hapatish* and *News From Within,* which increased public consciousness. The term "Mizrahi" saw wider usage. Finally, Mizrahi efforts to achieve equality were gaining recognition as legitimate cultural and economic struggles. This shift,

however, must not be seen, as Hall (1989) said, as a "new" phase replacing the old one, but as a phase that "assumes new forms." As long as the power and ideology that dictates the politics and the relation of race and representation exists, the "old" discursive formation cannot simply disappear. Moreover, in the Israeli context I argue that the relationship between race and representation will continue to persist as long as the old Zionist narrative is the driving force behind the construction of national identity, historical narrative and conflict resolution.

Criticism of Ashkenazi supremacy and disclosure of Mizrahi oppression, once strictly taboo, has even made small gains in mainstream media during the 1990s. Several articles exposed stereotypical representation of Mizrahim as well as deconstructed sources of power in society. In "Judicial Activism" (*Ha'ir* May 24, 2001), for instance, nepotism was exposed in the Israeli Judicial and Supreme Court systems. Children of influential judges were consistently placed in desirable internships and jobs within the judicial system. Since the establishment of the state, only 6 of 45 Supreme Court judges have been of Mizrahi descent. Miriam Ben-Porat, a Supreme Court judge and a former state comptroller, stated,

> There is a lot of injustice throughout the capitalist world. I am not saying that I am against it because I haven't found a better system. It is easier for children of doctors to get accepted to medical school, because they think "like father like son" . . . so if the father is a judge it is more likely that the child is more genetically gifted for that. It is not always true, but I think it is one of the criteria.
>
> (*Ha'ir* May 24, 2001)

This explanation makes the claim that genetics trump other considerations. Science awaits discovery of the judicial gene but in the meantime judicial committees that are representative of the populations they judge would better serve the country.

In 1996, *Maariv* published a comprehensive criticism of Ashkenazi domination under the title "Buzaglo Test[29]." The series highlighted the negative image of Mizrahim in literature, film and advertising. It also exposed subtle racist references and the bias of prominent Ashkenazi public figures. An educator in a prestigious Jerusalem high school, for example, claimed the superiority of Ashkenazi over Mizrahi culture: "The difference between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi is culture; popular vs. elite." (*Maariv* June 28, 1996) *Haaretz* journalist Gidon Levi said the following about the superiority of Russian Jews:

> Theses immigrants [the Russians] have great chances to become like us. First of all they are Ashkenazi. They are Europeans. Most of them are beautiful and talented. After they learn Hebrew they will look just about how we would like to look . . . the elite here is Ashkenazi, and it's happy to absorb

> others that are similar. The Russians are no doubt different from the North Africans. They will achieve faster.
>
> (*Maariv* June 28, 1996)

Levi, who has written extensively about unfair treatment of Palestinians, neglected to see the contradiction between his passionate support of the Palestinian struggle and criticism of the Israeli occupation and his view of Russian immigrants as superior to Oriental and Ethiopian immigrants.[30]

FEAR OF MIZRAHI PRESENCE

Despite some presence of other points of view in the mainstream media, Ashkenazi dominance still inhibits a free exchange of ideas. Independent media outlets do not necessarily integrate alternative perspectives that threaten Ashkenazi control. When Mizrahim overstep political or cultural boundaries established by the Ashkenazi media, there is an immediate backlash that perpetuates oppression and fear mongering.

As previously mentioned, a series about the history of Mizrahi music, directed by Shosh Gabay and Ron Cahlili and aired on Channel Two in 1998, created quite a stir. *Ha'ir,* an occasional contributor to alternative discourse about Mizrahim, dedicated several articles discussing what it viewed as a Mizrahi cultural takeover. A front-page article titled "The Ashkenazis from the Bunker" (*Ha'ir*, September 25, 1998) dealt exclusively with feelings of three Ashkenazi men who felt attacked by the Mizrahi presence. The phrase "from the bunker," especially in the Israeli military dominant culture, connotes trapped soldiers under siege from an overwhelming attack, contrary to any factual representation of Mizrahi cultural influence on Israel's public agenda. As Hall (1992) says, terminology is crucial in creating powerful discourses and maintaining hegemony, making the *Ha'ir* article a textbook example of media dominance.

To understand the meaning of the term "Ashkenazi," *Ha'ir* interviewed professors and journalists. Once again, Mizrahi culture was denigrated as the Ashkenazi culture was defended. *Haaretz* literary editor Beni Tzipor, for instance, defined European culture as the only culture worth acknowledging: "It is not that I am defending the West," he said, "there is just nothing else. Even the romantic longing for the East is a Western thing." (*Ha'ir* September 25, 1998). This assertion exemplifies Said's point that the West claimed ownership over the Orient in many ways, especially through using an authoritative stamp. Amihay Zilberman, head of behavioral sciences at the College for Management in Tel Aviv, justified fear of Mizrahi culture claiming that Ashkenazim are oppressed people who suffer in silence: "On the one hand," he said, "they expected themselves to be the successful elite. On the other hand, it is not in their nature to complain

and whine about oppression. So the Ashkenazis are holding it in" (*Ha'ir* September 25, 1998).

In these musings, Zilberman takes Ashkenazi dominance for granted. While "the oppressor" was not directly named in the quote above, it was implied that whining is a Mizrahi quality. Mizrahi challenges, therefore, are dismissed as an extension of their natural tendency to whine. Zilberman's assertion supported Dahan's claim that "only in Israel can one find racist people who are proud of their racist thoughts" (Interview, summer 2001).

Other writers in the same issue of *Ha'ir* claimed that Mizrahi discourse identified Ashkenazim as the enemy. Further, Mizrahi Jews were seen as having "the real political power" while neglecting to take responsibility. To Mizrahim, they claimed, European culture was lost, and the Holocaust was minimized. Such rhetoric has helped the Ashkenazi elite to maintain what Said (1978) called a "flexible positional superiority." In taking the offensive, the cultural superiority of Ashkenazim is imposed on others as the natural course of order. This is essential to understanding the mechanism of this oppressive discourse, which employs an offensive or defensive approach, as needed. And while most Israelis defer to the importance of the Holocaust as part of their history, its sanctity has sometimes been used in subtle ways to lessen or obscure other human tragedies such as the Yemenite Babies Affair.

It follows suit that Mizrahi success in the political arena would be feared as well by Ashkenazim who control the press. An independent Mizrahi political figure or party showing promise may well be subjected to editorial harassment in order to maintain the status quo. These squashed political movements have rarely regained momentum.

Both Mizrahim and Ashkenazim interviewed for this book agreed that the Shas (Mizrahi Orthodox) party is currently the dominant force behind public discourse about Mizrahim. Secular Ashkenazim view this party as the primary source of Mizrahi "venom," and therefore, the enemy. [31] When Ashkenazi journalists and columnists attack Shas, the distinction between orthodox religion and fundamentalism is often blurred. Shas supporters are labeled unsophisticated Orientals who substitute religious arguments for rational thought or modern logic. Their increasing political power is considered suspect, as though they should not be taken as seriously as other parties.[32]

Ashkenazim fear of the Shas party dominated media coverage during the 2000 Israeli presidential elections, in which left wing (almost exclusively White and Ashkenazi) and right wing (Mizrahi) candidates faced off (Lavie, 1996). This struggle almost obscured the political issues at hand.

The Israeli presidency has little power but enormous symbolic value. Candidates are nominated by the political parties and voted on by Knesset members. In August 2000, Moshe Katzav (of the political right) was

victorious over the left wing's Shimon Peres.[33] The morning after Katzav's victory, well-known journalists and public figures expressed disappointment with election results. The political right and religious political parties were vilified as "extremists," "stupid," "haters of progress and peace," and worse.[34] The outraged, mournful tone of Ashkenazim predicted the downfall of Israeli culture. Some even suggested an exodus "before things get really bad."[35] The state of Israel was described as "struck by a sorrow" that was compared to Rabin's murder.

In *Haaretz*, Gideon Levi proclaimed that "hope is gone and a nightmare begins." (August 4, 2000) Amos Oz[36] declared that "Peres was defeated by a group of right wingers that don't recognize reality, hate peace, and are hostile to enlightenment and progress" (*Yediot Aharonot* August 1, 2000). In *Maariv*, Ron Miberg[37] stated that Peres deserved to win the election as a reward for his political service, and lost due to the vindictiveness of Shas members: "This was another stage in the sweet revenge of Shas on what they see as the White political institution and what they call in a hateful tone the Ashkenazi elite…Katzav is not my president" (*Maariv* August 4, 2000).

Could such laments and contempt – even by Peres - reflect fear of an increased Mizrahi presence rather than apprehension about political upheaval? The 2000 presidential election coverage could be viewed as a microcosm of the broader sphere of public debate in Israel. It demonstrated, as Hall (1989) reminds us, that racism operates in a way, which always marks the boundaries of "belonging and otherness." It clearly marked who can be let in the Zionist club and who must remain outside.

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CHAPTER 3

Mapping the Media Coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair

Documentation and official complaints about the disappearance of babies appeared in the press as early as the 1950s when the Committee of Yemenite Immigrants filed a complaint with the police (Harris 1988). Yemenite Knesset member Hayim Megori initiated a discussion in the Knesset in November 1950, claiming that babies were being taken away to never return to their parents: "Are they [the babies] merchandise for shipment?" he asked.1

Following this discussion and police investigation of the disappearance of six babies, the press published several sporadic stories, such as a story about the complaint of Yehiel Tzuberi in *Davar* (September 29, 1950) and the story of Yosef Said in *Haboker* and *Haaretz*, (March 7, 1952). According to Dov Levitan (1983), these complaints were investigated as separated cases and there was no attempt to look at a connecting thread. Police efforts to investigate the cases of six children who had disappeared from different hospitals were reported at the end of 1952, but there was a failure to locate these children or offer any explanation (Harris, 11). Levitan (1983) claimed that while this was the first attempt to make a connection between cases, the state did not conduct a serious investigation and left the responsibility to the Ministry of Health and the police. Shoshi Zaid (2001, 55) also noted that the police report was classified "Top Secret" and that the minister of police, Bechor Chetrit, wrote, "If this matter is going to be exposed in public and discussed in the press, it will be a disgrace [for Israel]."

With more complaints filed in the mid-1960s, the Affair gained more momentum in public and got more coverage in the press. From the 1960s

to 2001, however, mainstream media coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair was erratic and superficial.[2] During this time, government commissions investigating the matter initiated media coverage when they wished to publicize information. Reporting was reactive rather than proactive. As a result, the media produced a narrative that obscured rather than investigated the Affair. Public information about the Yemenite Babies Affair was one-sided in that commission findings were presented as the truth. The government's two inquiry commissions, appointed in 1967 and 1988, had limited authority and budgets and no power of subpoena. In 1995, a public investigative commission, called *Va'adat Hakira Mamlachtit*, was created. This final commission, which had subpoena power, functioned until November 2001.

Press coverage of the Affair primarily emerged at the time of these commissions but then quickly faded. The news focused on the commissions themselves, rather than on the allegations they were investigating. In the last four decades, mainstream newspapers as well as four television features and a 1990s radio show have supported the notion that critical coverage of this tragic event was minimal.

1960s: The Public's Introduction to the Yemenite Babies Affair

Despite individual complaints about missing or abducted children made to government officials or the police in the 1950s,[3] the Affair was rarely mentioned outside the Yemenite community until 1966. An early article in *Yediot Aharonot* (March 22, 1965) reported on the story of the Danin family, which lost triplets. The article was very sympathetic to their story and even defined it "an unfortunate truth" but treated it as an isolated case. There was no mention of an Affair.

Zaid (2001) said the Affair had been well documented but classified as "Top Secret" or "Confidential" to prevent public awareness. Deliberate misinformation put out by the government about Yemenite families who lost babies led them to believe that their cases were isolated and that all possible venues of investigation had been pursued. Most of the missing children were born between the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the mid-1960s, children born in 1948 or later were turning 16–17 and started receiving army draft notices.[4] This procedural error exposed the complicity of the Israeli government in that deceased children would not have been registered to report for military service two decades later. While a few bookkeeping errors might have been understandable, draft notices of dozens of disappeared children were not.

In response, Yemenite journalist Yosef Tzuriel wrote, "Twelve Mothers are Looking for their Children" (*Maariv* April 1, 1966), which was the first substantive article about the Yemenite Babies Affair.[5] This article was also the first to provide information and perspectives that challenged

the government position. Before that, articles were short, anecdotal, and lacked an investigative point of view. The Tzuriel article implied foul play by government agencies and acknowledged the broken hearts of families whose babies had been stolen. Mothers were quoted as saying that their babies had been taken from them in absorption camps during the 1950s. One mother claimed that a nurse told her that babies were housed separately at the Ein Shemer Camp, as her baby was taken from her:

> The nurse told me I can come and breastfeed her every day, so I went and after a few days they told me that the baby died. I asked when? And they said "during the night." So I asked "where is she?" And the nurse said that she did not know and that it is not her job to deal with dead children. So I asked "where did they bury her?" And the nurse said that she didn't know and that I should go to the office.
>
> (*Maariv* April 1, 1966)

The mother repeatedly asked camp officers for an explanation of what had happened the night her child disappeared. She was continually rebuffed when she asked to see the body:

> For three weeks, I would go every day to the babies house and beg for answers, until one day a nurse told me she heard that my baby didn't die, but was taken somewhere else. To this day we never found her, we never saw a grave or sat Shiva [the Jewish mourning period of seven days].
>
> (*Maariv* April 1, 1966, 8)

At Ein Shemer, one of the largest absorption camps for Yemenite immigrants, there were many such claims. Tzuriel reported that state authorities universally claimed that the babies had been lost during the confusion of immigration, that nothing could be done, and that it would be best for all concerned to put the Affair to rest.

"Chaos of resettlement" became the authority's justification for the disappeared children, which thwarted further inquiry. It was too chaotic to keep track of the children, and there was no record of what happened because of the disorder. Camp officers, medical workers, and mainstream media did not deviate from this explanation. The chaos argument informed and influenced public opinion about the Affair for decades. As a lone voice, Tzuriel wrote, "The reality is different. The parents' wounds are still painful and they are entitled to know the truth" (*Maariv* April 1, 1966, 8).

This argument was accompanied by denial. Government officials overseeing Yemenite absorption interviewed by Tzuriel responded with disbelief. One said, "All the people working in the camps, with no exception, were honest people. If there were some mistakes, it was because of the lack of clear working rules at that time" (*Maariv* April 1, 1966, 8).

Tzuriel quoted Israel Yeshayahu, chairman of the Knesset in 1966, who was Israel's most prominent Yemenite political figure. Yeshayahu knew that families had illegally adopted Yemenite babies. He expressed disappointment about the way that "we all treated this Affair from the first rumors in the 1950s to this day." He suggested that a public council be established to investigate the Affair "so that the parents could finally know if their children were alive or dead" (*Maariv* April 1, 1966).

THE YEMENITE COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

Tzuriel's article incited an outcry within the Yemenite community that culminated in a public protest. In the face of government apathy, parents of 15 missing children formed the Yemenite Parents Committee in June 1966 to investigate the matter (Zaid, 2001). While the committee had no legal power or official recognition, it became a significant cornerstone for Yemenite families with similar stories.

Armed with hundreds of stories of disappeared children from distraught families, the committee pressured the Israeli government to investigate in an official capacity. A few months later, *Maariv* reported on the committee's progress and demands for government action. A *Maariv* article titled "100 of the Magic Carpet Children Disappeared" (July 27, 1966) reported that the Yemenite Public Council unearthed nearly 300 stories with remarkably similar details. Yediot Aharonot also reported on the committee's demand for investigation in a feature article titled "Where Are the Children" (July 2, 1966). This article characterized the parents as naïve and trusting, and while the description clearly marked them as others "they looked like the prophets of the old days," the write-up was sympathetic to their stories and their demands. Some stories reported on physical kidnapping: "They took the child from my hands and took off in the ambulance" (*Yediot Aharonot* August 25, 1966). This article reported on the protest of over 100 families and documented their stories.

The disappearance scenarios described in *Maariv* invariably shared the following details: when Yemenite families arrived in Israel, parents were told it was unhealthy for babies to remain in the tents or tin houses used for adult housing. Babies were removed to stone baby houses to protect them during relocation. Mothers were allowed to visit and nurse their babies three times a day. Shortly after arrival (usually a few days but at times longer than several weeks), mothers would report for feeding and find that their children had been transferred to other facilities without notification or consent. Attending nurses usually explained that the infants had taken ill during the night and had been sent elsewhere for better care or quarantine. The nurses rarely knew where the children went, which thwarted further investigation and foreshadowed the chaos defense.

At this point, stories began to differ. The Yemenite Public Council heard testimony from hundreds of stricken parents desperate to find their children. Persistent parents were told that their babies had died, sometimes days after an alleged death and burial. Most parents did not receive death certificates, burial records, or grave locations. The anguish of loss was compounded by the lack of closure that would ordinarily come from Jewish burial and mourning rituals.

The lack of bodies, graves, and burial rites for children who had supposedly died became the fatal flaw in the chaos explanation of the disappearances because Jews have enormous respect for the dead and protocols for mourning and burial are strict. Even in war, the ultimate chaos, Jews have found time to properly bury their dead. So to claim that camps under Jewish jurisdiction in the new Jewish homeland were too chaotic to follow proper burial procedure was not credible.

A few parents who were lucky or who persisted in their inquiries to the point of physical obstruction at hospital facilities were reunited with children previously reported dead. A *Maariv* article (July 27, 1966) conveyed several stories of babies reported dead who were found alive. When one woman demanded to see a body, the nursing staff refused her. Heartbroken and desperate, the mother went to the hospital, grasped the arm of a nurse who had taken care of her baby, and refused to let go. Only after she took this physical action was her baby girl returned to her alive.

In another story from the same article, a Yemenite family was told that their daughter had died in the baby house. The parents, who accepted the word of camp authorities, began to mourn their child. During this time, a relative recognized their daughter, alive and healthy, in the baby house. When the family demanded her return, the child was reunited with her parents. Amazingly, this family had an identical experience a year later at the same baby house. This time, when the mother demanded to see the body, camp authorities refused her. The doctor in charge eventually threw her out, proclaiming, "We do not show dead babies" (*Maariv* July 27, 1966).

A Yemenite Public Council representative noted that the council had evidence of influential people organizing these disappearances, but did not pursue the matter when children were located: "We give up our right to demand the punishment of the sinners . . . It would be enough if the babies were returned to their families" (*Maariv* July 27, 1966). The article concluded with the council's demand for the Knesset to sponsor an investigative government commission. This, the first of several demands for government inquiry, received little coverage or support from the press.

The *Maariv* article was the public's first real exposure to stories of disappeared Yemenite babies. Despite public shock, official institutions did

not respond. The press ignored the council's demands for investigation. The Israeli government did not conduct a proper investigation for nearly three decades; most people in the Yemenite community claim that a proper investigation has not taken place until now.[6]

Interestingly, rabbinical institutions demanded investigation despite their conservative nature because disappearances had to be solved for religious reasons in order to prevent incest. In "The Problem of the Yemenite Babies Will Be Discussed in the Rabbinical Institution" (*Maariv* September 6, 1966), representatives of the rabbinical institution acknowledged that if some of these children were still alive, siblings unaware of blood kinship might marry.

BLAMING THE PARENTS

The Yemenite Public Council continued to investigate and protest the lack of government support, which began to generate some attention from the press. On April 20, 1966, *Maariv* published a letter to the editor, titled "Help Me Find My Son," from a Yemenite father:

> I had a son that was born in Pardesia hospital in 1949. He was moved to Brandies hospital in Hadera and from there he disappeared . . . I did everything I could to find him, but could not. The child has no name since we did not get to do the bris[7] yet. I hope to find him in the future. Zohar Tohami, Nir Galim.
>
> (*Maariv* April 20, 1966)

Later in 1966, Dan Margalit, now a prominent journalist, published two articles about the Yemenite Babies Affair. "The Kids That Were Separated from Their Parents" (*Maariv* September 2, 1966) summarized the Yemenite Public Council's findings and demands for government investigation and described the search by two families for their disappeared children. Both families had evidence linking their children to adoptive parents with personal connections to camp authorities. Despite acknowledging camp authority involvement, Margalit contradicted his research by agreeing with the chaos theory. He stated that the children's disappearance resulted from the bedlam of mass relocation, disordered camps, and communication problems.

Further, Margalit cast blame on the parents, citing allegations that some parents simply forgot about their children:

> Despite the claim that some parents apparently had a tendency to forget about their children who were lost in the hard winter months between the tents, some did not let go of this affair.
>
> (*Maariv* September 2, 1966)

The claims that some parents forgot their children were given no source or independent justification. People were so disorganized that they could lose their own children! Such accusations slandered Yemenites by insinuating that they could lose their children in the first place. The government and the media used this argument, cited as a "lack of public interest," many times to dismiss the Affair. Despite clear testimony from Yemenite parents and vague assertions from the government and camp staff, these themes remained unchallenged by the press.

Margalit's second article, "The Institutions Are Silent" (*Maariv* September 4, 1966), alleged that the Yemenite Public Council agreed with "chaos of relocation" as the cause of disappearances, although there were contradictions in his arguments. He reported that Yemenite parents were in constant contact with camp authorities after the abductions and that the Jewish Agency in the camps refused to cooperate. But if chaos reigned to the point where disappearing children went unnoticed, camp authorities could not have been maintaining "constant contact" and the Jewish Agency could not have been in a position to help.

Margalit conceded that a public investigation was necessary not for justice or restitution but rather to settle problems within the Yemenite community:

> A wide objective public investigation is needed to help realize the great ethnic tension among the Yemenites, even if it is not going to lead to the discovery of the children.
>
> (*Maariv* September 4, 1966)

Both Margalit articles were contradictory. While he grudgingly advocated for investigation, he saw the Yemenites' cultural trouble as the investigative committee's burden. He cited the chaos theory of child disappearance as a justification and promoted this excuse in the media. Margalit's descriptions made a case for relocation logistics preventing camp authorities from reuniting parents and children. He accepted the chaos theory at face value, did no further investigation, and neglected to call for government action. This indifference was typical of most of his subsequent articles.

"The Horror of the 'Kidnapping'" (*Maariv* October 9, 1966) was an unsigned article,[8] asserting that the term "kidnapped" had no factual basis and was used for sensationalist value. The term was further undermined by the quotation marks around it in the title and the text. The unnamed writer, who described the Yemenite Public Council's work in a disrespectful manner, dismissed the claims of bereaved parents as "the fruit of their imagination":

> Lost children are not an acceptable phenomenon in this country. If someone claims that this child or another was mistakenly registered for another family, it was probably because they were not meticulous enough.

> But the more this public Committee continues to demand "to return these lost children" they have found that they are much better off calling them "kidnapped." Since a small number of kidnapped children is not impressive enough, we heard in the last conference of the public Committee that they have proof for at least 267 children that were kidnapped. But it also looks like "with the food the appetite gets bigger." Apparently not only children were kidnapped but also women were kidnapped. By whom? By people from the Kibbutz . . . This is some story. In order to determine its credibility, the public Council demands that the government will establish a Public Investigative Committee. Don't you think that if these accusations were true, the police at some point in time would have opened some file to investigate these kidnapping matters?
>
> (*Maariv* October 9, 1966)

This author asserted that the Yemenite council's claims were outrageous, and he dismissed their legitimacy because there was no police investigation. He used this tautology to justify the government's inaction: if the issue required no police intervention while the disappearances were taking place, then why would an intervention be required now? Yemenite claims, presented as illegitimate, irrational, or perhaps the result of someone's imagination, were dismissed. The author even used the immigrants' moral outrage to undermine their legitimacy by suggesting that the idea of such inhuman crimes committed in Israel by Jew against Jew was preposterous. Other articles such as in *Yediot Aharonot* (April 6, 1967) put the blame directly on the parents saying, "How did parents accept this loss for 17 years . . . it is all about how parents related to their children."

These arguments hinged upon the notion that an absence of news coverage, government interest, or public recognition was equated with the absence of a real event. This argument pushed aside obvious questions about specific proven kidnappings committed by people powerful enough to stifle the press, inquiries, and exposure of said crimes. If a baby was kidnapped and no one wrote about it, did it happen? Those who say "no" would disavow foul play in situations that have been squashed by the media.

If the alleged incidents were never proven beyond scant anecdotal evidence it would seem that the government's mistake was in not holding Yemenite families responsible: why didn't parents speak up until now? Parents seeking lost children and community members who supported them found themselves on the defensive. "Where were the parents until now?" is asked even today by press and government officials seeking to undermine claims of Yemenite families (Zaid, 2001). Absence of publicity was blamed on indifferent Yemenite parents, who could have done more, rather than on police and judicial institutions. The Yemenite Public Council was accused of having resources to mount a larger investigation that they simply chose not to pursue.

Further, in the minds of many, no investigation was equated with no kidnapping. The assumption that anyone with a grievance could inspire a government investigation at will was cruelly revisionist. Hundreds of Yemenite families that did everything in their power to locate their children received no official response. The government had limited resources and motives driven by self-preservation. While the "no coverage/no event" argument has broken down over time, there is still a cover-up of facts that would implicate the government.

The "indifferent parents/why now" argument begs the question of motive. If parents were telling the truth but were dismissed often enough and publicly enough to be discounted, there was nowhere else to go. Money was not a motive, as the Yemenite Public Council did not seek financial restitution. Many saw the Yemenites' motive as troublemaking—purposefully disrupting the equanimity of the Israeli state.

Arguments that refuted such attacks got little exposure. *Maariv* published a letter to the editor entitled "Why Were the Parents Silent until Now?" by a Mr. H. The author did not identify himself. The Yemenite Public Council's response showed the naiveté of rural immigrants with complete confidence in the Jewish authorities, who presented themselves as noble saviors:

> I am sorry that Mr. H. is concerned that the parents were silent until now. The real concern in this painful matter is that the authorities of the state knew about this Affair, and silenced it for 17 years.
>
> (October 12, 1966)

While Mr. H was allowed the luxury of anonymity, the writer-parent of the editorial quoted above was not. Readers saw his statement as the lone dissenting opinion of a Yemenite parent who could be dismissed as an unreasonable individual with an axe to grind.

THE FIRST GOVERNMENT INQUIRY COMMISSION

On January 3, 1967, the Knesset publicly acknowledged the Yemenite Babies Affair for the first time. In response to newspaper articles and ongoing complaints from Yemenite parents, the minister of justice circumvented a formal inquiry by recommending an investigation by the Israeli police on an individual basis (Zaid 2001). This arrangement denied collective bargaining power to the Yemenite community. The decision led to additional pressure from the Yemenite Public Council to conduct some form of formal investigation. Consequently, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Police created a formal inquiry commission.

This first public inquiry into the Yemenite Babies Affair was led by Y. Bahalul, lead public attorney of northern Israel, and Superintendent

Minkovski, an officer from the Israeli police headquarters. The Bahalul-Minkovski Commission reported directly to the ministries conducting the investigation. This conflict of interest of an investigative body reporting to the subject of investigation, received no mention. The commission had no legal power beyond the right to ask questions.

As an inquiry commission rather than a public investigation commission, the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission could be led behind closed doors by anyone the court deemed appropriate. In contrast, a public investigation commission, overseen by a Supreme Court judge, has the power of subpoena and to conduct public hearings.

The discrepancy not only illustrated disinterest on the part of the Ministry of Justice, it later motivated Rabbi Meshulam's revolt against government apathy in 1994.[9]

Shortly after the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission began its investigation, *Davar*[10] published a deceptive series of five articles about the Yemenite Babies Affair. Carefully selected individual stories of reappearing children, heroic workers in chaotic camps, and irresponsible parents created an impression of a legitimate case or two amidst a great deal of uncertainty. *Davar's* point of view suggested that some events might have happened but that no one could really be blamed under the circumstances. There were no accounts of the Yemenite community's attempts to organize or assert their vast body of firsthand accounts.

In "Suspense and Mystery" (*Davar* February 10, 1967), Shlomo Bahagali was told that his son had died during relocation in 1950, but he was not shown a body or a grave. The article's title, which implied uncertainty, directed attention away from the responsibility of camp authorities. Bahagali questioned authorities about his missing son and wrote many letters to try to learn about what had happened. The writer suggested that the Yemenite parents did not work hard enough to locate their children, for which he did not blame them:

> Today, 18 years later, people are judging the parents' lack of action as if they didn't care about the children. But this lack of action was a result of a complete acceptance of state authorities and difficulties to adjust to the new world.
>
> (*Davar* February 10, 1967)

This story, which spanned nearly 20 years, was presented without historical background or contemporary context. As such, it conveyed the false impression of being an isolated incident.

"The Girl That Returned from Nowhere" (*Davar* February 17, 1966) described two other stories. The first represented a disappearance scenario: a mother was told that her daughter died in the baby house. She insisted on seeing the body. She was denied but as a result of persistent screaming, tears, and pleading at the hospital, the baby was returned alive. The supervising

doctor at the hospital described the abovementioned story as "just wild imagination," despite the fact that he was not there at the time. He scorned the possibility of children being kidnapped for adoption: "Despite the fact that I didn't work in this hospital at that time, I can guarantee that no child was released from the hospital not to its legal parents" (*Davar* February 17, 1966). The hospital records manager said, "It is inconceivable that such a story had happened in the hospital and we didn't hear about it." He cited as proof that the child's name was not on record and that no one working there remembered the incident (*Davar* February 17, 1966).

The second story was told by a woman named Margalit, the stepsister of a child who the family was told had died. The family was given no death certificate. When relatives told her that no death certificate could mean that the child was alive—and on the advice of a Yemenite nurse—she ran to the camp hospital and rescued the child.

Margalit later gave a comprehensive testimony about her experience to the Yemenite Public Council. In her testimony, she said that the nurse "whispered" to her about the missing child as though there were something to hide. In a later interview, the nurse claimed that she used a normal tone of voice. The *Davar* writer latched onto this discrepancy to ridicule the notion of a conspiracy. He suggested that claims of disappeared children hinged on this sort of misunderstanding: "In the Yemenite Commission's report, the writer who recorded this testimony, maybe unintentionally, was determined to prove a conspiracy theory, and the existence of organizing force that kidnapped those babies"(February 17, 1966). He concluded that the incident was an isolated case that needed no further investigation: "Each case should be investigated objectively as the special police force is doing. But still there are many questions with no answers" (*Davar* February 17, 1966).

"Shalom Reani Writes in German" (*Davar* February, 22 1967) opened with a familiar scenario: in 1955, the Reani family was told that their infant son had died in a Jaffa hospital. They, too, were never shown a body or death certificate. The police ignored them. Twelve years later, the Reani family received a postcard in German from their son who claimed to be "feeling good and living on a kibbutz in Israel" (*Davar* February 22, 1967). The writer did not follow this story. He neither interviewed the family nor determined how Shalom managed to contact his parents 12 years after he disappeared. Rather, the writer says the incident is merely one of the myriads of inconceivable claims that the Yemenite Public Council is determined to manufacture into a conspiracy:

> The testimony of the parents, as given to the public Committee, are full of detail each stranger then the other. One person who worked at the camps said that he remembers an incident where two mothers were fighting over the baby in the bed, each claiming that it is her baby girl; when the nurse

> came to change the baby's diapers it turned out to be a baby boy. The man who told this story wanted to demonstrate that the lack of order in the camps was so bad that even mothers didn't recognized their own children.
>
> (*Davar* February 22, 1967)

The writer questioned the veracity of Yemenite immigrants and accepted testimony from relocation camp workers at face value. The article emphasized the "weirdness" of the stories rather than the need for a serious investigation. The effect was to render this crisis of the Yemenites as a novelty rather than as hard news.

Fourth in the *Davar* series, "The Death Lurked in the Tents" (February 24, 1966), detailed difficulties camp medical authorities had in supervising the relocation. From the start, the prospect of imminent death in the camps reinforced the notion that the relocated children had died. The title of the article invoked an image of spooky, unlit tents contaminated with typhus or malaria and the constant threat of death.

The article stated, without providing any medical evidence, that Yemenite immigrants carried disease into Israel from their homeland. The writer suggests, between the lines, that these immigrants were of unclean stock overall and less civilized than their European counterparts. These were, in reality, harsh times. The winters of 1949 and especially 1950 were notably severe. However, even the alleged Yemenite tendency toward illness as well as poorly equipped and staffed camps and rough winters can't explain hundreds of babies dying without any corresponding government record or medical reports.

Further, the article explained that camp workers separated babies from their parents because conditions were better in baby houses. Parents refusing to part with their children were viewed as troublemakers: "It took a lot of convincing to have them agree to transfer their children into the Baby Houses" (*Davar* February 24, 1966).

The writer intimated that the Yemenites resisted the medical workers because they did not understand disease. Camp workers told parents that they were taking the babies away from them to protect them. With this slant, readers could sympathize with the parents as well as with camp workers who were trying to save the children (see fig. 3.1).

The writer goes so far as to suggest that camp staff even taught immigrant mothers how to care for their children:

> In one of the camps, there was a special arrangement: all the babies were put in beds in the windows so the family members could watch them. Many families were taking turns watching their babies by the window, this way they could see for the first time in their life how to bathe a baby and how to change a baby's diaper.
>
> (*Davar* February 24, 1966)

Figure 3.1 A nurse teaching Yemenite immigrant mothers how to diaper their babies at the Rosh Haa'yin camp, October 1, 1949, by Kluger Zoltan.

Without direct assertion, the article lets the reader know Yemenite immigrants were disease ridden and ignorant of such basic baby care as bathing or changing a diaper. It's a short step from there to justify taking children from their parents as an act of kindness. Years later, Ahuva Goldfarb, a camp nurse in the late 1940s and early 1950s, said that she was not sorry about what had happened to the Yemenite parents: "No, maybe we did them a favor. Some of them did not come in a hurry to get their children"[11] (Madmoni 1996). Furthermore, the director of the Department of Absorption in the Jewish Agency, Giyoga Yoseftal, accounts of the events in his autobiography (1967) and verifies this condescending impression with the Yemenite parents. "Most of the Yemenite mothers are indifferent to their children's destiny," he said to biographer Hezi Lufban. "If they refuse to give up their children they must be taken away from them forcefully (149)."

The fifth article in the *Davar* series featured testimonies from camp workers who blamed the plight of the missing children on understaffing and disorganization. "Oversights of Absorption and Organization" (*Davar* February 26, 1966) promoted the "chaos of relocation" theory, poor communication, and diseases such as polio as the main culprits. "Almost all the Yemenite people in the camp had the same name," said one worker, "and babies may have been 'lost' during the epidemic because camp workers lost track of names when people were rushed to the hospitals." Another camp worker said, "We had no time to run name lists, we were busy saving lives" *(Davar* February 26, 1966). The fifth article's author said that he

had interviewed many Yemenite families where various family members addressed the same child by different names (*Davar* February 26, 1966).

Journalists reiterated claims by absorption camp workers, such as those above, to rationalize the children's disappearance. Such workers were not treated as suspects by the media or by the various investigative committees. A cultural clash between Yemenites and others made matters worse. With a confusing naming system and poor understanding of modern medicine, Yemenites could not easily adjust to the demands of a Western society. The *Davar* writer said,

> Since they didn't have scientific medical treatment in Yemen, their belief was based on religion only. If a child died in the tent they would say, "God gives and God takes" but if a child died in the hospital, then it was a human fault. This cultural clash was evident in the different assessments as of the kid's condition starting with, "oh, in Yemen we didn't even treat this" and "yesterday the child was completely healthy." Also some accent problems caused great misunderstandings.
>
> (February 26, 1966)

The Yemenite community felt that camp workers could have operated with greater cultural sensitivity toward new immigrants and especially with regard to the mother-child bond. As the Yemenites were subtly denigrated, the workers of the Ashkenazi authority were described as heroic in their efforts to help homeless and culturally handicapped Yemenites. Workers "too busy saving lives" to keep track of names (*Davar* February 26, 1966) could not be questioned about bookkeeping.

The February 26 *Davar* article additionally presents a horrifying argument not seen elsewhere, drawing a parallel between the immigration processing of the Yemenites with Holocaust survivors. The writer said that in some cases of Holocaust survivor parents, camp workers intentionally did not tell them that their child had died because for those Holocaust survivors it meant the loss of their last hope to start a new family in Israel. The child's body would then be secretly transferred to a hospital. The hospital would be the bearer of the bad news to the family. The author thought that well-intentioned medical staff at absorption camps might have used the same "method" with Yemenite parents.

> If this was done to European people, it is possible that this "method" was applied to the Yemenite immigrants as well. It is probably why the Yemenite parents were given such laconic answers as "your baby is dead" without further explanation or showing them the body . . . This doesn't prove however that any criminal acts were committed but oversights of absorption and organization (this is not the place, however, to discuss if it could be justified because of the hardship of the time) . . . Disconnecting

> kids from their parents dead or alive was a direct result of the conditions in the absorption camps. If these conditions were sometimes used to commit criminal acts of stealing babies and giving them for adoption in Israel or abroad, this is to the government committee to find out.
>
> (*Davar* February 26, 1966)

In the above article, the writer asked the reader to stretch logic beyond normal reasoning. Parents were misinformed about the death of their children out of pity. The author did not address well-documented allegations of criminal acts by camp workers handling Yemenite children nor did he call for an investigation. The media functioned as a public relations arm of the government rather than conducting an investigation.

The press coverage of this Affair in the 1950s and 1960s was influenced by stereotypical portrayals of masses of newly arrived Mizrahim as culturally deficient and uneducated. The concerns of Yemenite immigrants were often ignored or undermined. Even articles that sympathized with individual families undercut the Yemenite community. Only one article to the contrary was published in *Ha'olam Haze* (1967) during the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission's two-year investigation.

ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE IN *HA'OLAM HAZE*

"The Yemenite Babies Were Sold to America" was an article by Shalom Cohen claiming that the Yemenite babies were sold for adoption to Americans for $5,000 per child (*Ha'olam Haze* January 11, 1967). *Ha'olam Haze* was a popular weekly magazine that was considered controversial by the mainstream. The article, which sensationalized the issue as "the shocking discovery of the year," was the sole media outlet that framed the Yemenite Babies Affair as a possible crime, at the time. But while the author recognized that camp medical staff allegedly participated in child trafficking, he laid claim to their good intentions. In fact, Cohen supported the separation of Yemenite parents from their children.

> Rich couples have adopted them [the Yemenite babies] so they will not suffer in the absorption camps. If we [camp workers] left them in the camps with their parents, they would have died. The parents wouldn't miss their children anyway, so it is better to give them to good homes were they would be saved from death . . . The people who are raising these children are apparently good people. Otherwise they wouldn't have opened their hearts and their houses to these children.

Information gathered from the Yemenite council revealed that relatively few children were adopted in Israel. Most were placed abroad in

exchange for money. Cohen's investigation uncovered the involvement of an American businessman named Bergman, also known as "the Rabbi":

> Due to his connections with the religious institutions in Israel that were in charge of the absorption in Israel, he had free access to all of the absorption camps and the institutions that took care of the new immigrants . . . Through these connections, he managed to take children not only out of the camps but also out of Israel.

Cohen specified the names of American families that had adopted Yemenite babies. He referred to them with initials but claimed to have full names. His source was Rabbi Avidor Hacohen, a nationally recognized Israeli rabbi who discovered cases of adoption of Yemenite children during a visit to New York in 1963. Years later in 1996, in testimony to the public investigative committee, he said that he conveyed what he knew to the Jewish Agency in 1963. He also claimed to have had given the story to prominent journalists of *Yediot Aharonot, Maariv, Haaretz,* and *Davar*[12] "but they all said they have no interest in this story" (Zaid 2001, 70). At that time, Cohen declared that, if asked, he would provide authorities with the names of people involved. Neither the press nor the government contacted him. Zaid confirmed that Cohen had provided the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission with names of American adoptive families and connections to Rabbi Bergman but the commission did not investigate or even report the information to the appropriate ministries.[13]

The Bahalul-Minkovski Commission released its findings in October 1968 after almost two years of investigation. It investigated 342 cases and claimed that 316 children had died, four were alive, and 22 were missing.

As the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission began to form conclusions, the press seemed eager to show that most of the children had died. There was no discussion about the methods used by the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission to conduct its investigation. Figures were presented without independent correlation, lines of inquiry were summarily dismissed, and suspected perpetrators defended themselves without proof. Commission findings seemed to suggest that the issue was resolved and best forgotten, in order to promote healing and closure. The press treated the outcome as though the commission was a formality intended to put Yemenite complaints to rest. The press never raised the fact that this was an inquiry commission without much authority, rather than an investigative commission with power of subpoena.

One example of the press's negligence was an article about the lack of cooperation between institutions under investigation. "Archives from Yemenite Absorption Camps Were Discovered" (*Maariv* February 13, 1967) hinted at conflicts without making an effort to reveal motives of involved parties. Commission investigators admitted, "In one case, they had to activate police

authorities against an institution that refused to cooperate." The institution was not identified, and this promising line of investigation was dropped. Repercussions of this refusal to investigate were not discussed.

Institutional cooperation was crucial to the investigation because it might have turned up hard evidence about the kidnappings from immigration camps and hospital records. The press sat on both sides of the fence: some media figures claimed that the Yemenite families were not given media exposure due to lack of evidence. At the same time, when evidence was withheld, the media did not investigate.

"The Destiny of Most of the Missing Yemenite Babies is Now Made Clear" (*Maariv* November 7, 1967) was an article that minimized the value of the children to their biological parents in seeking closure. The article alleged that "only 22 out of the 339 cases brought to the commission are not resolved yet . . . 313 of the kids died in the camps." Twenty-two children—less than 10 percent—might not warrant further investigation. The article implied that readers should be relieved with the near resolution of the issue. Two days later *Yediot Aharonot* (November 9, 1967) published a similar article with an identical title, also pushing for closure and using similar closure statements such as "Only 22 . . . " *Yediot Aharonot* reprinted a similar article six months later claming "The investigative commission has reached its conclusion: most of the Yemenite Babies died" (May 22, 1968).

As Zaid (2001) stated, in contrast, when his ultraorthodox grandparents kidnapped seven-year-old Yossele Schumacher[14] in 1959, the whole country was outraged. Press coverage was extensive. The Knesset discussed Yossele's destiny, and the Supreme Court defined the kidnapping as "an abominable crime, unprecedented in the land of Israel" (Zaid 2001, 58). Prime Minister Ben-Gurion became directly involved until the Israeli secret service finally located Yossele in the United States.

Maariv devoted little time or space to the issue. "The Investigative Committee for the Yemenite Babies Affair Had Finished Its Work" (*Maariv* March 7, 1968) was a 200-word article that supported the theory that most of the babies died of disease and stress. The number of unresolved cases was not specified, although the article suggested that not many survived: "The destiny of only a few children is not clear yet . . . the commission has found the traces of a few children that were adopted by families in Europe and the US."

In contrast to the Schumacher case, foreign leads were not pursued and despite the commission's clear recommendation the article stated, "Commission members did not run an investigation abroad." The writer did not inquire if or when the investigation would be pursued. Instead, he concluded that "the special investigative force that was established for this affair is now let off" (*Maariv* March 7, 1968). After the publication of this article, the story was not pursued again until the late 1980s.

THE YEMENITE COMMUNITY DEMANDS FURTHER INVESTIGATION

The commission officially completed its work in October 1968, a summary of which was published by *Maariv*. The article, "The Police Will Look For the 22 Yemenite Kids That Are Still Missing" (October 20, 1968) reported that the investigative team was shocked by the accusations of the kidnapping. This article, like others, dismissed the claims and again blamed the disappearances on the disorganization and chaos of the early days of the state. "This miserable affair happened in the first days of the state when law and order weren't established yet . . . this created rumors that might have caused a split within the Jewish people" (*Maariv* October 20, 1968).

The article concluded on a positive note, stating, "The results of the Commission's work helped to bring back Israel's unity" (*Maariv* October 20, 1968). There was no follow-up to the commission's recommendation to continue the investigation abroad. The police did not continue to search for the 22 missing children, and the issue was not raised in the Knesset again until 1985 (Zaid 2001). Many families neither received their original documents back nor any official response letter from the commission stating the outcome of the investigation. This was the case of David Shuker, whom I interviewed for the newspaper *Shishi* in 1995 and later for the television show *Uvda* (1996). Although Shuker had filed a complaint with the Bahalul-Minkovski Committee in 1967 and despite the fact that the commission found his daughter living with an adoptive family in Israel in 1968, he was never notified.[15] Shuker looked for his daughter for an additional 20 years until his lawyer forced the authorities to disclose the adoption document and arrange a meeting with his daughter Miriam.

Zaid (2001) noted that the Yemenite community was critical of the commission's work. This body did not respond to all complaints nor did they examine all adoption files and published contradictory information. Many Yemenite parents claimed they brought original documents to the commission and never got them back. Moreover, during the work of the Shalgi Commission, its investigator, Ami Hovav, told numerous Yemenite parents that without original documents they could not prove anything (Zaid 2001, 69).

1970S: THE ABSENCE OF MEDIA COVERAGE

The 1970s saw a complete media blackout of the Yemenite Babies Affair. The media only covered government activity. Despite ongoing challenges by the Yemenite community, the government took no action between 1968 and 1985. This silence stirred further resentment among Yemenite families. They lost whatever remaining trust for state authorities that they

had as they realized that the state had no intention of conducting a proper investigation. The 1970s, then, became a breaking point for the Yemenite community (Zaid 2001). Media coverage resumed shortly before the establishment of the Shalgi Commission in 1988.

1980s: Key Testimonies/Superficial Coverage

In 1985, the Knesset's interior committee was prompted to consider the Yemenite Babies Affair due to further pressure from the Yemenite community. Several meetings were held in which incriminating testimony from Knesset members, Rabbi Porush and Avigdor Pe'er, was presented. Both had been involved in the absorption process of the 1950s. As vice manager of the immigrants department in the 1950s, Porush could speak with authority. His division was in charge of children's institutions during this period of immigration. Porush told the committee, "They took children, told them they were dead. Where were they buried? No one knows. Then they forged documents. I say it from knowing the facts. In different places, they forged documents" (Zaid 2001, 73). In the face of evidence from government officials, the interior committee recommended the establishment of a public investigative commission. With no explanation, Shimon Peres (prime minister at the time) refused to oblige. No further progress was made for three years.

Pressure grew from an increasingly vocal Yemenite community, which finally prompted Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir to reopen the investigation by appointing the Shalgi Commission. Despite the interior committee's recommendation to create a public investigative commission, the Shalgi Commission was constituted as an inquiry commission only (Zaid 2001). Like its Bahalul-Minkovski predecessor, the Shalgi Commission, which met behind closed doors, had little authority and no power of subpoena. The press did not enlighten the public about these shortcomings.

Porush and Pe'er's testimonies to the interior committee represented the first official admission of the Yemenite Babies Affair in nearly 15 years. The press, on the other hand, addressed the issue only when the government had something to say, although it did publish several short articles about the Yemenite community's demand for a public investigation. These articles were informative but did not support the Yemenites' demand for an investigative commission.

Resuming media coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair

Al Hamishmar (August 5, 1985) reported that a Yemenite mother claimed her son had been stolen in 1949. The woman appealed to the Supreme Court, saying that camp and government authorities had given her

contradictory information about her son's alleged death. She demanded that the Supreme Court require an investigation. The press did not support her demand, and her story was reported as an isolated incident. There was no follow-up or call for government response by any major newspaper.

During November 1985, several brief news items about Yemenite demands for a more aggressive public investigation appeared in daily newspapers. *Yediot Aharonot* (November 13, 1985) reported that Shimon Peres had instructed the minister of absorption "to check the mystery of the 'Yemenite Babies'. It looks like there will be an investigation to follow." *Maariv* (December 13, 1985) published a small item announcing that the head rabbis supported the Yemenites' demand because "not knowing their true identity could lead to some serious religious consequences."[16] In "Why They Are Not Investigating Who Stole 500 Yemenite Babies," *Maariv* (November 11, 1985) described a large protest organized by the Yemenite community in Rosh Ha'ayin, a major Yemenite town near Tel Aviv. A few Knesset members who participated in the rally vowed to lobby for the establishment of a public investigative commission. Neither article advocated for further inquiry or governmental action. Only Yemenite families raised allegations about governmental incompetence or possible criminal action.

Famous Mizrahi poet Erez Biton was more forceful in demanding an investigation in a 1985 *Maariv* opinion column. His was a lone voice:

> Some say why should we dig in the mud of the past? Who needs now to get into this Affair again? This Affair is from tens of years ago, and treating it could damage the gentle fabric of Israeli society today . . . Well all of those who wanted to silence this Affair, to minimize it and hide fearing the fragmentation of Israeli society, to those I want to say the opposite is true. Only by checking and investigating this matter to get to the hard truth, by an official public commission, can we purify the fog surrounding the immigration of Mizrahi Jews in general and of Yemenite Jews particularly during the 1950s . . . This is a simple humanitarian demand that is the answer for hundreds of parents about their children, and a national effort to erase this historical stain from our country.
>
> (December 6, 1985)

Maariv published a disclaimer that assured the public that Biton's article was not representative of the newspaper's point of view.

PARENTS IN SEARCH OF CHILDREN; CHILDREN IN SEARCH OF PARENTS

"Our Sister from the Yemenite Babies who 'Died' Lives in Tel Aviv" (*Maariv* February 22, 1985) told the story of Yemenite family whose members were convinced that a lawyer they saw in court was their sister. The article was sympathetic to the family's emotional state but again pointed

to the commission's conclusion that the Yemenite babies had died. The article intimated that although the case had been solved, Yemenite families remained in denial:

> The Commission sadly determined that many documents and listings concerning this Affair were lost or destroyed. Hundreds of families that received notes from the Commission saying their children are dead, do not believe it. To this day, the families are convinced that their children are alive and were kidnapped, the documents were forged and they were given for adoption.
> (*Maariv* February 22, 1985)

As with similar stories, this incident was reported as an isolated incident. As such, the Yemenites were denied the power of the collective. They were portrayed as unreasonable, impossible to satisfy, and unable to acknowledge the truth. The implication was that the Yemenite community was blocking the rightful closure of the Affair. This argument continued well into the 1990s.[17] To this day, important questions remain unanswered. How was it possible for so many documents to be "lost"? How would contradictory information in the commission's report be resolved? Most importantly, why was an inquiry rather than a public investigative commission formed to examine the Affair?

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

During the 1980s, several stories emerged about children of Yemenite heritage adopted by Ashkenazi families seeking their biological parents. Varda Fux (*Maariv* February 2, 1985) and Shmulik (*Ha'ir* March 1, 1985), in their 40s at the time, said that their Ashkenazi parents provided vague and sometimes suspicious descriptions of the circumstances surrounding their adoptions. Varda's parents told her, "You will know the truth when I die." Shmulik's parents told him that his parents had died in a car accident. Shmulik told *Ha'ir* he knew of three other Yemenite children whose parents had died in car accidents, causing him to question the validity of these stories: "How many cars were in Israel in the 1950s that so many people died in car accidents?" Neither set of adoptive parents could show Varda and Shmulik their adoption papers.

OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

Although the majority of kidnapped babies were Yemenite, parents from other ethnic groups also complained that their babies were kidnapped during the immigration to Israel. The press reported about families from Libya, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, and other countries claiming their babies had disappeared in circumstances similar to the Yemenites. Articles about these

matters were brief and inconspicuously placed. No link was made to the Yemenite babies, and the government did not expand its investigation to cover cases of other ethnic groups. All three commissions investigating the Affair claimed that the government's letter of appointment limited their investigation to Yemenite babies. After much pressure was put on the Kedmi Commission by parents and activists, it agreed to hear testimonies of parents from other ethnic groups.

PRESS SUPPORT OF CAMP DOCTORS' PROTEST

Although Yemenite positions were censored and sometimes ridiculed by the press, criticism of the government's investigative role began to grow. In response, *Tel Aviv* (local weekly) published "The Yemenite Children Died in Hospitals" (December 20, 1985), a story devoted to the testimony of three anonymous doctors who claimed to have managed the children's unit of Tel Aviv's Hadassah hospital in the 1950s. The article opened with the following paragraph:

> The Yemenite children were not kidnapped and given for adoption. The lost Yemenite children died in hospitals. One of every five children died in the summer of 1949 and 1950. There were no forged death certificates. Every death certificate was signed by a doctor or the head of the children's unit.[18]

The doctors were allowed to maintain anonymity on the basis of what they defined as a noble principle "only very few doctors still keep. The principle of not giving interviews to the press." The doctors' anonymity prevented the public from ascertaining their credibility as news sources. Some doctors were prime suspects in the child abduction testimony of Yemenite families. Why were they not under investigation? Why were they not called to testify before the investigative commission or the Knesset committee? Instead of considering these vital questions, the author treated their testimonies as authoritative and used their input at face value to build conclusions that supported the government's version of events.

As of the content of their testimony, the doctors described the "panic of masses of immigrants in terrible conditions" and admitted that some children arrived without identification. "NEVER, NEVER! [caps in original article] was a child released from the hospital without identification." The exclamation point appeared again in bold in between the paragraphs of the article. The doctors denied the issuance of forged death certificates and condemned those—and especially Yemenites—who were skeptical: "It is inconceivable to think that there was even one case of death that wasn't true . . . If you blame doctors in issuing forged death certificates, this is a very serious and criminal blame." In the last paragraph, one doctor

admitted to examining Yemenite babies placed for adoption with Ashkenazi families, but he stated unequivocally that "all of the adoptions were kosher and legal . . . Otherwise this would be against all the rules of professional ethics and human ethics in all times" (*TelAviv* December 20, 1985).

One can question whether these doctors supervised the release of every child from the hospital, signed every death certificate, or tracked every misidentified child. With so many unanswered questions, their testimony leaves open the possibility of unauthorized adoptions.

PROTEST AND DEMAND FOR PUBLIC INVESTIGATION

In 1986, the Yemenite community organized more protests to demand a state-sponsored investigation. In response, the Knesset interior committee heard more testimonies from state officials as well as Avigdor Pe'er's testimony from December 1985. Most newspapers carried Pe'er's testimony as a small news item. Headlines indicated that the Yemenite children had, in actuality, been moved to women's organizations (such as Wizo) in accordance with political criteria. Yemenite activists were shocked to hear this first-time admission from an institutional figure.

Only *Hadashot* dedicated a feature article to Pe'er's testimony. In "The Parents Were Gone" (January 17, 1986), Pe'er told the Knesset interior committee that sometimes parents did not seek out their children for months, although he could not specify a reason. He noted that people, from Israel and America, were interested in adoption but that a legal adoption procedure had not yet been established. As a result, adoptions took place with minimal supervision or paper work.

> People came to look for children to adopt but not officially, and they didn't say out loud that that is what they were looking for. The social worker acted only for the best interest of the child, out of dedication, they looked for a different way, I can't blame them . . . We should remember that these were hard times and if the social worker did that, it was because she knew that the parents were not looking for their child for at least 3–4 months. The first cry for these children came only a few years later so I don't know what to say to that. Someone must have thought that they are doing a humane deed by giving these children to a warm family who wanted them . . . You can't blame the social worker for thinking these thoughts . . . I also remember that there were some guests from abroad especially from America, they came and adopted these children, but not legally, they just took them. These were the stories then.

Neither the newspapers nor the general public questioned or hypothesized about why parents would abandon their children for months. Nevertheless, after a change in government from the Labor to the

Likud Party two years later, a second inquiry commission, The Shalgi Commission, was established.

Once again, the Yemenite community actively advocated for a state-sponsored open investigation, which promulgated very little press and no further action from the government. *Hadashot* (July 4, 1986) was the only newspaper to report on a protest by 10,000 persons in Tel Aviv. In this gathering, a Yemenite activist attacked the government's inaction and incompetence. He promised to sustain the protest until the government established a public investigative commission. Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir appointed the Shalgi Commission in September 1988 in response to substantial pressure from the Yemenite community.

Haaretz's different columnists took a strong stand against the demand for investigation and published columns such as "Never Ending Psychoses" (November 13, 1985) and "This Time, It Isn't the Ashkenazim's Fault" (September 26, 1986). They defined the affair as "rumors" and marked the Yemenites as "others" through stressing cultural differences such as "they didn't know how to use the bathroom." as reasons for what they saw as a simple "confusion."

FIRST TELEVISION EXPOSURE OF THE AFFAIR

In 1986, the Yemenite Babies Affair was discussed for the first time on Israeli television. The jump from printed word to television represented a significant increase of exposure and subsequent legitimacy as an issue under consideration. The show's production was of great concern to the Yemenite community, who knew that this broadcast would frame future discussions.

At the time, Channel One was Israel's only television channel as well as the establishment's flagship voice. Content was conservative and aligned with the government's version of the Affair. Channel One's investigative news magazine *Mabat Sheni* (Second Look[19]) devoted an entire program to the issue on September 24, 1986.[20] When prior to the release date, the Yemenite community realized that its perspective was to be omitted from the show, activists protested and tried to block the broadcast by appealing to the Supreme Court. One protester said,

> The show is hostile and one-sided in the way it is treating the demand for an investigative committee. Also the editors of the program are expressing their personal opinion by saying that suspicions regarding criminal acts are false and that there is no justification for establishing an investigative commission.
>
> (*Maariv* September 24, 1986)

The appeal to block the show was denied by Judge Dov Levin.

The Show's Narrative

Host Michael Karpin opened the show stating that in the mid-1960s, Yemenite parents received army draft letters for children supposedly deceased around 1950. Even by the 1980s, these parents had still not received a satisfying explanation. Karpin claimed that the absence of clear answers caused "the rumors about stolen babies."

The program followed the stories of three Yemenite girls who had been adopted. Editing was disjointed, so the testimony of a distraught Yemenite father looking for his daughter was confused with two Yemenite girls happily adopted by Ashkenazi families. Viewers were denied a linear narrative and instead saw a confusing presentation of parent testimony, starved children, film of a major public protest by Yemenite activists, and archival footage of the 1949 Yemenite immigration. The confused delivery emphasized the supposed confusion of the situation. Yemenite parents and children were presented as faces without names, which diminished their credibility as well as a sympathetic audience response. Authority figures such as nurse Masha Kaplan were named and accompanied by images (i.e., of sick and possibly dying Yemenite children) that would justify separating them from their parents.

The show countered Yemenite accusations. The formula was presented as follows: sick, misidentified children arrived daily to the absorption camps. Many died or were neglected or abandoned by their parents. Ashkenazi people adopted the remaining children to save their lives.

The program portrayed the camps as horrifying. Footage of sick children and confused rural immigrants contributed to an image of a disease-ridden logistical nightmare. One nurse said that Yemenite babies "died like flies and we had no time to inform the parents." Archival footage showed the Yemenite immigrants as creatures from "Arabian Nights" while the show's host proclaimed,

> You watch and wonder. You walk around them and you wonder how much work, how much skilled effort will be needed to take these representatives of the Middle Ages and to assimilate them into a progressive Western civilization community.

In the above quote, human beings were referred to in the third person in a tone that National Geographic had used to investigate "primitive" African races: "You walk around them . . . wonder how much work . . . skilled effort . . . to assimilate them."

The show portrayed a distraught father named David Shuker[21] who had been looking for his daughter since her disappearance in the 1950s. His search was extensive, well documented, and in the end, successful. Other stories were about two legally adopted girls who were living happily with

their adoptive families. Tamar Tzuker, adopted by Ruth Tzuker of Haifa, was prominently featured. As a result, Shuker's tragedy was diminished. The implication was that Yemenite babies who were deserted by their parents fared better with adoptive families.

Tamar's adoptive mother Ruth was portrayed as a hero: "They suggested that I will adopt a blond girl, but I said no, there is a long line of people who wanted the blond girl; if Tamar had no one I wanted to adopt her" (*Mabat Sheni* September 24, 1986). Ruth said that she located Tamar's parents, who did not object to the adoption. When asked if she wanted to find her biological parents, Tamar said, "No. Whoever deserted their child once cannot be looking for them now."

The show ended with Tamar's testimony. The placement implies that this, a genuine happy adopted Yemenite child, can speak authoritatively on the subject. She tells the camera she has no interest in her biological family and is much happier with her adoptive family. Hence, the "prying" Yemenite family was seen in a bad light—almost as criminals seeking to separate the girl from her home and the woman who saved her. Tamar's contentment served as rationale for the course of events and for the lack of further investigation. For want of other opinions, viewers could conclude that other adult Yemenite adoptees felt the same way. Wherever Shuker's daughter was, the audience was led to believe that it was probably for the best.

The show's bias came through clearly: other points of view were not offered nor were criticisms or questions. Worse, the government withheld damning evidence. For example, Shuker's lawyer located documents proving that the Shalgi Commission knew his daughter had been adopted by a family in Israel (Interview, February 1996). This information proved that there had been a cover-up of some adoptions. One could assume that more than one family had been broken by this chain of events.

The Press Responds

The press's response to this show was supportive. "Just not another investigative commission" (*Davar* September 30, 1986) was full of praises for the "excellent investigation of the show" and cited the possible "emotional harm to the missing kids" as a reason to avoid investigation. *Maariv* took a similar stand:

> The show, just like the different commissions that dealt with this issue before, determined there were no kidnappings and no criminal acts . . . . The show did good by airing the things that should be heard like the testimony of Tamar Tzuker-Kabiri who was adopted: "I am not interested in finding my biological parents because it is good for me with the adoptive parents. Why spoil it? Whoever deserted their child once can't fix it now."
>
> (September 24, 1986)

A few years later, *Haaretz* published an article recycling the story of Tamar Tzuker. The article focused on the misfortune of Tamar's early years and the kindness of her adoptive mother. Ruth's aristocratic and wealthy European roots were emphasized. She was characterized as a devoted and strong pioneer. In contrast, Tamar's life before adoption was portrayed as grim:

> She was born somewhere in the south of Yemen, an unwanted child to parents whose marriage was forced on them by old men in their community. She was brought to Israel on the eagle's wings[22] and was deserted in the immigrant's camp in Atlit, abandoned and dying. No one knew anything about her but that she had pneumonia and dysentery. If not for faith that brought them together, it is doubtful if Ruth would have found her happiness, if Tamar would have recovered and of course, this amazing story would never have been written.
>
> (*Haaretz* November 3, 1989)

Ruth said that a doctor in the camp had told her that the baby had been abandoned and would not survive in the camp. The infant Tamar was on the edge of death:

> So I decided to take her home. I brought my husband to see her; this beautiful woman that you see now looked like a monkey with no eyebrows, with swollen stomach and gray color. But she had a great smile and at that moment we knew that if she lives, she will be ours.
>
> (*Haaretz* November 3, 1989)

After a time, Ruth realized that she needed to complete the legal adoption process. A social worker helped Ruth to locate Tamar's biological parents, who signed adoption papers.[23] She said, "The parents divorced a short time after arriving to Israel and did not care about this girl at all" (*Haaretz* November 3, 1989). Tamar has never seen a picture of her parents, and she professes to have no interest in meeting them.

As a child, Tamar was subjected to racism from people in her affluent Haifa neighborhood.[24] She was called *shvartze* ("black" in Yiddish, a derogatory term) and people thought that she was the maid. Distanced from her ethnic background, Tamar did not seem bothered by these attitudes on the show, but she did object to being told about the adoption: "Why did you tell me that I was adopted? I wanted so much to be your child, the child you gave birth to . . . I would have never known that you were lying" (*Haaretz* November 3, 1989).

Tamar's "amazing story" became an end unto itself. No longer the story of Yemenite families protesting the abduction of their children, it was transformed into a romantic tale of a young girl who was saved.

However, there were several holes in the plot. How were Tamar's biological parents located so easily? Why do we never hear their side of the story? Supposedly, Tamar was an ideal adoption candidate because she had been abandoned and because her parents could not be found. If the parents could be found when needed, perhaps other parts of the story had also been stretched.

The most disturbing revelation had to do with the ease with which Ruth completed the adoption. Self-reported, private citizens like Ruth could access babies at immigrant camp hospitals without credentials, paperwork, or procedures.[25] The government, however, said that the babies were abandoned and never removed without proper procedure.

Tamar's story in no way represents the Yemenite Babies Affair. It is true that she was adopted and that she was happy with her new family. Yet the circumstances of her adoption remain unclear. Her alleged condition (i.e., ill, abandoned, close to death, and the unwanted daughter of an arranged marriage between a 13-year old girl and an older man) provided justification for a rescue but was she really all those things? Finally, what about the several hundred parents who actively spent decades searching for their children?

A CRITICAL VOICE

On February 22, 1985, *Ha'ir* published the first article presenting another point of view about the Yemenite Babies Affair, accompanied by hard evidence and pointing to the state's deliberate avoidance of a proper investigation. The article, written by Ilan Maget, told of patronizing, well-intentioned investigators with no power who were replaced by a superficial government investigation. The latter was conducted by people with agendas that could inhibit the uncovering of truth and responsibility. Yemenite families were portrayed as sympathetic and believable, unlike the usual negative stereotypes.

"Suddenly she will come and say this is me" depicted Yemenite families who were actively searching for their children. Their testimonies were taken seriously and treated with respect. One example told of immigration medical officials who informed the parents of ten-month old Moshe Nagar that he was sick and hospitalized in Tel-Hashomer hospital in Tel Aviv. While hospital records show that he was released on January 8, 1950, his parents never saw him again:

> In the hospital, they told me that he was released but they don't know where to. I went back to the camp but my son wasn't there in the Babies House. They told me, "Listen, it is too late, come tomorrow morning." First thing in the morning, I went back and a Yemenite instructor was helping me look. We went back to the hospital and they said that maybe he was taken to a different camp, so we looked in Ein Shemer and they said that they did

> get a sending certificate but they didn't get the baby. The manager of the camp shouted at me saying, "I got a letter but not a baby, go look for him." I haven't seen him since.
>
> (*Ha'ir* February 22, 1985)

The article was unique in its unequivocal support of families' narratives and criticism of the commission's report. The stories were detailed, and there was a clear connection to the larger picture with detailed criticism of the Bahalul-Minskovski report, including pointing out contradictions, mistakes, and oversights that clearly undermine the validity of the investigation.

Since the 1950s, 41 complaints have been submitted by Yemenite parents to various police stations. Concomitantly, evidence shows that state authorities, including the Jewish Agency, the police, and the Ministry of Health, knew that parents were searching for missing children. This *Ha'ir* article was the first mainstream publication to acknowledge that the state knew about disappeared children but took no action:

> The Chief of Investigation of the police wrote a report that dealt with less than 10 cases but showed the connection between them. The report was not published and the Health Office consistently avoided giving satisfying answers. The families lost hope. The culture of covering up was on its way for another victory.

The author attempted to correlate these accusations with the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission's 1968 report, which at the time was the only official investigation to have taken place. He could not locate the first commission's report in the Knesset's library or state archives. He interviewed Bahalul and Minkovski, both of whom claimed that they were charged with locating children, not investigating who was responsible for the disappearances. Bahalul thought that a second commission should have followed, although he never mentioned it before. As for possibly prosecuting some of the responsible people, Judge Bahalul said,

> We did not see our role as finding who is guilty unless there was clear proof for that and we didn't find any. Our job was mainly to find the children. Who is to be blamed is insignificant. This was our letter of appointment.

Minkovski could find no culprit except circumstance. In his mind, no criminal action had taken place. He believed that investigative responsibility lay higher up in the chain of command.

> What guilt? Who is to blame? What for? We didn't find any vicious intent, just neglect. Our job was to find the children and not to look for people to blame. Maybe the Minister of Police and the Minister of Justice should have found them. They nominated us and we gave the report to them.

The article, however, did not mention that the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission was an inquiry rather than a public investigative commission.[26] With no power of subpoena, the inquiry commission could not conduct an adequate investigation into government stonewalling. Three years later, another inquiry commission was formed. The Shalgi Commission was a weak investigative body equally unable to move the investigation forward.

1990s: Inquiry, Revolt, and Investigation

Media coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair in the 1990s responded primarily to a series of events including Rabbi Meshulam's revolt and the Shalgi Commission's conclusions. The investigation of the Shalgi Commission, formed in 1988, might have dragged on for decades had it not been for a Yemenite activist, Rabbi Uzi Meshulam, who refused to wait for commission findings any longer. His protest in 1994, accompanied by a great deal of media attention, triggered the conclusion of the Shalgi Commission in 1995.

The work of the Shalgi Commission was barely covered in the press despite the superficial investigative work with no meaningful findings. According to Zaid (2001, 79), Judge Shalgi himself complained to the interior committee of the Knesset in 1991 that the work of the commission had been held up due to insufficient funds and lack of investigators. In two and a half years, Shalgi admitted, the police reviewed only 22 of 400 files. The press ignored the commission's lack of progress as the investigation continued out of the public eye. The Yemenite Babies Affair only regained momentum when Meshulam's revolt took place.[27]

Articles in *Yated Ne'eman* (May 8, 1990) and *Kol Ha'ir*[28] (June 1, 1990) raised the possibility of Shamir's appointing a public investigative commission to further examine the Yemenite Babies Affair:

> Most of the cases have information or historical records. In some cases, a burial license was found but none of the graves were located, this raises the suspicion that the licenses were forged. Shamir was shocked to hear that and promised that if the commission does not find anything within a year, he will appoint a public investigative commission.
>
> (*Kol Ha'ir* June 1, 1990)

This information was not forthcoming from the major newspapers nor did *Yated Ne'eman* and *Kol Ha'ir* follow up. The press did not hold Shamir accountable for his promise. It took five more years, changed leadership, and a violent protest[29] for the government to finally form a public investigative commission.

Rabbi Uzi Meshulam began to research the Yemenite Babies Affair in the 1970s. In the early 1900s, he established Mishkan Ohalim, a non-profit

organization dedicated to generating public awareness about the Affair. Media coverage was still minimal,[30] even though Meshulam and his followers accumulated evidence about the kidnapping of thousands of Yemenite babies in the 1950s. In August 1993, Mishkan Ohalim instigated a massive letter writing campaign. Findings were sent to Knesset members and other important figures in politics, security, education, media, and academia (Zaid 2001, 84).

The organization's attempts to generate public reaction or political response failed; it got no responses from Knesset members or the media. Meshulam claimed that Shabak (Israeli secret service) warned him to stop all activity related to the investigation (Zaid 2001). Ignoring this mandate, Mishkan Ohalim published *Evan Maasu Habonim*, a private newspaper, to carry the story (March, 1994). Mainstream media ignored the narrative and even refused to publish paid announcements on Meshulam's behalf (Zaid 2001). Meshulam's attempts to increase public recognition were stymied by the legislature, press, and law enforcement. According to Rabbi Meshulam's organization, on March 24, 1994, he was provoked by the government into what became a violent revolt.

Two months after Mesulam's revolt, the Shalgi Commission released its findings. The dissatisfied Yemenite community pressured Knesset members to investigate further. Finally, the media began to debate the commission's validity and the need for a public investigative commission, although the coverage continued to be minimal. *Haaretz* reported that a Knesset committee member said, "There is no escape from forming a committee that will investigate this issue thoroughly" (May 31, 1994).

On November 3, 1994, *Maariv* reported that the minister of justice supported the decision to appoint a public investigative commission, noting that it was "a surprising decision." *Maariv* covered the testimony of Yigal Yosef (mayor of Rosh Ha'ayin),[31] a commission member who refused to sign the report because he claimed that the work was inadequate: "I don't think that with documents that their authenticity wasn't checked, you can determine what happened to these children" (December 7, 1994). Articles such as this were brief and inconspicuously placed.

In contrast, articles that supported the findings of the Shalgi Commission were thorough and prominently placed. *Maariv* published a front page article entitled "There Is No Proof That Children Were Kidnapped" (December 7, 1994). In an accompanying picture, Yemenite youngsters in traditional clothing appeared to be busy and content. However, a caption in parenthesis noted that the children in the picture had nothing to do with the article. A smaller font conveyed to the reader that the commission could not determine the fate of 65 children in 301 new cases. A total of 222 children were alleged to have died, and 51 had no documentation.

A day later, *Maariv* placed a small article about the dissatisfaction of some Knesset members with the Shalgi findings. Knesset member David Mena said, "The report doesn't reflect the real picture of the Yemenite children's disappearance. We should remember that the Shalgi Commission was an inquiry commission only." (December 8, 1994). This was a rare mention of the Shalgi Commission's limited authority. Another noteworthy statement came from the chair of the interior committee, Knesset member Dov Shilanski, who had overseen the gathering of testimony in 1986. At that time, he had recommended the formation of an investigative commission. In 1994, he said, "I personally believe, in contradiction to the Shalgi report, that there were more than a few cases of kidnapping of Yemenite babies" (*Maariv* December 8, 1994). This declaration was one of the only times that a Knesset member openly expressed an opinion that differed from the party line.

Later, *Haaretz* (December 20, 1994) reported that the government would make a final decision about forming a public investigative commission, once the Shalgi report was reviewed. Prime Minister Rabin and Judge Shalgi expressed reservations about forming a new commission, which the newspaper did not challenge.

> Rabin himself will not state his position on the forming of a public investigative commission, however in principle he thinks it is a waste of time and money . . . Judge Shalgi said that he didn't find anything that could lead to criminal activities but in light of the public atmosphere and the feelings of insult in the Yemenite community this commission will be the price for the usage of DDT and the hair cutting[32] of Yemenite immigrants. He was doubtful if such a public commission will find a solution to the Yemenite community, but maybe it will contribute to a more relaxed public atmosphere.
>
> (*Haaretz* December 20, 1994)

It was well known that throughout his term in office, Rabin objected to another investigation; yet he was never confronted by any news media about his position. Government responsibility toward the Yemenite community was completely absent. Judge Shalgi declared that a new investigative commission was a token to silence the Yemenite community and assuage bad feelings. The investigative commission, he said, should be formed "in light of the public atmosphere and the feelings of insult in the Yemenite community." Was the government forming an investigative commission to address an "insult" or to confront a matter that had been ignored for 40 years? The term "insult" was familiar press jargon for Mizrahi social protest. Within the Israeli press, Mizrahi people have often been presented, like Arabs, as people who are largely motivated by pride and emotion. As such, the significance of an "insult" is important to understanding their behavior.

After major public pressure, a public investigative commission called the Kedmi Commission was formed in 1995. However, it was not until 1996 when people were subpoenaed to speak before the Kedmi Commission did a more thoughtful public understanding begin to develop.

FEATURE ARTICLES

While public debate about forming an investigative commission was taking place, *Yediot Aharonot* published several feature articles about Yemenite babies who had died or had been deserted by their mothers. These stories relied heavily upon the testimony of nurses and hospital personnel.

The first article, entitled "The Yemenite Children Were Not Kidnapped and Did Not Disappear," appeared in *Laisha* (April 11, 1994), Israel's most popular women's magazine (published by *Yediot Aharonot*). While the discussion of the Yemenite Babies Affair was contained, it still became the headline. In the article, the author interviewed historian Deborah Hacohen about the publication of her book *Immigrants in Turmoil*. The first two paragraphs established Hacohen's distinguished academic achievements and family genealogy.

In the article, Hacohen's admiration for Ben-Gurion and other early Zionist leaders was evident. She found herself "admiring Ben-Gurion even more" (*Laisha* April 11, 1994). Her research led her to believe that the Yemenite Babies Affair was exaggerated, although it is worth noting that the Affair was only one piece of her research about the mass immigration to Israel in the 1950s.

> This story is more than exaggeration . . . those who talk about hundreds are wrong, it is maybe 22 kids according to one research and of course I am not disregarding this number . . . The fact is that many of the Yemenite children died and they were buried without telling their parents. It was hard to locate the families that had identical names. It was a mess, cards were lost, maybe there was one corrupted person who took advantage of the situation and took a child for adoption, but who ever claims that there was an official policy to kidnap Yemenite children is talking nonsense.

Hacohen's work read more like a public relations release for the Jewish Agency and the Zionist movement than historical research. She was criticized by some of the new historians who challenged Zionist discourse.[33]

In contrast to her lack of sympathy for Yemenite families, Hacohen could not hide "the tears that are falling from her green eyes" when talking or writing about Russian immigrants of the 1990s. To see educated Russian immigrants—even doctors and engineers—clean houses for a living "broke her heart." But stories about discrimination against Yemenite mothers in

the 1950s or Ethiopian immigrants in the 1990s did not seem to move her. Ethiopian immigrants, who suffer to this day from institutionalized racism in Israel, were not mentioned in the interview.[34]

The second article, entitled "Testimony: Some of the Yemenite Babies Were Deserted by Their Mothers," was published in *Yediot Aharonot* (May 18, 1994). It featured the testimony of a nurse who said that she witnessed Yemenite mothers deserting their children. The article's first two paragraphs established the nurse's credibility. A Holocaust survivor who was devoted to her community, she was also a volunteer who received an award from the president. And of course, she stated, "She loves the Yemenite people."

The nurse's testimony about the Yemenite Babies Affair contradicted accusations made by Rabbi Meshulam. She felt compelled to "tell her story" after a violent incident in Yahud, although her identity was not revealed. This nurse claimed to be in charge of the baby house at one of the hospitals:

> One day they brought a baby that was deserted by his mother in another hospital and on his hand, he had a sticker with his name David. After two days, they brought two more Yemenite babies that were deserted by their parents. After a week we had seven babies.
>
> (*Yediot Aharonot* May 18, 1994)

Not having witnessed parents deserting their children, the nurse's testimony was based on hearsay. The reporter did not address complaints of Yemenite parents who had to search for missing children in different hospitals after being told that they had died. The nurse said she had wanted to adopt baby David but her husband nixed the idea. "We will get attached to the child and then one day, his biological parents will come demanding him and we will have to return him and live with pain and trauma" (*Yediot Aharonot* May 18, 1994). This comment went unchallenged. The reporter did not ask about who would look for a deserted baby or why this was a "dangerous adoption." Instead, the reporter stated,

> I am convinced that many more Yemenite babies were held in different state institutions and were eventually adopted; no one kidnapped them . . . Based on her personal experience she [the nurse] wants to say that no one kidnapped the Yemenite babies. The Yemenite families arrived to Israel with ten or more children. These were days of austerity and families couldn't feed their children. This is why there were babies that were born and their mothers just deserted them . . . It wasn't an evil motive, it is just that they couldn't deal with one more baby in the house and they preferred the state authorities take charge of these babies.

This testimony exemplified the media's slant on the Yemenite Babies Affair. Anonymous testimony, from a nurse who could potentially be a

suspect, was presented as hard fact. This narrative was reiterated in similar testimonies from more unnamed nurses, days later in "Yemenite Babies: New Testimonies" (*Yediot Aharonot* May 23, 1994).

Another featured article, entitled "Is the Search Over?" (*Yediot Aharonot* September 26, 1994), supported the theory that most of the children died from illness. The title implied that the public was eager to put this Affair to rest. The article portrayed Yemenites as people who would never be satisfied with the results of the investigation: nothing and no one would change their belief about what had happened.

To further establish the death by illness theory, the reporter interviewed Ami Hovav, the chief investigator of the first two commissions. Hovav found "a lost book in the attic that puts a whole new light on this dark Affair he investigates." Written by Avraham Shternberg, the book entitled *Behikalet Am* (When People of a Nation Are Absorbed) was "a treasure of facts" Hovav had been searching for since 1966. Avraham Shternberg was one of the receiving doctors in the absorption camps. He claimed that new immigrants suffered from numerous diseases and lack of good nutrition. As a result, many children died in hospitals. Due to much chaos and because immigrants had similar names, parents were not always located when children died: "Sometimes there were also mistakes that caused distress and unjustified sorrow" (*Yediot Aharonot* September 26, 1994).

As a person of Yemenite descent, it was assumed that Hovav would champion the Yemenite perspective, but he did not. Hovav's work was praised by the reporter and described as adding a dimension of mystery to the story.[35] A dedicated investigator with experience as army intelligence, Hovav was a family man related to a famous family.[36]

The article ignored questions about Hovav's investigative methods or about the fact that he was assigned to work on the Shalgi Commission after participating in the first failed Bahalul-Minkovski Commission. Hovav's role in the first two commissions had given him exclusive control over original documents. Some parents told the 1995 Kedmi Commission that Hovav took original documents from them, which were never returned. Some claimed that he used these materials to discount their cases. One woman who testified before the Kedmi Commission said,

> Hovav asked me if I had documents and when I said, "No, they were all taken from me in the first commission," he answered, "As long as you have no evidence and documents you can jump to the sky, you can prove nothing."
>
> (Zaid 2001, 69)

Other Yemenite parents complained about a condescending tone and overall skepticism about their testimony. In one specific case, baby Zahara, mentioned in the introduction, was kidnapped from her mother's arms.

The mother, Miriyam Said, provided the name of the nurse who took her baby girl in her testimony to the Shalgi Commission. When I asked Hovav why he did not investigate the case further, he replied, "Do you really believe her?"

In the *Yediot Aharonot* interview, Hovav said he was surprised by the cooperation he got from nurses, doctors, and others who dealt with new immigrants. He blamed these fatalities on the parents' inability to adjust to modern medical services:

> Yemenites people were hiding sick kids in the tents because of the rumor that children were kidnapped . . . In one case, the doctor told me that if the family had brought the kid a few days earlier, they would have saved him.

Hovav told the reporter that in one case, the father did not recognize his own child after he had gained weight in the hospital:

> The manager tried to convince him that was his son but the father disagreed. "You exchange my son," he said and refused to take him back. The child was transferred to Wizo[37]and was given for adoption.

Yemenite activists harshly criticized both commissions Hovav served on. This criticism, which challenged the authenticity and accuracy of documents as well as a biased and incomplete process, was not mentioned in the newspaper article. The article concluded with a letter that Hovav mailed to various organizations and people interested in the Affair, which gave the impression that his findings were definitive:

> To all who are concerned with the Yemenite Babies Affair: there wasn't any person or a body that organized, kidnapped or sold the Yemenite babies for adoption. The babies died from difficult diseases, lack of nutrition and the hard road to Israel.
>
> (*Yediot Aharonot* September 26, 1994)

THE PUBLIC INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSION AS REPORTED BY MAINSTREAM MEDIA

In January 1995, the Israeli government finally established a public investigative commission. This body began hearings in June 1995. Judge Yehuda Cohen was appointed to chair the commission but quit after about four years. Judge Ya'akov Kedmi took his place.[38] As government representatives were called to testify and as new and incriminating evidence became available to the public, the media showed moderate interest in covering the commission's work. Unlike the series of articles in *Ha'ir* and *Haaretz*, most of the coverage was sporadic, appearing in daily newspapers as brief articles that were not always easy to find.

More specifically, both daily newspapers (*Yediot Aharonot* and *Maariv*) covered the public investigative commission's work irregularly. Investigation-related items would appear in clusters and then disappear for months. With no further investigation and no in-depth interviews, the newspapers reported meagerly on different issues raised by the hearings to include such topics as the opening and sealing of graves, review of adoption files, lost documents, and the responsibility and roles of involved institutions.

Maariv (September 21, 1995), for instance, reported, "The Yemenite babies were forced out of their parents and into the Babies Houses." This testimony was given to the commission by Hayim Tzadok, a member of the Jewish Agency in charge of Yemenite immigrants in the 1950s. Despite potentially explosive information, no daily newspaper investigated the information further nor was an extensive interview conducted.

Yigal Yosef, the mayor of Rosh Ha'ayin, also provided testimony that was not further investigated. He blamed specific people in the government who silenced this Affair. Published as a small news item entitled "Jews Committed a Crime against Other Jews" (*Maariv* January 1, 1996), the article lacked an in-depth interview with Yosef and did not report on responsible parties that he named.

Headlines of important topics raised in minor ways included "A Private Investigator Was Leading Witnesses" (*Yediot Aharonot* January 9, 1996); "Shilanski[39]: "Yemenite Babies were Given for Adoption Illegally" (*Maariv* January 11, 1996); "Shilanski: "Hadassah[40] Women from the United States took Yemenite Babies for Adoption" (*Yediot Aharonot* January 11, 1996); "The Committee Discovered Death and Birth Certificates Signed in Advance in One of the Archives" (*Yediot Aharonot* January 13, 1996); "Confidential Documents Revile: People in the Government Knew about the Childrens' Disappearance" (*Maariv* February 2, 1996); "Dead Yemenite Babies Were Thrown into a Hole in the Ground" (*Maariv* February 12, 1996); "The Chairman of the Investigative Committee: 'I Suspect that the Nurses who Refuse to Testify Have Something to Hide'" (*Maariv* March 3, 1996); and "A Rabbi Sold the Yemenite Babies to Families in the United States" (*Yediot Aharonot* April 26, 1996).

Instead of focusing and elaborating on the above topics brought before the investigative commission, the press published featured articles contradicting these findings. *Maariv*, for instance, published the testimony of a nurse who provided the newspaper with five pictures of emaciated children:

> They looked like they arrived from the concentration camps [reference to the Holocaust] . . . I don't remember how many of them died. They were starved. We took these pictures because we were shocked.
>
> (*Maariv* January 26, 1996)

Two days later, *Maariv* published Hovav's[41] testimony accompanied by pictures of underfed and sick children recovering in a hospital. He claimed, "These children recovered because of the dedicated treatment of hospital staff. Other children died because they were not brought on time" (*Maariv* January 28, 1996).

Two days later, *Maariv* published yet another similar testimony from another nurse. She said, "The children suffered from terrible diseases and undernourishment. Many of them died in camps in Yemen before they arrived to Israel" (*Maariv* January 30, 1996). The nurse's story was presented with authority, allowing no room for doubt about her testimony.

The testimony of the historian Tom Segev was widely quoted in the newspapers. He dismissed all claims of wrongdoing toward the Yemenite community. Further, he stated that no one in America would want to adopt these black babies:

> There is no base for the claim that someone kidnapped Yemenite babies to raise them as Ashkenazis, determined the historian Tom Segev . . . Dr. Segev noted that as a historian that investigated this Affair, he can determine with great certainty that these children weren't kidnapped. No one kidnapped them and sold them to America. In the US, no one was standing in line to buy Black babies.[42]
>
> (*Maariv* September 19, 1997)

The historian's point of view was not challenged by the news reporter or members of the Kedmi Commission.

TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE AFFAIR

At the center of television coverage of the Yemenite Babies Affair was the investigative television special of *Mabat Sheni* (Second Look) aired on Channel One on February 12, 1996. For the second time, a television program dedicated an hour to the Yemenite Babies Affair. The show produced a documentary similar to its first, aired in 1986, and it reached a similar conclusion. The show's perspective was aligned with the government's version of events, which dismissed Yemenite claims that this Affair had not yet been properly investigated. The program discounted other points of view that had been published in *Haaretz* and aired on the show *Hasifa.*

"What has happened now that didn't happen in 40 years?" asked the host of the show, Yarin Kimor, "Well, Uzi Meshulam happened." This opening statement bound the Yemenite Babies Affair with a violent incident that had occurred in Yahud. It put the Yemenite families' demands for investigation in a bad light and ignored the lack of investigation for

40 years as the major reason for Meshulam's protest. The show presented the Meshulam group as violent, dangerous people who threatened democracy. As such, their concerns were not considered valid.

Along with recycled footage from the first show (1986),[43] the new program focused on one Yemenite family that, despite much evidence, refused to accept the fact that their baby had died. The show indicated that the Yemenite community's lack of faith in the government's investigation was blocking the country's ability to make peace with the Affair. The Yemenite's lack of understanding and fatalist beliefs were seen to be the root of the problem.

The show followed the Matana family. Despite the fact that the state notified the parents of the death of their child, they refused to accept that their child had died. They never received a death or burial certificate. The reporter asked many hypothetical questions to illustrate the family's distrust of state authorities and presented evidence that contradicted the mother's doubt.

The mother's testimony confirmed that her baby had no symptoms of illness the day before his disappearance. Investigator Ami Hovav refuted the mother's testimony saying that the child had died from a viral disease, a theory he supported with a pathology report. Hovav claimed that the doctors who operated on babies who died were not obligated by law to notify parents in the 1950s. He said, "Their motives were pure and noble. They wanted to know what diseases were causing the death and how to prevent them" (*Mabat Sheni* February 12, 1996).

The host Kimor stated, "This is one of thousands of cases." He alleged that the kidnapping could not have happened because a document had been found that proved that 600 Yemenite orphans had been brought to Israel at the time: "If 600 orphans were brought to Israel, why would they need to kidnap babies?"

Counter Discourse

One of the first items on television to challenge the approach of the mainstream media was an item in a magazine news program *Yoman* (Diary) on July 1995. Broadcast on Channel One on Friday nights, the show has been one of the most popular programs of this channel. In an unusual journalistic step, a reporter of Yemenite descent named Michal Kafra accompanied a Yemenite activist, Avner Farhi, to an interview with nurses who had testified before the Kedmi Commission. This meeting resulted in a document that pointed to elements of racism and condescension that may have contributed to the kidnapping of the babies.[44] This news item, however, was an isolated story on Channel One that pales in comparison with this channel's pro-establishment coverage.

Kafra stated that the nurses' testimony identified a lack of proper registration as a major problem:

> Many kids were taken for medical treatments without any registration forms so the mission to return them to the parents was doomed to failure. The lost little ones were sent to Wizo [women's organization] and from there for adoption.

Kafra interviewed a Yemenite mother who was certain that her child had been healthy: "I breastfed my child three times a day. It is inconceivable that everyone died. It can't be, it can't be." Kafra and Farhi interviewed Sonia Milshtein, a nurse in charge of the absorption camp's baby houses. She claimed that most of the children died but she would not respond to Farhi's question about whether she had seen dead children with her own eyes. Pressured further to answer, she finally said, "Dead children I didn't see, I didn't take care of this personally." When asked if she could understand families' pain, Milshtein replied, "Oh, I hear this too much lately. After 40 years, I would have been happy that my child got a good education and a good family. Yes, that is how I would feel."

The show also aired testimony taped by Farhi of another nurse named Ruja Kuchinski:

> I used to take two or three babies with an ambulance to the hospital in Afula[45], and we were told to leave them there, they were perfectly healthy. The next day, I would take more babies and I asked where are the babies that we brought yesterday and they said—they died. What do they mean died, they were healthy, nothing was wrong with them. I took them. You see what I am saying. Today, when they say that they died, it isn't true. It isn't true; they were given for adoption. As long as I can see the light of the day, I will tell you the truth. And most of them were sent to the USA.

Kuchinski's testimony was first published earlier by me in *Yediot Aharonot* (December 12, 1994) and again given voice on the show *Uvda* on Channel Two (February 13, 1996). After her initial meeting with Farhi, Kuchinski refused to cooperate further, claiming that she was afraid of retaliation.[46]

Channel Two

During this period, Channel Two aired two investigative programs dedicated to the Yemenite Babies Affair within a week's time. The timing of the shows in conjunction with *Mabat Sheni* on Channel One (also aired that week) was somewhat surprising since the issue had been sidestepped on Israeli television for years.[47]

The first program *Uvda* (Fact), which aired on February 13, 1996, was the most challenging to the prevailing understanding of the Affair. Entitled "The Yemenite Babies Didn't Die," the show examined different aspects of

the Affair, including an in-studio discussion with Judge Shalgi and Yemenite activists. In the opening remarks, the show's host Ilana Dayan challenged statements previously made by Israeli media. She used the term kidnapping, which had been used only once before by *Ha'olam Haze* in 1967. She spoke about injustices done to the Yemenite community. Dayan noted that while one might disagree with the magnitude of the Yemenite Babies Affair, one could not disagree with the magnitude of the cover-up. She said,

> We want to tell you the story of the kidnapping of Yemenite babies from their parents, months, days and sometimes hours after they landed here . . . We want to form an inducement against a patronizing and condescending institution that its pioneers treated Yemenite immigrants as they wished, and its followers still manage to cover it up . . . They told them that the children died but didn't show them a grave. They sent army draft letters to children that were no longer with their families; they concealed from them that these children were given to others for adoption. They counted on them to keep suffering quietly, bleeding into themselves, just like in the stereotype.[48] Now this is over, the testimonies you will hear tonight are not the end of story and do not replace the investigative commission's work, but they will also leave no doubt with you. There were kidnapping of babies, there were cases of illegal adoption. There was a system that transferred children from the camps to hospitals, to institution of Wizo and away from their families.

In her opening remarks, Dayan also told the story of a Yemenite friend whose mother would hide him under the bed when strangers came to the village. "He grew up in Israel to haunted parents that the trauma of the past is still haunting them."

The first segment, entitled "From Mommy's Hands," featured three stories of families who had lost their children to this tragedy. The stories were told respectfully and with compassion. The host pointed to many contradictions within the government investigation's findings. Stories told by Yemenite parents were given credence, which had not happened in the mainstream media. Further, the program reenacted two testimonies that were filmed at Camp Ein-Shemer, where the majority of children had been taken.

In all three stories, the families never saw a body or a grave nor did they receive death certificates. The first story was told by Naomi Gavra, whose son Zion was kidnapped in 1951. One evening, while she was nursing her son in the baby house of Camp Ein-Shemer, the baby was wrenched from her arms and taken away, along with 14 other children:

> It was eight in the evening, I was nursing my son and there were two women and a man . . . They took children out and they spoke Yiddish. I told the Yemenite nurse that was with me, to ask them where are they taking the

> children… they said to the hospital…They will bring them back in 2–3 weeks. So they left with 14 babies, I saw it with my eyes. So I thought to myself that as soon as they leave I will take my baby and run, but suddenly the two women came back and said "Give us your baby" and I said "No, go away." So they came to me and one of them held my hands and the other ripped the baby from my arms. I ran after the car crying . . . I don't think they were Jewish. It is hard to believe, you need a heart of stone to kidnap a baby from his mother's hands.
>
> (*Uvda* February 13, 1996)

The second story told of the Karni family who had triplets on June 30, 1951. The mother was not allowed to nurse the babies or to take them home after delivery. Instead, they were transferred to the Wizo Institute in Tel Aviv. After a week, the parents were told that two of the babies had died. Later, the father noticed that two of the birth certificates had been marked with the word "dead" when he received them.

The third story was about Batya Farhi's search for her daughter Shoshanna. Farhi said she was kicked out from the baby house after the nurses took her daughter to the hospital: "They yelled at me, 'your daughter is dead, dead,' they told me in Arabic in a condescending language to go away while pushing me with a broom like I wasn't a mother of a child any more."

Farhi's son Avner was also interviewed. He had become an activist and an aggressive investigator of this Affair: "It is like there is a second generation to Holocaust survivors, we are the second generation of families whose children were taken away from them," he said.

The Farhi family never saw a death certificate or a grave. The Shalgi Commission told them that there were reasonable grounds to believe that their daughter had died and was buried in Ein Shemet Camp on March 6, 1950. According to the same report, this camp began to bury the dead only three years later in 1953. When Dayan confronted Judge Shalgi about this contradictory information, he admitted to having made mistakes. He noted 34 mistakes in the previous commission's report. However, he claimed that none of these were critical mistakes.

The second portion of the show was dedicated to the story of David Shuker, who had lost his daughter Miriam in 1951. For the first time on Israeli television, the adoptive mother was brought in to meet Miriam's biological father, who had been looking for her for 40 years.

The adoptive mother said that she heard about a girl available for adoption from a doctor friend who worked at Camp Rosh Ha'ayin. When Miriam was taken from her parents, they were told that she had died. At the same time, the state of Israel had taken her for adoption purposes. State authorities pronounced the adoption to be legal because no one had claimed the girl in response to the required newspaper announcement that

had been placed beforehand. However, the legality of this adoption was still questionable. David Shuker's search for his daughter was well documented, and he even received a document from the state claiming that the child, Miriam Shuker, had not been given up for adoption.

When Shuker finally hired a lawyer, he discovered that the first commission had already located Miriam back in 1967, but for 20 years did not notify him. It was not until Shuker's lawyer threatened to sue the state of Israel that the adoption authorities arranged a meeting between Miriam and her father, David.

The televised meeting between the adoptive mother, Marika, and the biological father, David, was heartbreaking:

> Marika: "What happen shouldn't have happen, but nothing bad happened . . . She didn't suffer."
>
> David: "I know. I am the one who suffered the most."
>
> Marika: "The doctor said that she was very sick, they thought that if she stayed with you, she will be sicker . . . You should think that you raised her . . . Should they have told you the truth?"

Prior to this meeting, Marika revealed that in 1960 she saw an article in the newspaper about David's search for his daughter. Although she could tell that he was Miriam's biological father, on the basis of the name and details of the case, she decided to remain silent: "I was worried about my husband who was very sensitive and didn't feel well, I didn't want to upset him," she said.

Dayan also exposed police reports classified as "Top Secret" that had been given to the Ministry of Health by the police about disappearing babies in 1952. The ministry, slow to respond, attributed the problem to the Yemenite immigrants' lack of knowledge about the naming system customary in Israel.[49]

The second show *Hasifa* (Exposure), hosted by Micha Limor, was aired on February 11, 1996, also on Channel Two. The show focused on illegal medical experiments that had been performed on Yemenite babies, both alive and dead, without parental knowledge or consent. This program represented the only media treatment of the alleged medical experimentation performed on babies. The show aired a segment from the movie *Down A One Way Road* , directed by Tzipi Talmor. Talmor investigated these allegations extensively using documentation and interview material from Professor Ya'akov Rotem, former pediatrics director at Pardes Katz and Shiba hospitals. In one published article Rotem denounced what he called "the unethical treatment of immigrants' babies." In this interview, he claimed to have witnessed what he called the "dehumanization of the medical profession." Rotem said

doctors regularly performed lumbar punctures for experimental rather than diagnostic purposes.

> Those humanists never imagine that among us there are doctors who conducted lumbar punctures on healthy newborns, still in the maternity wards, in order to measure phosphorus values in their spinal fluid . . . or that daily punctures were conducted on the bone marrow of a single patient to follow the development of certain cells.

Professor Rotem proclaimed this research to be dangerous: "I have always demanded to uphold the right of the patient." The public commission never pursued this line of investigation.

THE CASE OF TZILA LEVINE

The press highlighted the case of Tzila Levine in 1997. An American citizen, Levine claimed to be a kidnapped Yemenite baby who as an adult was searching for her biological parents. An article published in *Maariv* (March, 24, 1997) provided background about Tzila Levine and her life in America with her husband and two sons. As a child in Israel, she had been adopted by people from Kibbutz Ein Hamifratz in 1948. On the kibbutz, she said, "the kids used to tease me because of my dark color and call me a cup of coffee" (*Maariv*, March 24, 1997).

Levine heard about the Yemenite Babies Affair through Shimshon Giat, then the president of the Yemenite Jewish Federation in the United States, who was interviewed for an Israeli television show in the United States. She contacted Giat, who in turn sent her picture and story to a lawyer in Israel. When the story was published in the Israeli press, a Yemenite woman named Margalit Omeisi contacted the lawyer because of a strong resemblance between her and the young woman. Omeisi was confident that Levine was the daughter she lost in 1949.

In August 1997, Levine came to Israel for DNA testing. Dr. Hasan Hatib of the Genetics Department at Hebrew University conducted the tests and determined with 99.99 percent certainty that Omeisi and Levine were mother and daughter.

This happy story, however, was very short lived. When Levine testified before the Kedmi Commission, she was told that her adoption documents contradicted her mother's story. "The girl was adopted in 1948 and the mother immigrated in 1949," reported *Yediot Aharonot* (August 28, 1997). The article deemphasized the lawyers' claims that the commission had relied on inauthentic documents.[50]

The commission demanded that Omeisi and Levine retake the DNA test, this time with the state pathologist, Professor Yehuda Hiss. This second test determined that they were not mother and daughter. Although he

had signed a confidentiality agreement, Hiss leaked the test results to the press before reporting back to the families.

The press coverage reflected relief at the new outcome, continuing as it had, to support the state's version of events. In the article "Was the Celebration Too Early?" (*Yediot Aharonot* October 9, 1997), Hiss was granted the status of "national pathologist," which gave him a higher standing in determining the test results. Dr. Hatib's test results were viewed as faulty. Hiss's results were assumed to be 100 percent accurate, and his assertion was never questioned.

In an article entitled "Insulted" (*Maariv* October 23, 1997), Hatib described the accuracy of his tests as well as their scientific underpinnings. He was incensed by publications discounting his test results. Hatib conducted the test again and received the same 99.99 percent rate of accuracy. In addition, he suggested that Professor Hiss's test was faulty in its reliance on DNA that might have changed due to the mother's advanced age. Professor Adam Freedman, a genetics expert from Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, confirmed Hatib's scientific opinion: "We are working at the Hebrew University with the best and newest equipment . . . If they are saying that my test is not valid then they will have to question all the tests that were done in this lab" (*Maariv* October 23, 1997).

The press completed its coverage of this story in *Yediot Aharonot* (October 15, 1997). Reporter Anat Meidan followed Umesi to the United States for a five-day visit to her daughter Tzila Levine. The article, entitled "One Family against the Whole World," focused on the human drama. Omeisi and Levine chose to ignore Hiss's test results as they had developed a mother-daughter relationship: "Anyone who is convinced that Omeisi and Levine are mother and daughter will be happy with the family's happiness. Anyone who thinks they are delusional will be shocked with the level of emotions, happiness, love and big illusion."

Alternative Perspectives on Film

The only documentary film about the Yemenite Babies Affair was directed and produced by Tzipi Talmor in 1997. Talmor, who had repeatedly been denied grants to make this film, produced it by using personal savings and loans. The documentary was shown at two festivals in Israel but not on television (with the exception of a segment on medical treatment broadcast on *Hasifa*) because, Talmor was told by producers, it was "an evil script."[51]

The film *Down A One-way Road* refuted various government claims, using documents and testimony of government officials, investigators, and parents. The government's lack of investigation and its efforts to silence the Affair were highlighted. In contrast to treatment of this Affair by

mainstream media, Talmor dealt respectfully with Yemenite parents and brought eye-opening new testimony to bear.

Some testimony described the physical act of children being kidnapped from their mothers' arms. A particular nurse named Masha was involved in the kidnappings: in one case, she even made a Yemenite mother name her daughter Masha. The mother, Yona Hubara, later recounted that when the nurse had wanted to take her daughter from the baby house on grounds of "pneumonia," she sensed that something bad was about to happen:

> I knew that nothing was wrong with my baby, she wasn't coughing and had no fever, and it wasn't my first child, if she was sick I would know. So I asked the nurse to wait a minute until I get my husband, it took me maybe five minutes and when we were back, they were already gone. Three days later, they told us that she died. I didn't believe them and insisted that they show me the body. At first they refused, and then one day they told me that they brought the body and that she is wrapped in rags in a package in a room in the camp and that I could go see her but that I shouldn't open the package. So I went into the room and decided to open it anyway, I wasn't afraid, I just wanted to know. It was all full of rags and the package was empty.

Talmor also exposed the testimony of adopted Yemenite babies, now adults, including those who were not searching for their biological parents. By so doing, she helped refute allegations that if there had been mass adoptions, there should be more children looking for their parents. One of the adoptive children said, "I am not ready to try and locate my parents because I am not sure that I can deal now with the emotional stress of finding a new family in these circumstances."

The film was unique in its focus on the viewpoint and feelings of Yemenite parents. In refuting claims of parental disinterest or abandonment Talmor ended the film with the agonized cry of two Yemenite parents:

> Miriam Ovadia: "I don't want her to think that I threw her away, I miss her; I was looking for her everywhere and I was worried and prayed to be able to see her in my eyes." Shlomo Bahagali: "I am talking to you Hayim, this was not my fault. This is the fault of the people in charge. It isn't at all like they said that we were not interested in the babies. It is a cruel lie. That is why I am talking to you Hayim, please in God's name, if you hear me, your I.D number is 64703, please come back to me, let me rest in peace. I need to know that you are alive wherever you are."

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE RADIO

The only documentary feature about the Yemenite Babies Affair to be aired on Israeli radio was researched, edited, and hosted by Yemenite journalist Yael Tzadok. The show entitled "The Missing Yemenite Babies" (May 12, 1994)

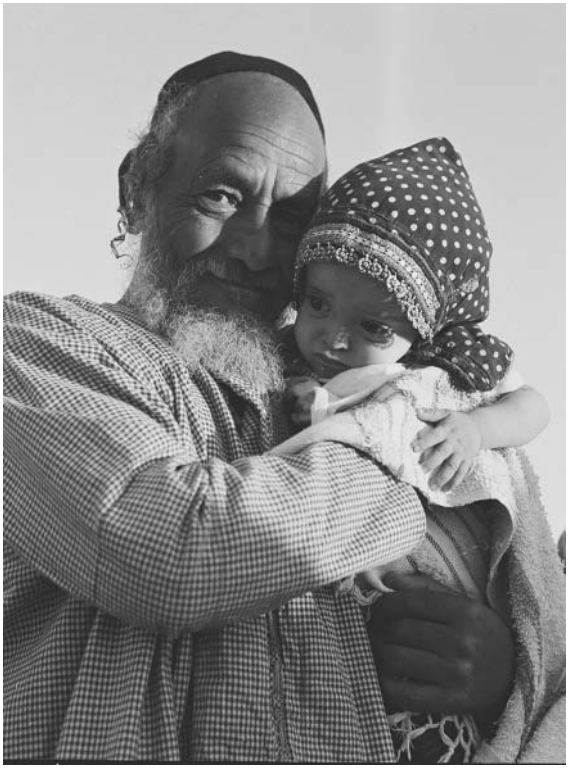

Figure 3.2 A Yemenite grandfather helping to look after his grandson, January 12, 1949, by Eldan David.

was broadcast on Channel A (Reshet Alef), which had the lowest radio ratings. Although the program received high marks[52], it has never been broadcast on the more popular Channel B (Reshet Beit).

The show was aired for two hours, providing listeners with one of the most in-depth media accounts of this Affair. Tzadok researched different elements, to include testimony of parents, adopted children, researchers, Yemenite activists, and state authorities. Tzadok believed that a lack of government investigation added to the pain and heartache of the Yemenite families. She detailed the emotional bond between parent and infant (see fig. 3.2) by asking such questions as "Do you remember what the baby looked like?" or "After all these years do you still miss your baby?"

With regard to the Ashkenazi establishment, one mother said, "They treated us like we were crazy, they were not answering us and not even looking at us." Another mother said that when her baby was taken, she cried and screamed as the staff beat her and pushed her away: "I don't

know how could they do that, it is my soul, it is my son, I feel like it happened yesterday. Nothing was wrong with him."

One of the most shocking testimonies aired on the program was that of a mother whose baby had been taken from her moments after delivery:

> After the delivery, the nurse came to my room and showed me the baby after she washed him and told me that he looks healthy and weighs three and a half kilos. Moments after the nurse left, the doctor came into the room and pointed his finger at me like you do to a child that did something wrong. So I looked around to see if he was talking to someone else, and he said: 'I am talking to you, you are a bad girl.' When I asked why, he said that I was pushing so hard that I killed my baby. So I started to scream and cry. I told him that it was not possible, that the nurse just showed him to me, but he didn't care about me and just left the room.
>
> ("The Missing Yemenite Babies,"
> The Voice of Israel, Reshet Alef, May 1994)

Through talking to experts and investigators, Tzadok dealt with acute questions such as the patronizing and sometimes inhumane attitude toward the Yemenite immigrants; the many contradictions in government documents; the lack of government investigation and the important distinction between inquiry and investigative commissions. Tzadok also refuted the notion that the chaos of the first years of the state caused the separation of parents and children. Uri Avneri, a prominent journalist and the editor of *Ha'olam Haze*, dismissed the state's claims: "It is simply not true," he said. "I wish that the state of Israel today were as organized as it was in the early 1950s. No one died or was buried without proper documentation. The mess theory is simply wrong, period."

ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINTS IN THE PRESS

While the Kedmi Commission[53] was holding hearings, several nonmainstream news media (like *Ha'ir* and *Haaretz*) challenged the familiar narrative of silence and denial. As mentioned above, most daily newspapers reported occasionally on some testimony in small news item format. However, articles that appeared in *Ha'ir*, *Haaretz* and the two programs on Channel Two contributed to a shift in public opinion about the Affair, causing at the very least, some people to question the prevailing story.

In one article, *Ha'ir* (October 27, 1995) reported the testimony of nurse Sonia Milshtein, mentioned earlier. The article, entitled "All Kinds of Yihye Son of Yihye,"[54] brought facts and voices to bear that had thus far been missing. Absorption camp nurses admitted that sick babies had been taken from their parents without identification and placed for adoption.

They said that healthy babies were sometimes kept in hospitals because their parents could not be located. Upon arrival to the absorption camps, mothers were involuntarily forced to part with their children. Some mothers were not permitted into the baby houses because the person in charge decided that they could not provide adequately for their children. The article opened with Milshtein's testimony:

> Milshtein: I would see the carcasses that they took in the ambulance.
>
> Prosecutor Nahmani[55]: Where from did they take the carcasses?
>
> Judge Cohen: What do you mean carcasses? Corpses?
>
> Milshtein: I mean the carcasses they took in the ambulance.
>
> Judge Cohen: By carcasses she means dead children?
>
> Milshtein: That they took in the ambulance that it was still possible to save.
>
> Judge Cohen: She means live children? She calls sick children carcasses?
>
> Prosecutor Nahmani: Do you mean live children that were taken?
>
> Milshtein: Yes.

Milshtein also referred to Yemenite Babies as "packages." When Judge Cohen asked her, "Are packages babies? Babies are packages?" Milstein replied, "Little ones." She admitted to knowing about the adoptions but denied any connection to or knowledge of an inclusive policy.

> She [Milshtein] was not present at the Babies Houses or clinics, had nothing to do with transferring of babies, never saw parents looking for their children and knew nothing about the unrest at the camps regarding babies' disappearance.

As to the procedure for registering and identifying children, Milshtein admitted to no policy, notebooks, or system that allowed for proper identification of babies:

> Milshtein: I, as a European mother knowing how to follow my child, would have gone searching, asking and would have found out where my child was. But they [the Yemenite mothers] in their primitive state of mind, I say primitive, they were shocked and needed food and had many children and diseases, they could not do it.
>
> Prosecutor Nahmani: If it was not possible to do, and you as a European mother could have done it, why didn't you make sure that someone else would have done it instead of the Yemenite mothers?
>
> Milshtein: I had other things to worry about. I didn't think about the destiny of the children. I thought about what would I do if this was missing and that was missing.

> Prosecutor Nahmani: So you were thinking about technical stuff only? You were not troubled with the destiny of the children. …You didn't care that the children will not return to the camp?
>
> Milshtein: I was not interested in these children, you have to understand I had to take care of the camp's needs.
>
> Prosecutor Nahmani: So you are saying that these children, ahead of time, were destined to be unidentified; this was clear in advance.
>
> Milshtein: This was the reality and that is it. It is true that there were tragedies; it is true.
>
> Prosecutor Nahmani: But to connect the children with their families, this was not important to you?
>
> Milshtein: I don't want to answer this.
>
> (*Ha'ir*, October 27, 1995)

Milshtein concluded by telling the commission that when she was later transferred to care for children on a kibbutz with polio, things were different. There, kibbutz nurses had a well-organized registration process and a file for every sick child with his or her name as well as the names of the parents. When asked about the difference in treatment of immigrant children, Milshtein replied, "But this was after, and we didn't have 15,000 crowded people with diseases. How can you even compare?" (*Ha'ir* October 27, 1995).

A second article in *Ha'ir* (November 3, 1995) featured two key witnesses: Sara Pearl, the chairwoman of Wizo-Israel, an international Jewish-Zionist women's organization; and Hayim Tzadok, the person in charge of the Yemenite immigrants at the Jewish Agency in the 1950s.

In 1950, Wizo International established a recovery center for babies in Safad, a small city in northern Israel. Hundreds of children who recovered there were released for adoption shortly after their recovery. In her testimony to the Kedmi Commission, Sara Pearl said,

> The kids were recovering really well, but for some reason their parents never came to visit them or to take them home . . . When I asked the manager of the home why, she said 'they just don't want their children, they have too much going on and that is why they are not coming to pick them up.' She told me explicitly that people don't want to take their children, we want to give them back and they don't want them. And I was wondering, what does it mean a mother doesn't want her child? I didn't understand that.

Pearl admitted that "there was great confusion and misunderstanding about the registration of children" at Wizo. She could not remember whether they notified parents about the whereabouts of their children but she did remember that Wizo-International always had guests and visitors from abroad. "We thought they came to see the place," she said.

Another Wizo worker confirmed that the children were brown skinned. She told the commission that she did not remember what had happened to them. Further, she said, she was not interested in these children. In response, commission members accused her of withholding evidence, which was a crime. The commission never took any disciplinary actions toward Pearl or any other of the witnesses suspected of withholding information.

Hayim Tzadok (former Jewish Agency official) testified before the commission for two days. Because he was of Yemenite descent, there was great pressure from Yemenite activists for him to yield information they thought he was hiding. Tzadok insisted that he had only heard about several cases of disappeared children. However, Prosecutor Nahmani exposed internal mail from within the Jewish Agency that addressed the disappearance of Yemenite babies.

Despite pressure from commission members and the prosecutor, Tzadok denied involvement in or knowledge of the Yemenite Babies Affair. Even when confronted with Avigdor Pe'er's testimony (a colleague from the Jewish Agency who admitted to knowing about Yemenite baby adoptions), Tzadok maintained his denial.

The testimony of people who refused to cooperate or who claimed amnesia was a new and crucial dimension to public perception of the Affair. Previously, professionals such as doctors, nurses, and clerks were regarded as authorities of the true account of what had happened to Yemenite babies. Now, for the first time in the press, *Ha'ir* articles portrayed these "authorities" as people under investigation, which fundamentally changed the definition of their role.

Between the end of 1995 and early 1997, the journalist Yigal Mashiah published thirteen feature articles in *Haaretz* about the Yemenite Babies Affair. These articles represented the most substantial research published by the Israeli press to date. Mashiah addressed the issue of government responsibility head-on. He interviewed institutional people and exposed the poor treatment of Yemenite immigrants during the 1950s.

Mashiah's story differed from the official narrative. Personal stories were connected rather than presented in isolation. In the end, however, he generally attributed the disappearance or kidnapping of these babies to circumstance and chaotic times.

In his first article, entitled "Goodbye Children" (*Haaretz* December 8, 1995), Mashiah followed stories of several Yemenite families whose children had been stolen. Families were told that their children had died but none saw a body or a grave. All the families he interviewed had heard stories similar to their own.

The second article described how sick babies in immigrant camps were taken from their parents without proper identification, and never returned. He interviewed an ambulance driver who took dozens of children to Rambam

hospital in Haifa, mostly at night. The driver never brought any child back from the hospital. He claimed that nurses would take babies from the tents with no registration or identification (*Haaretz* December 22, 1995).

In the same article, Mashiah told stories of two kidnapped children who were returned to their parents after they aggressively pursued them. These cases aside, crimes were committed against other naïve people who did not dare question the state's authority or imagine that other Jewish people could steal their children.

In the third article, Mashiah stated,

> From the many testimonies given to *Haaretz*, the following picture comes up: in many cases the babies were taken from young mothers, some were separated from their husbands . . . When they came to inquire about the child, they were told that he is dead. They weren't asked to identify the body, didn't get a body to bury and didn't get even a death certificate.

Mashiah pointed to contradictory information given to parents by different institutions. For instance, one child was supposedly buried in two places. His name was written on a single gravestone along with the names of other children. At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior reported that this child had left the country in 1962. Mashiah said, "Even the most naïve person could see the cover-up if he looked deeply into the facts. Too many question marks and very little done by the state to research for some decent answers." (*Haaretz* December 29, 1995).

In the fourth article (*Haaretz* January 5, 1996), Mashiah traced the probable trail of the disappeared children. According to his investigation, the children were kidnapped from airports, baby houses in the absorption camps, and from the two Wizo recovery centers in Safad and Tel Aviv. The testimony of ambulance drivers, nurses, doctors and other Wizo workers affirmed that 20–30 children arrived at Wizo weekly. Workers assumed that these were abandoned children. No effort was made to locate their parents. In an interview with Reuven Peled, the manager of medical services for new immigrants from 1947 to 1952, Mashiah asked,

> You said that things were done with terrible irregularities. Doctors were confused with the names and didn't write them down. Children were taken without proper registration. You said that hospitals didn't know where to return the children. They couldn't tell the parents where are their children and that many ambulance drivers didn't know where to return the children. Don't you think that this kind of a break in the wall invites thieves?
>
> Peled: I think that no one can claim that such things didn't happen, the question is how many cases. According to the logic and the situation there were no doubt cases like this.
>
> (*Haaretz* January 5, 1996)

In the following article, entitled "The Traces Lead to Wizo" (*Haaretz* January 12, 1996), Mashiah interviewed Wizo's manager in Tel Aviv. The manager claimed to have never seen a Yemenite baby in his institution in Tel Aviv.[56] When Mashiah confronted him with contradictory testimony of other government officials, the manager's lies were exposed, as even the Shalgi Commission's report had identified Tel Aviv's Wizo as a center that moved children from camps to adoptive families.

Mashiah also interviewed Mordechai Virshuvski, a former Knesset member who had demanded an investigative commission back in 1985. Virshuvski believed that there was a systematic government attempt to cover up this Affair:

> I asked questions and never got proper answers and this is not a national security matter so what there is left to conclude? There is indeed an attempt to cover it up. If your hands are clean, it shouldn't be a problem to prove it. The institution was too comfortable with this continual situation of uncertainty.
>
> (*Haaretz* January 12, 1996)

Two weeks later, Mashiah interviewed the head nurse at Wizo in Tel Aviv. Unlike the manager, the nurse admitted that some of the many Yemenite babies who had arrived at Wizo were adopted. Like many others, she blamed the parents for not wanting to see their children and not caring whether their children were dead or alive:

> It was the parents' fault, they didn't care. They didn't even come to visit their children. Didn't come to look for them . . . Once I told a father that his child died and he said, 'God gave and God took.' He said that without any reaction and went away. The Yemenite parents didn't care, this is the truth.
>
> (*Haaretz* February 2, 1996)

In Mashiah's series, incriminating evidence supported testimonies. Attitudes such as those expressed above shed a new light on the Yemenite Babies Affair for public consideration. Mashiah's eighth article dedicated four pages to an interview with Ami Hovav, who, as mentioned before, was the lead investigator of the first two commissions as well as a Yemenite. As a media favorite, he was interviewed often. He always defended the claim that chaos was to blame for the disappearance of the babies.

Hovav presented himself as a Yemenite investigator who was eager to find the guilty parties. Beyond chaos, Hovav said that some children were placed for adoption because the authorities could not locate the parents:

> This parent, after several years wakes up and says, 'they kidnapped my child, stole him, sold him for $5,000.' That is what they were told. They are

> telling them that the state is going to pay them reparations and they are all complaining now, even those who didn't think about it. That is how they are being incited by Yigal Yosef [the mayor of Rosh Haayin] and Uzi Meshulam.
> (*Haaretz* February 16, 1996)

This article of Mashiah exposed the many cracks in Hovav's investigative work, which served to undermine the findings of the first two commissions. One of the crucial points that Mashiah made had to do with the number of adoption files that Hovav examined while working with the Shalgi Commission. The Shalgi report stated that approximately 10,000 adoption files from 1949 to 1960 had been examined. The Central Bureau of Statistics showed that approximately 1,800 adoption cases occurred in Israel during those years: Hovav: "Great, so it was written, so we made a mistake. What is important is that we minimized the relevant number to 2,000 or 3,000 adoption files." When asked to be accurate with the number, Hovav replied, "Come on, I don't remember, you are entrapping me for a thousand . . . the important thing is what we found in them . . . We checked to see if the mother is married today, because if her husband will know that she has another child outside the marriage, he will murder her. You know how it is like with the Yemenite."

The above quote conjures up age-old images of Arabs as vicious killers. Yemenite Jews have never participated in honor killings as a result of marital infidelity or perceived misbehavior. Hovav's slurs convey contempt toward Yemenites; thus it is easier to ignore their rights if they are inherently evil people.

In the following article, entitled "And Only One Investigator Does it All" (*Haaretz* July 5, 1996), Mashiah criticized the third commission's work after its first year of investigation. He exposed serious flaws in witness interrogations:

> Only one year since the Commission had started to question witnesses, some puzzling working procedures are revealed. Testimonies are taken without learning the findings of the previous Commission; key witnesses were subpoenaed without any preparation and adoption files were not open yet.

For instance, Judge Cohen neglected to ask an ambulance driver some vital questions such as his age, years of driving experience, or the names of his superiors and hospital personnel. He was not queried about documents or pictures from this period or about why he was taking healthy children to Wizo. Moreover, the interrogation appeared to be casual. For example, when he named another ambulance driver, the judge said,

> Maybe when you see him again, you can convince him to come to us. If you can find out his last name, let us know. We don't ask you to run detective

> work, but if you see him, ask him what his last name is and his address and let us know.
>
> (*Haaretz* July 5, 1996)

As Mashiah stated, "A fear of the Court of Law wasn't present during this hearing." Despite the commission's ability to subpoena, it preferred to count on the willingness of witnesses to provide useful information.

Another ambulance driver, Bussi, who was interviewed by Mashiah was not asked to testify before the commission. When Mashiah asked Judge Daliya Kobel why this driver was not subpoenaed, she claimed that he always managed to produce excuses of poor health. "Do you know if he is still alive?" the judge asked. Mashiah responded, "The answer to the Judge's question—is the driver Bussi alive or dead?—was easy to get in one phone call to Bussi himself. I called and he answered the phone."

Mashiah further depicted the passive nature of the Kedmi Commission pointing to substantial omissions that could influence the outcome. An interview with Prosecutor Devora Nahmani from the state attorney's office confirmed flaws in the commission's work. Moreover, serious charges such as medical experiments performed on Yemenite children[57] were not addressed. After all, the commission had only one investigator conducting fieldwork. This overextended person was also responsible for validating approximately 100,000 documents.

Prosecutor Nahmani admitted to questioning key witnesses without prior review of background material.

> Nahmani: The assumption should be that these witnesses will not cooperate; we have seen that. Witnesses gave us names of dead people to get away from the questioning, or supposedly their memory was suddenly blurry because of the distance of time. The witnesses couldn't remember what was better to forget. There is no point in bringing these people to testify without good investigative work.
>
> (*Haaretz* July 5, 1996)

The involvement of Wizo, which was an important link to the babies' disappearance, was especially challenging. Prosecutor Nahmani said that the Wizo organization was evasive when asked to present documents to the commission. Moreover, questioning authority people about their involvement in Wizo was frustrating:

> It was impossible to question them more aggressively. Regarding Wizo, we had to face evasive witnesses and doctors. It would have been much easier if I had all the archive material available to me.

In an article entitled "Bergman's Dark Business" (*Haaretz* September 9, 1997), Mashiah exposed the commission's failure to follow an important line

of investigation in New York. The connection of the Yemenite Babies Affair to the United States was first mentioned in an article published by *Ha'olam Haze* in 1967. The magazine reported that Yemenite babies were stolen from their parents during the 1950s and sold for adoption to Jewish families in the United States for $5,000 per baby. During a visit to the United States, Rabbi Avidor Hacohen (source of the information) met with an Ashkenazi Jew and his adopted daughter, who looked distinctively Yemenite. He was told that the girl had been brought from Israel and that Rabbi Bergman arranged adoptions of Yemenite babies in exchange for money:

> Hacohen: 'It wasn't a secret, they spoke about it openly. I wasn't thinking then about stolen babies. I was just wondering why they are sending Israeli children to the U.S.? So they told me that they are saving these souls; that there is this Jewish man that organizes the transference of these children. Everyone who was looking for a child to adopt contacted Bergman or Mr. Thatch, the father of the girl that I met.'
>
> (*Haaretz* September 5, 1997)

Rabbi Bergman was a powerful leader of the American Orthodox community. In the 1970s, he was found guilty of fraud in connection with a group of elder homes that he owned in New York. After Bergman's conviction, the American Yemenite community's leader, Shimshon Giat, suggested that the Kedmi Commission's investigator meet with the American district attorney who had incriminated Bergman. Giat thought that incriminating evidence from a secret taping of Bergman's phone calls would link him to the sale of Yemenite babies. The district attorney who had prosecuted Bergman was happy to cooperate with the Israeli investigation. However, the Israeli investigator cancelled two meetings despite a visit to New York (*Haaretz* September 5, 1997).

When asked by Mashiah why this line of investigation was neglected, the investigator replied, "I can't investigate in the US, it should be done between the two governments."

In his final article, entitled "Gray Kidnapping" (*Haaretz* August, 29, 1997), Mashiah summarized his findings. Despite a significant amount of incriminating evidence, he concluded,

> There was not an organized connection to steal babies, but the circumstances created a gray process of transferring dozens of children to adopting families without informing their parents.
>
> (*Haaretz* August 29, 1997)

Mashiah's dismissal of the possibility of organized kidnapping was puzzling in light of the exposed lies of some interviewees: the nurses and ambulance drivers who admitted to taking children and then not returning

them to their parents and the fact that only Yemenite babies were separated from their parents. Moreover, in his last four articles, Mashia demonstrated how the Kedmi Commission failed to run a proper investigation. While he provided the reader with enough evidence to dismiss the findings of this commission, he nevertheless claimed that there was no organized effort to kidnap these babies.

Conclusions of the Investigative Commission

In November 2001, the Kedmi Commission published its conclusions after almost seven years of work. *Maariv* and *Yediot Aharonot* published two-page feature articles with identical titles: "The Yemenite Babies were Not Kidnapped" (November 5, 2001). Both newspapers had a celebratory tone and an eagerness to put the story to rest.

Yediot Aharonot featured the story on its front page. The title was in large font red letters against a background of a smiling Ashkenazi nurse holding a happy Yemenite child. The article reinforced the notion that "three commissions have investigated the matter exhaustively." A sidebar conveyed the opinion of Yemenite activists who rejected these conclusions, but no legal counterarguments were presented.

The article in *Maariv* said,

> The commission determines that there is no proof to the claim that babies were kidnapped by the institution or stolen intentionally . . . The judges determined that kids that were given for adoption were kids that their parents didn't come to visit them for a long time in the babies houses. The connection with their parents was cut off, or they recovered in hospitals and their parents could not be located.
>
> (*Maariv* November 5, 2001)

The article's author interviewed Mayor Yigal Yosef of Rosh Ha'ayin, who rejected the commission's findings, although his position had no legal backing. The strongest objection was made by Esther Hertzog, a professor of sociology and a columnist for *Maariv*. "The false conclusions of this Commission are a direct continuance to state crimes against the parents from the 1950s to this day" (*Maariv* November 11, 2001). Known for her critical views, Hertzog claimed that this commission only paid lip service, leaving much of the investigation out of the public eye.

> None of the discussions in the commission were shown on TV and many of the testimonies were closed to the public without any explanation. Files of important documents were not shown to the public and most importantly the commission didn't have any representative from the families and was composed of government trustees only.

Hertzog went so far as to say that to this day the government is taking babies from weak groups and giving them for adoption to the dominant group. "Therefore, it is important to keep silencing the methods with which the government takes control over citizens' children."

While the editorial in *Haaretz* supported overall the "end of story" tone, proclaiming that the "The Investigation was Exhausted" (November 6, 2001), the paper also printed the only in-depth critique of the commission's findings in two feature articles one month after they were published. The first article, written by Aviva Lori, was entitled "The Dead are Alive Again" and exposed contradictions in the findings:

> The first story is of two girls, Tziona Yosef and Tziona Salem: Salem, according to the third Commission, was born in January 1950. According to the second Commission, she disappeared from the Babies House in Rosh Haayin before she was born in August of 1949. Tziona Yosef, on the other hand, died according to Commission Number One in October of 1951, when she was two years old. According to Commission Number Two, she died in November 1951, and according to Commission Number Three, she was five months old when released from the hospital in Jaffa in March 1950. So who is buried where? Died, died, and missing determine three different commissions.
>
> (*Haaretz* December 7, 2001)

The second story is of a man declared dead by the previous two commissions and brought back to life by the last commission. However, the commission transferred the "dead" status to another boy who was declared missing until that point:

> When I saw the commission's report, I almost got a heart attack. My kids said: "Daddy got out of the pathology room." Now I understand why I was never drafted to the army, I had to initiate the draft myself. Now this commission brought me back to life again, thank God.

The article tied these stories to a larger picture, claiming that parents who had refused to accept the commission's findings were justified. In too many instances, the last commission, like its predecessors, presented conclusions on the basis of questionable documentation.

Haaretz was the only paper to dedicate a three-page spread about the commission's findings.[58] In the article entitled "Unanswered Questions" (*Haaretz* December 7, 2001) Ehud Ein-Gil raised many questions about the 1,800-page report. This represented the primary challenge in the media to the commission's conclusions: "A close perusal of the Kedmi Commission report gives rise to great many questions, which cast doubt on the panel's working methods, the criteria that guided its work and the accuracy of its conclusions."

After close examination, Ein-Gil defined the commission's report as "a big question mark rather than the end of the story." Missing from the document, as reported by Ein-Gil, was a general list of witnesses, a list of witnesses who had refused to testify, and references to witnesses who had withheld information from their testimony.

Further, the commission neglected to investigate who was responsible for concealing and burning hospital archives. In relation to one particular hospital whose documents, including the registration of newborns, from the 1960s had been destroyed, Ein Gil noted,

> Hospital Hillel Yafe was asked to preserve birthing records "but unfortunately, because of some administrative misunderstanding, the request was not respected and the records were destroyed." [quoted from the Commission's report] The commission doesn't explain the usage of this soft language or if there was any investigation to find out who was responsible for destroying these documents.
>
> (*Haaretz* December 7, 2001)

At times, the commission downplayed the role of key participants. For example, when government officials refused to cooperate with the investigation, they were only asked to apologize:

> It is unbelievable that the members of a public investigative commission are convinced that in government offices, there is archival material concealed from them and all they have to say is that 'they are sorry for that.' The commission also notes that social services, the primary agency in charge of adoptions, gave them only partial material regarding the relevant time for investigation. This is the heart of this Affair and what the commission had intended to investigate. How could they not be suspicious of a government office trying to withhold information from them? Was that not intended to influence their conclusions?

Moreover, Ein-Gil noted contradictory information in the report about the liability of documents. For example, in one place, the commission determined the death of 778 children with certainty, while in other places, commission members questioned the validity of medical documents: "In every case that the testimony of the parents contradicts the medical documents, the Commission chose to ignore the testimonies and stick to the documents."

The biggest blunder raised by Ein-Gil was the commission's forgiving attitude toward involved authorities. While the commission confirmed that many babies were separated from their families and possibly adopted, they did not hold hospital management or social workers accountable. They did not hold morticians accountable for burying hundreds of infants without the presence of their parents, which is a blatant disregard of religious obligation. While the report acknowledged poor treatment of

Yemenite people the commission neglected to name specific people to be held accountable:

> The report distinguishes between "institutionalized kidnapping" and "chance transfer for adoption." According to the report, "even a chance transfer for adoption means removing babies from their parent's care without their knowledge or consent." The commission members admitted that when government officials found out about cases in which babies disappeared, the necessary steps to end this phenomenon were not taken.

Despite these alleged criminal acts, the commission was gentle in its language when referring to these omissions or to government responsibility:

> It looks like they [the commission] searched for the gentlest words in the Hebrew language. The words guilty, for instance, or neglect or malicious neglect are all absent from the report (is it because such terminology could be the basis for a civil lawsuit against the Jewish agency?). Also, the word omission seemed too strong for the commission. In the end, they chose the words helplessness and administrative failure.

In response to Ein-Gil's questions, a courthouse spokesperson said, "The Commission has finished its work, and the material would soon be available to anyone who wants to look at it."

CHAPTER 4

MEDIA DISCOURSE: COVERAGE, COVER-UP, AND CRITICISM

> We used to leave healthy babies in the hospital; the next day I would ask them "where are the babies?" and they would say that they are gone. They died. What do you mean died? They were healthy. Nothing was wrong with them. Today when they say that they died, it's not true. They were sent for adoption, mostly to the U.S.[1]
>
> (Nurse Ruja Kuchinski 1994)

The historical review of the Yemenite Babies Affair raises questions about Western domination, national identity, "otherness," memory, and the silencing from dissenters of the status quo. The media coverage was inconsistent and mostly supported the government version of events. Coverage appeared primarily in waves responding to government investigations; the Affair was otherwise suppressed and forgotten. Most importantly, the media's main role was in framing this Affair as a "Yemenite problem." The title, "The Yemenite Babies Affair," was the biggest barrier in the discourse; it set the tone for the overall framing of the coverage, thus never transforming the discourse to questions of state and society's responsibility. As Cornel West argued in *Race Matters* (1993, 2–3), part of the problem in the public discourse about race is that it considers black people as "problem" people "rather than consider what this way of viewing black people reveals about us as a nation." In this chapter, I analyze the media discourse of the Affair locating what Stuart Hall terms "strategies of representation" and revealing the power behind the production of knowledge about this narrative as well as its practical devastating consequences.

Silencing Dissenters

In looking back, patterns of silencing dissenters were predictable. As shown in the previous chapter, media coverage was anecdotal and the newspapers rarely initiated their own investigations. Apart from some dialogue in the 1990s[2], mainstream media assumed a passive role in deliberating the Affair. This was not an innocent discourse because, as Hall (1992, 194) notes, it did not "represent an encounter between equals."

To use Hall's framework, the discourse of the Yemenite Babies Affair represents a classic example of what he terms "the discourse of the West and the Rest." The media had the ultimate power to produce the public knowledge about this Affair. They constructed this discourse by classifying society into simplistic categories, constructing distorted images, and providing models of comparison through difference. The hegemonic system of representation created a discourse that overall helped maintain the Zionist authority over the validity of events, especially by actively silencing the potentially explosive versions of the story. As Hall (1990, 224) noted, "Every regime of representation is a regime of power." Thus, the close link of power/knowledge, a la Foucault, can explain how the media used its power not only to distort information but also to block knowledge perceived as "too explosive." As Yael Tzadok, a journalist with Israeli radio, said, "The separating line that usually exists between the press, the political and juridical establishment, which is essential to democracy, disappeared in this case. The press and the establishment have been welded into one entity, which made a combined, two-headed effort to bury the story" (Interview, summer 2008).

One of the main strategies used by the media was denying access to Yemenite families and activists seeking further investigation and demanding answers from authorities. Yemenite activist Rafi Shubeli, who tracked and documented the Affair's coverage, said he was personally silenced on several occasions. He further claimed that while the media sensationalized individual stories for rating purposes, it consistently silenced the Yemenite community when activists tried to make claims that were perceived as "dangerous." At the same time the media magnified state authorities narrating this Affair publicly, thus weakening the Yemenite community. This became an especially "easy" task when the Affair became associated with Rabbi Meshulam's revolt, which delegitimized criticism and put critics on the defensive.

Ilana Dayan, a prominent Ashkenazi journalist and the host of the show *Uvda* on Channel Two, was one of few journalists to break this silence. She said,

> There is a gap between the depth of the pain, the magnitude of the Affair, and the media treatment. I know that every Yemenite can tell you a story about a family member who lost a child, yet the Ashkenazi lay person will still tell you that it didn't happen. The ability to prevent the Yemenites from having an effective form of expression for so long is unbelievable. Especially because we think of ourselves as an open society, but the truth is that different groups in society have no access to power focal points and effective forms of expression.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

On a global scale and in Israel, Western domination has relied upon silencing voices of minorities in the media and government as well as in public protest. Arguing for "making the silences speak," Ella Shohat (1989, 1993) demonstrated, for instance, how Mizrahi Jews and women have been silenced in Israeli cinema. Smadar Lavie (1996) claimed that even voices of Mizrahi authors were rejected from the center, making them feel pushed back to the margins. Similarly, Israel's media outlets perpetuated such thinking, denying access to the Yemenite perspective. As Yemenite activist, Shubeli said, "There was a discourse in the media about us but without us, and it looks completely natural to them" (Interview, summer 2001).

Yael Tzadok, a Yemenite journalist for Israeli radio, talked about her experience with the media's silencing:

> This is one of the greatest failures of the Israeli Press. The very basic standpoint of journalism should be doubting the state authorities. This is the engine, the "raison d'etre" of this profession. In the Israeli case, the bulk of the media, including senior journalists, big newspapers and prestigious radio and TV programmers, either ignored the Affair or, worse, eagerly and actively silenced it, consistently supporting the state authorities. It was especially evident during the work of the Investigative Committee. Parents testified about their babies having been kidnapped, really tormented and heart-breaking testimonies and they were ignored. In addition, key witnesses testified that they have been threatened not tell the truth in court. Moreover, some testimonies were declared confidential, which is odd, if there was no massive kidnapping of babies, as they claimed, what is there still to keep away from the public's eye? And yet the press has shut its eyes, its ears, and its mouth, just like the three monkeys.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

PUBLIC DENIAL OF THE AFFAIR AND THE REGIME OF TRUTH

While complaints of disappearing/kidnapped children were lodged with the government as early as 1950, the media published only few isolated stories. A more extensive coverage did not emerge until the mid-1960s,

primarily in the form of questioning the very existence of the Affair. Denial ruled the discourse: that is, kidnapping babies from their parents in the state of Israel was inconceivable and therefore could not have happened. The press considered the notion to be so outrageous that accusers and victims were subject to counterattacks for making such obscene claims.[3]

The media, as well as the different commissions investigating the matter, treated the Yemenite Babies Affair with what Boaz Sanjero (2002) terms "lack of epistemology of suspicion."[4] *Maariv* (October 9, 1996) stated, "Lost children are not an acceptable phenomenon in this country." Another *Maariv* article asked, "Don't you think that if these accusations were true, the police would have opened some files to investigate theses kidnapping matters?" (October 9, 1996). Phrases such as "this is some story" or "despite the evidence, some people claim" continually created doubt about the veracity of the Affair. To this day, Yemenite activists say that some Israeli citizens, especially the secular Ashkenazi group, still have doubts about whether the Affair really occurred, which continues to distress the Yemenite community.

The Western media exercised their power by operating in what Michel Foucault (1980, 131) called the "regime of truth." As Foucault explained, what is accepted as "truth" is the basis for distinguishing between other true and false statements. Foucault argues that the power to produce influential discourse is implicit in the power to make it true. In other words, media discourse is one system through which power operates in society. In Israel, the Zionist meta-narrative (Shohat 1988, 1990) is accepted as the regime of truth.[5] According to this narrative, Jews were victims of anti-Semitism through the ages and were rescued into life in their homeland. This self-perception of Jews as victim and the motive of 'rescue' are the cornerstones of the regime of truth in the Israeli state. This meta-narrative, as Uri Ram (2006) claimed, is deeply rooted in what constitutes the "common sense" of Israeli life.

While the rationale of victims can be used to justify oppression, it is morally contradicted by the Yemenite Babies story. The Jews, in addition to being victims, have victimized others, on a racial basis, within a decade of the Holocaust. The Israeli regime of truth cannot allow for the existence of this perspective. The media therefore used the power of the accepted "truth" and collective knowledge it generated to dismiss the Yemenite Babies Affair out of hand. The subsequent denial was easily accepted by the public and strongly supported by historians, reporters, and other authority figures charged with selecting, presenting, and archiving information. As activist Shubeli explains, some vital questions were absent from the media discourse:

> How is it possible that in a democratic state, so many people are living with an unresolved pain for so long? Why is Yemenite pain not legitimate? If the

> media really wanted to expose this Affair, they should have tackled it nonstop. Instead of initiating investigation, they mainly relied on the information they got from secondary sources.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Moral outrage on the part of mainstream Ashkenazi society silenced discussion for decades, as witnessed by the press' refusal to address the Affair properly. Moreover, the link between the power of authority figures and the power of the media played a significant role as well. To use Foucault's notion of discourse, authority figures, such as doctors and nurses, constituted the power behind generating this discourse. In examining this link between knowledge, power and discourse I don't wish to search for the ultimate true discourse but to analyze competing discourses, to locate the power struggle behind them, and point to practical powerful gains. As Hall (1992, 293) said, "It is power, rather than the facts about reality which make things true."

Individuals willing to refute Yemenite accusations, such as anonymous nurses and doctors, were presented as authorities despite a lack of corroborating evidence. This became a major tactic of the media to silence discussion. Quotes often came from people such as absorption camp doctors, nurses, and others who might have been implicated in investigations of the Affair. Camp doctors and nurses unequivocally denied wrongdoing. Their statements became the backbone of arguments used to silence challenges to the government line. Foucault (1972) referred to this strategy as "discourse formation." Sample statements, taken from different newspapers at different times, included "No Child was Released from the Hospital Not to Its Legal Parents" (*Davar* February 17, 1966); "Never, Never was a Child Released from the Hospital without Identification" (*Tel Aviv* December, 20, 1985); and "All the People Working in the Camps, with no Exception, Were Honest People" (*Maariv* April, 1, 1966).

These articles served to banish a suspicion that children were intentionally separated from their parents[6] while emphasizing the good work of clinical staff at the camps. Edward Said (1978) noted that the Western establishment gained authority over a given text or historical event in part through the testimony of academic experts and journalists. Seemingly, these "experts" determined the acceptable limits of controversy within the "truth," which rendered their statements "true." Experiences of Yemenite parents were viewed as exaggerated tales that emanated from disorganization and cultural misunderstanding. Or worse, Yemenite parents were seen as traitors working against unity within the Israeli state or as people who were undermining the truth. In addition to eyewitnesses sure to present a biased account of events, the media presented experts such as historians Deborah Hacohen and Tom Segev, neither of whose research

focused on this Affair in depth,[7] claiming that the Yemenite Babies Affair never happened.

The Kedmi Commission took a similar approach clearly preferring state official testimonies in authenticating the state's point of view. Suitable "experts" were chosen if their testimony fit the Kedmi Commission's needs. As Sanjero (2002, 49) noted, the Kedmi Commissions forgave "severe actions and omissions" on behalf of camp medical workers and other authorities "and even the suspicion of crimes worse than obstruction of justice were glossed over and forgotten."

Strategies of Containment

A strict policy of information containment was another method used by the media to control the discourse about this Affair. New discoveries about the Affair, especially during the Kedmi Commission's work in the late 1990s, that defied the government and mainstream media line were frequently presented as "well documented" and often "shocking." However, incriminating evidence was undermined or contained by well-orchestrated counterarguments. Though often unsubstantiated, they nevertheless created an air of uncertainty and controversy about undisputed facts.

Yediot Aharonot (December 12, 1994), for example, reported the testimony of camp nurse Ruja Kuchinski who witnessed the kidnapping of Yemenite babies. But while her testimony appeared in a small box on the bottom of the page, the two-page article "celebrated" the Shalgi Commission's findings under the title "We Didn't Discover Any Kidnapped Baby." Moreover, *Yediot Aharonot* featured several testimonies from camp nurses that described the diligent and responsible work of nurses in the face of difficult circumstances. Their story granted more weight and authority than any testimony to the contrary. These nurses claimed, "Accusations of kidnapping were a lie" (*Yediot Aharono*t May 23, 1994). *Yediot Aharonot* did not investigate the issue. Further testimony from nurses and doctors, however, swayed public discourse toward the government's position despite the illusion of a balanced presentation.

For almost 50 years, media coverage[8] fostered uncertainty rather than focusing on the kidnapping allegations. Questions were not about who kidnapped these babies? Why and how? Rather, efforts were centered on denying the Affair. Allegations of kidnapped children and government incompetence were lost or dismissed in a haze of uncertainty.

The media refused to support accusations of babies stolen by the government without hard evidence. Oddly, the government was the only acceptable source of hard evidence and was never pressed to explain the mysterious disappearance of archives or even loss of documents during the formal investigation.[9] As Sanjero (2002, 54) noted, the commission never made

an attempt to investigate this "loss" of information "right under its nose." Information from Yemenite families, activist groups, or nurses admitting to kidnappings, however, was considered to be anecdotal evidence that could not support valid conclusions. For other viewpoints to be validated, the government would have to incriminate itself, which was not likely to happen. In an effort to gain more power, the press never mentioned this conflict of interest. It did not call for an appropriate investigation or expose corruption of the first two investigations in the 1960s and 1980s.

In his legal analysis of the Kedmi Commission's conclusion Sanjero (2002, 48), wrote, "My main conclusion, based on acceptable legal text analysis, is that the commission's work is lacking the most fundamental basis for investigative work: epistemology of suspicion." According to Sanjero, suspicion of criminal acts was not considered at any stage of the commission 's work. Rather, he said, the commission was engaged in "a discussion" about this Affair.

When Iris Oded, a Yemenite journalist and editorial coordinator for *Uvda,*[10] wanted to produce the show about the Yemenite Babies Affair, the show's Editorial team pressured her to first gather hard evidence.[11] The show's producers said they would go ahead with the story only if I could find an adopted child, her adoptive mother, and biological parents who will all agree to appear on camera. It took a year and a half to get the story. Iris Oded said,

> The Yemenite Babies Affair was a hard story for the media to digest. They always wanted hard proof without fully understanding the complexity of getting a proof in this case. It is an anti Zionist story that breaks myths. If you examine who occupies the important positions in the media, it is understandable why the story did not come out right. The first show we aired on *Uvda*, it was a miracle that it came out the way it did.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Ilana Dayan, the show's host, recognized that following, what she called, her "Western journalistic standards" and insisting on getting an adoptive mother, child, and biological family, caused a delay in the airtime of the story. This pressure, she said, was not in favor of the Yemenite tragedy:

> The Ashkenazi hegemony in the media was absolute and that made the silencing possible over time. I think it was wrong to wait so long. It is true that I would not compromise on the Western journalist standards even though I knew the story was true, I still needed to convince myself that it really happened. I was looking for the ultimate evidence [a child, adoptive parents and biological parent] before I could air this story. However, I know that even if I didn't get this evidence, it doesn't mean that the story didn't happen.
>
> (Interview, Summer, 2001)

LENGTH OF INVESTIGATION

Shoshi Zaid (2001) noted the Yemenite's demand to investigate this Affair before 1948 and after 1954 was completely ignored by the media and the government. The Kedmi Commission was appointed by the government to investigate the disappearance of babies between 1948 and 1954. Complaints filed prior to 1948 or after 1954 were not included in the investigation (101). Extending the investigation time period could have unearthed valuable information about the Affair. Despite the fact that Meshulam's organization continually raised this point, it was never mentioned by the press.

BABIES FROM OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

Only a handful of small stories about other Mizrahi ethnic groups were published by the press or acknowledged by the government over the years. In fact, when claims were brought to the Kedmi Commission or to the earlier inquiry commissions, the commissions would say that the government had given them a mandate to investigate only Yemenite babies. According to Zaid (2001), the Kedmi Commission agreed to hear testimony of parents from other ethnic groups in response to pressure from the Yemenite community. One-third of the parents who filed complaints about kidnapped children with the Kedmi Commission were from other Mizrahi ethnic groups, although this information was not publicly recognized. The Affair continued to be seen by the public as the Yemenite Babies Affair.

The media did not take a stand on the issue as it had not taken a position about the overall investigation. Published stories were anecdotal and personal, as had been the stories of Yemenite babies. Newspapers placed such stories as small news items. Reports about disappeared babies included some from Algeria (*Maariv* June 29, 1995), Tunisia (*Davar*, July 20, 1985) Iraq, Libya, and Kurdistan (*Yediot Aharonot* September 1, 1996), and even a Romanian baby (*Hadashot* July 12, 1985; *Yediot Aharonot* September 19, 1995). Most of these stories were reported as isolated incidents that did not connect to a wider phenomenon or demand that the government expand the investigation beyond Yemenite babies. In contrast, however, a few stories that appeared about an Ashkenazi baby were disproportionately magnified.

Rabbi Meshulam was the lone voice insisting upon an investigation of kidnapped babies from all Mizrahi ethnic groups. Every protest sign and pamphlet of the Meshulam group talked about children from Yemen and other Mizrahi groups. Rabbi Meshulam also documented many stories of kidnapped babies from other ethnic groups in his publication *Even Ma'asu Haboni.*

Minimizing the Affair and Denying Mizrahi Pain

The Yemenite Babies Affair is a story of Jews victimized by Jews. While the Zionist narratives accept Jewish victimization of Palestinians as a distasteful necessity, they are extremely uncomfortable with the concept of Jew victimizing of other Jews. Relative to the Affair, the government had to either deny the incident or make two unacceptable admissions: (1) the government had broken/or overlooked the law and (2) racism against Jews was acceptable under certain conditions. Minimizing the Affair and parents' pain was necessary in order to avoid these new and disturbing categories of victims/victimizers.

Many of my interviewees, prominent journalists and activists such as Shaul Bibi, Sami Shalom Chetrit, and Yossi Dahan, claimed that the government's primary motive in silencing and minimizing the Yemenite Babies Affair was to preserve Zionist ideology and Ashkenazi hegemony. A common thread ran through their responses. Each felt that the media, knowingly or not, was dominated by Zionist ideology, which was grounded in the notion that the Jewish people's strength lay in their ability to work together. Accordingly, most journalists felt that maintaining unity was a shared responsibility. They operated in what Gramsci's termed "hegemony by consent," not by coercion.

In practice, it became an unofficial, self-imposed censorship that called attention to Israel's achievements and denied media access to issues threatening this unity. Between the promotion of Israeli unity in public consciousness and constant media reinforcement, the first reaction to the Yemenite Babies Affair was often incredulity. Newspaper editors responded with disbelief. My own experience at *Yediot Aharonot* exemplified these points. My editor did not believe that the stories of stolen Yemenite babies were true and he said in so many words. Despite my assertion that my own relatives had been victims, he still asked, 'come on, do you really believe people kidnapped babies in Israel?' It took a great deal of convincing before any article would be published and even then, it was given a marginal spot in the paper.

Yael Tzadok, a journalist with Israeli radio, experienced similar attitudes around her, which she attributes in part to our inability to face the meaning of this Affair:

> It is a crime that is very hard to perceive something so inhuman that was committed to Jews by other Jews. It is hard for us to cope with that. I think that we might not be ready to look in this mirror.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

Yossi Dahan, a professor of philosophy in the Open University and a columnist for *Yediot Aharonot*, agreed with Tzadok's assertion. He

claimed that the Yemenite Babies issue was an extreme example of Mizrahi oppression:

> It is not just one more issue; it is a crime with no remorse. It is a crime with no equivalent in Israeli history. The Ashkenazi elite will do anything to deny this crime. They will not let any real investigation take place because they see themselves as the eternal victims.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Ben Dror Yemini, a longtime columnist for *Maariv*, said the Yemenite Babies Affair was "an oppressive discourse."

> At first, I accepted the institution's version of the story because I always prefer to be skeptical. Then, I understood that a massive silencing is going on here. Moreover, it is not a discourse that operates with an apparatus from above. It mostly operated through self-censorship. We grew up on the notion that we are innocent and pure; no one is willing to face a different truth now. It is true that recently we had a wave of new historians criticizing Zionism, but I have not seen any Benny Morris talking about Mizrahi issues. It may be popular now to advocate for the Palestinian issue but it is never popular to talk about Mizrahi oppression.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

The pain of Yemenite parents was minimized. As Mizrahi activists noted, it was not recognized even by Israel's most liberal political camp. When Mizrahi tragedy was compared to the Holocaust for example, it rendered the Yemenite Babies Affair as less worthy of being part of public memory.

Yosef Dahoah-Halevi, a Yemenite activist and the publisher of the alternative journal *Afikim*, followed media discussions for 50 years:

> At first, they ignored the Yemenites completely. Then the institution claimed that these are people with a typical Mizrahi imagination. Up until now, the institution did all they could to cover it up. The media simply played to the hands of the institution by not initiating its own investigation, by publishing only little stories and not criticizing the government's lack of action.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Avner Farhi is an activist who researched the Affair in the early 1990s, as a journalist for a small local newspaper in Hadera. Farhi's sister had been kidnapped in 1951 from Camp Ain-shemer. During his research, he encountered media outlets that withheld information from him and other Yemenites of his generation. Noting that second generation Yemenite activists could view themselves as second-generation Holocaust survivors,

he was the first to make this connection on the show *Uvda* (February 13, 1996) on Channel Two. Farhi said,

> I am personally frustrated. I was born in this state, I served in the army but the state is ignoring my basic human rights. It is as if only one group in this country has ownership over history and even over pain. Only Ashkenazi pain is legitimate. The media minimized the pain by forming a discourse through isolated stories where parent's pain was dismissed. State authorities were presented as if they were not responsible for some children who disappeared. Rather it was the theory of the 'mess' that controlled the discourse and that led to blaming the parents instead of recognizing their pain.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Activists felt that other considerations were discounted, such as the theft of jewelry, clothing,[12] and antique handwritten Bibles from the Yemenite community. The three commissions ignored these matters and did not treat the theft of valuable possessions during the Yemenite immigration to Israel as important aspect of the investigation. Yemenite and head rabbi of the city Benei-Berak, Rabbi Korah's well-known family had a large collection of antiques and handwritten bibles that were stolen as well as antique writings of Yemenite leaders from his family that were saved from Babylonian times. He said,

> When we arrived here, the Zionists had taken from us our books. My family had 5,000 ancient holy books stolen from us. There is a room in the Vatican full of Yemenite Judaica and a collection from a seminar in Israel. I had found two books with my father's handwriting after they told me that all the books were burned in the fire.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

The consistent and forceful refusal of the media and the government to link the theft of books and jewelry as part of the overall investigation of this Affair recalls Shohat's critique of the Israeli theoretical desire to leap from Zionism to post-Zionism as well as to celebrate postcolonial hybridity without engaging in depth with the colonial dimensions of Zionist discourse and practices "on the ground." Narratives of Yemenites and other Mizrahi Jews in Israel are still "colonized" by the Zionist power to dictate the stories that will make it to the public sphere. The power of this oppressive discourse is still very much part of the present, demonstrating why it's premature to celebrate hybridity without fully deconstructing this discourse.

PERSONALIZING THE AFFAIR

Since the 1960s, stories featuring Yemenite families while sometimes blaming the victims, still expressed sympathy for the families of lost children,

but ignored the magnitude of the Affair. Personalization, a media tactic designed to sidestep broader issues, was successfully used with regard to the Yemenite Babies Affair.

A focus on individual stories usually featured similar scenarios of disappearance without any further investigation. In retrospect, the many different stories published over the years, blended into one story with different names. This form of storytelling isolated and set Yemenites apart creating what Paul Gilroy (1997, 313) terms "identity as sameness," which can be manipulated for political reasons. A former prominent journalist for *Haaretz*, Hanna Kim, said the media wanted to keep this Affair as a Yemenite and not a national problem; thus, keeping the narrative at the personal story level was vital.

This discourse exemplifies Hall's (1989, 445) description of racist discourse. "Racism," he said, "operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories." The Yemenites were alienated and defined as the "other" by the dominant group. And the discourse was constructed through what Hall calls a "binary system of representation." This was done, as Oren Soffer (1998) noted, among other things by using pictures of "typical Yemenites," often unrelated to the issue covered, and using direct quotes that stressed their "broken Hebrew." This coverage sharpened the divisions of "us" and "them" to the degree that even possible coalitions with human rights groups, woman's groups, or any other social organization on the left were never formed. The Yemenite Babies Affair remained solely a Yemenite problem. Moreover, Mizrahi activists say a possible coalition with the left was never formed partially due to the mostly European domination of the Israeli left. Activist Shubeli said when he tried to request the help of a human rights organization he got a very "polite and cold" response.[13]

The disconnection of this narrative from the national arena made many Yemenites feel excluded once again. In *Discourse in Zion*, G.N. Giladi (1990, 110) claimed that alienation and oppression of the Yemenite community by Ashkenazi institutions were harsher than treatment of other Oriental ethnic groups. He attributed this to the Yemenites' projecting more "Arabness" than other ethnic groups. As seen in the historical review of the Yemenites relationship with Zionism, this case demonstrated the duality of racist discourse. The Yemenites were seen as "nice" "sweet" "likeable" but at the same time "filthy" and "strange." This duality generated as Hall said both fear and desire, thus also complicating the structure of their otherness.

Rabbi Korah claimed that he felt alienated in Israel already upon arrival in 1949. After 50 years, he said, he is still disappointed by the lack of support for Yemenite community:

> When I arrived to Israel in 1949, I was accepted with a patronizing attitude. I was alienated and called 'Yemenite' while in the Diaspora, I was Jewish.

> There was no solidarity here; I could not believe how much a stranger I felt in the Jewish state. They thought that we were weird animals. What happened to Mizrahim here is cultural vandalism. Today fifty years later, our cultural and intellectual state is much worse.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

A sense of alienation was common among other Yemenites activists. Shubeli established a non-profit organization called *Amutat Yogev* to advocate for a proper investigation of the Yemenite Babies Affair. In following the media, he, too, found that the discourse focused solely on personal stories to the exclusion of input from other knowledgeable witnesses:

> The stories were mainly personal and shallow. I was barely interviewed because I am too serious for the media; they do not want to hear what I have to say. There wasn't any attempt from the media to investigate this Affair properly; it is always presented as an isolated tragedy of one mother. The Affair was never covered with the intensity one would expect from such a shocking story.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Western media's inclination toward sensationalist stories rather than substance has been criticized by Mizrahi intellectuals and activists in a similar vein to critiques of black intellectuals in the United States such as bell hooks and Cornel West. When activists wanted to break the familiar pattern of individual stories and raise the issue of race or talk about the overall discrimination that might have led to this Affair, they were rejected. Rafi Aharon, a playwright and Yemenite activist, said he was continually frustrated by his attempts to interest journalists in new ways to consider the Affair:

> Over the years, the media ignored and denied the story. I always tried to interest journalists in the details I found. However, only occasionally did they take a story and even then managed to make it a private case and not part of a large phenomenon. These stories appeared only on the individual emotional level. The only thing that helped a little was the development of the local press; there were more places to get these stories out.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

TERMINOLOGY AND MISREPRESENTATION OF THE INVESTIGATION

Inaccurate terminology for the Yemenite Babies Affair has been a core strategy in the representation of this Affair. As Hall (1992) noted, terminology is instrumental to how a conflict is seen and how meaning in constructed.

Different terminologies will represent the same story in a profoundly different ways constructing sometimes opposite meaning to the text.

The three most inaccurate terminologies used by the media were the label "Yemenite Children Affair," preferring the term "disappearance" over the term "kidnapped," and referring to each inquiry commission as an investigative commission. All served the need to deflect the government's mishandling of the Affair. Preferring the term disappeared over kidnapped is obvious, since the latter implies criminal suspicious that, as mentioned earlier was completely absent, even from the investigation of the public commission's work. The terminology used by the media exemplifies the heart of exclusion of Yemenite narratives.

The term "Yemenite Children Affair" was used, as Soffer (1998) claimed, as a "code word" that was very convenient for several reasons. First, it allowed the media to operate on a superficial level instead of engaging in complex examination of harsh accusation. Second, it represented the Affair, in a way that helped the media and the government to minimize it. Admitting this was not only a Yemenite story would only turn the Affair into a much bigger problem, and insisting on the term "Babies" makes the story more tragic. As evident even by the commission problematic report, however, thirds of the cases were of babies of other Mizrahi ethnic groups and most of the babies were indeed infants and not children.

Lastly, media stories focused on the need to end the investigations and bring the Affair to closure using misleading terminology. Almost exclusively,[14] articles and broadcast shows referred to the three government commissions as "investigative commissions." In reality, the Bahalul-Minkovski (1967–1968) and Shalgi (1988–1994) were inquiry commissions while the Kedmi Commission (1995–2001) was the only investigative commission.

MINIMAL COVERAGE OF THE INVESTIGATION

In addition to giving the public misleading information about the nature of the investigation, coverage by the three commissions was irregular. The last and only investigative commission discouraged the press from covering the Affair during the investigation and the press acquiesced. One journalist said Judge Kedmi reprimanded her for raising this issue while the Kedmi Commission was still working.

As a result, press coverage of commission work was sporadic at best. Unlike other important public commissions, reporters were not regularly assigned to cover commission meetings, which resulted in long periods of silence. According to Zaid (2001), many in the Yemenite community complained about the media's "thin" coverage of the commission 's investigation and interpreted it as lack of care in the outcome. Activist

Avner Farhi also said that the lack of press coverage contributed to public disinterest in the Affair. He thought that more intensive coverage of testimonies might have created a more open and broad discussion. For example, repeated coverage of the testimony of involved nurses might have encouraged others to testify (Zaid 2001, 119). Farhi said he placed numerous phone calls to editors of daily newspapers and Israeli Radio to complain about improper coverage of the Kedmi Commission's meetings. His complaints went unanswered. In his testimony to the Kedmi Commission, Farhi said that the lack of adequate media coverage violated his rights as a citizen and made him feel like a "stepchild" in Israeli society:

> The current commission was never covered consistently; it was very difficult to bring reporters to the commission's hearings. The commission's actions were not examined and not criticized by the media. As an activist, it was very frustrating to face this reality on a daily basis.

Yigal Yosef, former mayor of Rosh Ha'ayin and a veteran Yemenite activist, appealed to the Supreme Court for better media coverage of commission hearings. After all, he said, a public investigative commission by definition would address matters of public interest. He was especially pointing to Channel One, which is publicly funded and as such obliged to reflect all social groups in society. The Supreme Court denied the appeal, claiming that it could not force the media to cover commission hearings. The Court also stated that the Yemenite Babies Affair was not necessarily a matter of public interest (Zaid, 2001, 120).

Zaid (2001) also proclaimed that the Kedmi Commission had been disrespectful to the Yemenite community by neglecting to notify the public of meeting cancellations in advance, a point that was never addressed by the media.

> The media barely covered the meetings of the investigative commission and did not criticize their tendency to disregard the published schedule or to decide that some testimonies will be heard behind closed doors without notifying the public of such decisions. In the testimony of Ruja Kuchinski, for instance, the commission canceled the hearing at the last minute disrespecting tens of Yemenite people waiting by the door. The media did not relate this violation at all.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Zaid said she personally witnessed disrespectful treatment of Yemenite parents by the Kedmi Commission. She received no response to letters she wrote to journalists or to the Israeli Human Rights Organization. "I felt as a citizen who is ashamed of her country" (45). When a commission

hearing she hoped to attend was canceled, Zaid wrote to the president of the Supreme Court, Judge Aharon Barak:

> It is over a year now that I am studying the Yemenite Babies Affair. Slowly but surely, I am starting to feel ashamed of my country . . . On August 2nd, 1995, I traveled from my house in the Northern Negev to Jerusalem to be present at the Commission's hearing and realized that the disrespectful attitude continues. Without an announcement in the media, the Commission canceled its hearing for the day. They knew about this cancellation in advance but didn't bother to notify the public. Outside the hearing hall more then fifty parents, family members and just concerned citizens were terribly frustrated.
>
> (45)

Zaid recounted that the judge Aharon Barak's reply was almost more shocking than the canceled hearing. The letter stated that the court would be unable to respond to Ms. Zaid's complaint without details about who the commission members were and where their meetings were held.[15]

In 1998, Zaid wrote to Uri Porat, the general manager of the broadcasting authority, to protest the overall lack of coverage of the Affair. Porat said that he forwarded the complaint to the news department manager. Zaid was told that the authority lacked the budget to fully cover events connected to the Yemenite Babies Affair. After reviewing what was on the air, Zaid iterated her disappointment about the Authority's decision about what was newsworthy especially when compared with other events that were covered extensively.

For instance, a demonstration of the Meretz[16] youth organization that supported Yemenite parents was covered on television: "However, the hundreds of parents standing in the Knesset in front of them were not covered" (Zaid, 2001, 46). Other important events relating to the Affair were also ignored, including Knesset commission testimony and a large rally comprised of thousands of Yemenite families, Knesset members, and Yemenite performers in Jerusalem on May 5, 1998.

The media's disinterest was puzzling since this affair has all the ingredients of what is considered a "sexy" news story. Critical media coverage was even harder to find. The two major daily newspapers, *Maariv* and *Yediot Aharonot*, did not criticize the Kedmi Commission's work. The only form of criticism by the media was evident in the show *Uvda* (1996) on Channel Two, in a series of articles written by Yigal Mashiah in *Haaretz*, a series of articles in *Ha'ir* in (1985 and 1995), and in the article written by Ehud Ein-Gil upon the publication of the commission's conclusions in 2001, also in *Haaretz*. Shubeli, a Yemenite activist, said,

> The Commission's work was not criticized in the media, except for some articles in *Haaretz*. Serious oversights that should have been picked up by

> the media were ignored and neglected. For instance, the investigator of the previous two committees, Ami Hovav, was not questioned. When Avner Farhi asked Judge Kedmi why they were not investigating him, the Judge said, 'tell me what to ask him.' This ridiculous response by the Judge demonstrated the overall detachment from the details of the Affair; this was not picked up by any medium.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

In a detailed article in the journal *Afikim* (February 2002), Shubeli delineated legal problems with the Kedmi Commission that were not addressed by mainstream media. He mentioned the initial appointment of Judge Cohen, who was in his 70s and napped during hearings,[17] and his subsequent replacement with Judge Kedmi, who had not been present during most of the hearings; the elimination of relevant testimony; reliance on unauthenticated documents; and disregard of alleged involvement by key institution people.

Shubeli and Zaid raised these concerns directly with Judge Kedmi but were shocked to discover that the judge was not familiar with essential issues of the investigation. Again, the press turned a blind eye. Shubeli, Zaid, and other activists thought these major defects were severe enough to disqualify the commission's conclusions.[18]

Shimshon Giat, former president of the Yemenite Federation of America, agrees with the above assertions. He said that despite providing the commission with many documents he gathered and many leads to possible investigation lines in the United States they did not act on it.

> I mailed the commission many documents, I flew to Israel to testify and I never saw what they were doing with this material. This gives me a strong sense of injustice. I have all the documents to prove it, but what I see is a cover up. And I am a person with strong Zionist ties, who organized volunteers to Israel for years. I am disappointed because the government abused the people who love Israel the most.
>
> (Interview, summer 2008)

THE ORIENTAL JEWISH VICTIM

Since the early days of Zionism, Mizrahi Jews have been alienated and considered to be the "other" of Israeli society. As shown in Chapter 1 Mizrahi Jews were cheap labor and were discriminated against financially (Swirski 1981). Giladi (1990, 111) noted that "after the state of Israel was founded, discrimination became an overt policy. Ashkenazi immigrants were granted the best houses of the Palestinian refugees, or were given new houses free of charge." Rabbi Korah, a Yemenite leader who identified

alienation among the Jewish people, said he went through a difficult identity crisis that ultimately defined his life in Israel as life in the Diaspora:

> My identity crisis is a result of the selection process in the Zionist club; there are many similar clubs in Israeli society. I have reached a conclusion that we are in the Diaspora in this state, a Diaspora among brothers.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001).

Otherness of Yemenite victims was evident throughout the discourse of this Affair and constitutes the heart of the narratives told by the media. The system of representation as Hall noted always operates in connection to other systems in society. This connection was possible through what Said (1978) calls "archive" of knowledge already produced through other narratives. As evident in the historical examples and other media discourses about Mizrahim they were not only "othered," but as Said wrote, they were marked as "inferior others."

Images of Yemenite children in children's literature from the 1940s and 1950s were integrated in this discourse as well. In an article published in *Haaretz* (September 12, 1997), Yael Dar demonstrated how most stories not only describe the Yemenite children as primitive, weak, and miserable, but also as coming from poor, un-nurturing and sometimes abusive families. The obvious conclusion: good Ashkenazi adoptive families must rescue them. Dar reviewed a variety of stories and demonstrated how they reflected the ideology of the Ashkenazi establishment at the time, pointing to the good fortune of the Yemenite children who happened to integrate with Ashkenazim. "The best case scenario," she writes, "was in cases of adoption of Yemenite children by Ashkenazim. In many cases, this adoption was with the agreement of the hard working Yemenite mother."

Prominent Ashkenazi journalist, Shelly Yechimovish said the Yemenite babies conflict and its treatment by the media dehumanized the Yemenite community:

> It is clear that the absorbing Ashkenazi institution did not relate to the Yemenite people like equals. It was as if they were taking babies from a primitive tribe; they thought that maybe they did them a favor. When you dehumanize an entire group of people, you do not identify with their pain.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

In the case of the Yemenite Babies Affair it is important to examine the ideological frame of mind that placed Yemenites as "others" and served as the basis for constructing this discourse. The ideological formation of this Affair also exposes the link between power and knowledge in this discourse a la Foucault.

To uncover the powerful ideology of this discourse is to point to the public's perception of truth within the mainstream media and government's version of the Affair. As previously mentioned, Zionist ideology excluded Oriental Jews. European culture is considered to be superior and as such, assimilation, or even integration via adoption as suggested in the children's book mentioned above, is perceived as the only way to "save" Oriental Jews, redeeming them from their primal "sin" of forming part of the East (Shohat 1988). As shown in Chapter 2, Israeli media, which essentially monitored itself, was closely linked to government and Zionist ideology. As such the narrative never allowed for this story of Jews who victimized other Jews to become an urgent national story. As Lauren Berlant (1997, 7) noted, Westerners especially viewed victimhood as "unpatriotic" and a result of "victim-politics."

From the early articles about the Yemenite Babies Affair of the 1960s, the media portrayed Yemenite Jews as different in the most negative sense of the word. In a *Davar* article in 1966, Yemenite parents were described as seeing "for the first time in their life how to bathe a baby and how to change a baby's diaper" (*Davar* February 24, 1966). This view set the tone dismissing the Yemenites claims. In addition to being seen by Ashkenazim as "dirty, sick, and stupid," as some articles suggested, they were also seen to have little to do with their children and sparse knowledge of childcare. [19] Absorption camp staff told the press and the Kedmi Commission that Yemenite Jews were not terribly upset when told about the death of their children: "If a child died in the tent, they would say, 'God gives and God takes'" (*Davar* February 26, 1966). The Yemenites' religious belief in God, as the determinant of human fate, and their tendency to internalize pain were interpreted by Ashkenazi doctors and nurses as a lack of care. As Talal Asad (1993, 200) noted, the West tended to evaluate non-Western traditions "according to their distance from enlightenment and liberal models."

Moreover, the ideological assumption that Zionism 'rescued' Mizrahim, as Shohat noted, served to justify actions of adoption and even kidnapping. Ahuva Goldfarb, the head nurse of all absorption camp baby houses, went so far as to say, "Maybe we did them a favor" (Madmoni, 1996). The Yemenites were dehumanized beyond the categories of us/them, the Yemenite were viewed as inhuman 'things'.[20] When Sonia Milshtein, a charge nurse at the camp baby houses, was asked if, as a mother, she could understand the families' pain, she replied, "Oh, I hear this too much lately. After forty years I would have been happy that my child got a good education and a good family. Yes, that is how I would feel" (*Yoman* July 21, 1995)

Milshtein repeated this remark to the Kedmi Commission's prosecutor. When asked by the prosecutor about why she did not make it a priority

to make sure that babies were returned to their mothers, she said, "I had other things to worry about" (*Ha'ir* October 27, 1995).

In testimony given to the Kedmi Commission by Sara Perl, the chair of Wizo-Israel, Yemenite families were again characterized as people who did not want their children. When Perl asked her manager why parents were not claiming their children, she said, "They just don't want their children, they have too much going on" (*Ha'ir* November 3, 1995).

Head nurse, Sonia Milshtein, mentioned earlier, shocked the commission 's judge when she referred to Yemenite babies as "packages" and "carcasses" (*Ha'ir* October 27, 1995). The Kedmi Commission, however, did not reprimand her. Moreover, as opposed to hard questions directed at the Yemenite parents, Shubeli (2002) said that when the commission questioned nurses, doctors, and other government officials it was like "a casual conversation over a cup of coffee." In its final report, the investigative commission concluded that thousands of Yemenite parents deserted their children. Sanjero, who legally analyzed the commission's report, wrote,

> The possibility that Yemenite mothers carried their babies for nine months, then carried them on their hands through a long and hard journey on foot to Israel, through Hashed, would then desert them in the Babies Houses or hospital in Israel, is so unlikely that whoever gave these babies for adoption without making a considerable effort to locate the families and find out their will is a criminal.
>
> (58)

Sanjero (2002, 70–13) noted that only Yemenite parents were blamed in the commission 's final report. No other parties were held accountable for the separation of thousands of babies from their families or for the burial of babies without the knowledge or presence of their parents (if they had indeed died). The manifestation of us/them categories and viewing the Yemenites as "others" was evident not only in the way the Yemenite community was absorbed into Israel but also in the way the commission viewed the events, ultimately leading to separation of babies from their parents. The Commission assumed that "confusion" and "mix up" of babies happened because parents did not recognize their babies.[21] "Why would a parent not recognize his/her own child? Do the commission members think that they might not recognize their own children?" (Sanjero 2002, 70)

From the early years of the coverage of this Affair the media generally followed this formula characterizing parents as "having a tendency to forget about their children" (*Maariv* September 2, 1966); they were also often blamed for their silence (*Maariv* October, 12, 1966), or worse,

mothers were directly blamed for deserting their babies (*Yediot Aharonot* May 18, 1994). The above view of the Yemenite parents fits with Tzvetan Dodorov's (1984) analysis of racial "others," otherwise known as "either noble savages or filthy cows."[22] In any event, the Yemenites would always be seen in contrast to European Caucasians, as demonstrated in nurse Sonia Milshtein's testimony to the Kedmi commission. Milshtein pointed her finger at the Yemenite mothers claiming that she as a European mother would have searched better to find her child (*Yoman* July 21, 1995). Once again, her testimony demonstrated the power of the "binary system" of representation to produce both the knowledge and the meaning of this Affair.

Rabbi Korah recounted his family's experience and his feelings about the often voiced public accusation that the Yemenite did not do enough:

> They took my sister from my mother's hands. They said that she had a cold and then she was dead. We looked for her everywhere; it is not true that we were quiet about it. We just fought in a civilized way.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

The blame for not searching hard enough or worse, forgetting about their children, was the most difficult criticism for parents to hear. They were forced to defend themselves from false accusations as they relived their tragic losses. In Tzipi Talmor's documentary *Down ~~A~~ One Way Road* (1997), the following heartfelt testimony was given by Shlomo Bahagali, a Yemenite parent who searched for his son Hayim for 50 years:

> I am talking to you, Hayim; this was not my fault. This is the fault of the people in charge. It isn't at all like they said that we were not interested in the babies. It is a cruel lie. That is why I am talking to you, Hayim; please in God' s name, if you hear me, your ID number is 64703; please come back to me, let me rest in peace. I need to know that you are alive wherever you are.

The Yemenite Woman and the Palestinian Scientist

The case of Tzila Levine[23] is especially interesting because it aligned one Yemenite woman with a Palestinian scientist, against the state of Israel. Now a resident of the United States, Levine came to Israel in August 1997 to find her biological mother (see fig. 4.1). She requested a DNA test from Dr. Hatib, a Palestinian forensic scientist from Hebrew University. Although Dr. Hatib's results indicated a 99.99 percent match, the state refused to accept his findings. The family was sent to a state pathologist whose test results concluded that mother and daughter were unrelated. The Hebrew University,

Figure 4.1 Tzila Levine and Margalit Omeisi, March 27, 1997, by Amos Ben-Gershom.

later, claimed that Hatib's test was incorrect. Dr. Hatib no longer works for Hebrew University. Shimshon Giat (then president of the Yemenite Federation in the United States who had discovered Levine) proclaimed that the state pathology test was conducted "knowing that it would produce misleading results":[24]

> I have a testimony of a respectable American biochemist who explains why Dr. Hiss's test cannot be used to determine mother-daughter relations, yet the commission insisted on using his results and closing the case. This is a scientific fraud.[25]
>
> (Interview 2008)

Avner Farhi, a Yemenite activist who followed the case, said that the media and the state viewed the negative DNA test results provided by the state as ultimate proof that the Affair never happened.

> In the Tzila Levine's case, the media focused on the wrong issue. Instead of investigating how was it possible that a six months old girl disappears from the camps and arrives to a family in the Kibbutz, they focused on who is her biological mother. In addition, the request of the investigative commission for a second genetic testing has no legal precedent and no one in the media was challenging that. The media almost celebrated that the second testing was negative. You could feel their sigh of relief; it was as if the dignity of the state was saved and now this Affair should be finally closed.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

The media portrayed Dr. Hiss (the state pathologist) as a hero[26] and Dr. Hatib as an evil and misguided scientist. Reporters who dismissed Dr. Hatib's results ignored the fact that the tests and scientific methodology came from one of the most credible labs in Israel.[27] Those associating the West with progress, science, and humanism, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, 3) point out, by implication simultaneously patronize and demonize the non-West. Inconceivably, mainstream newspapers reported that Dr. Hiss's test was one hundred percent accurate.

Maariv's Michal Kafra (October 23, 1997) was the only newspaper reporter to present Dr. Hatib's opposing point of view and accompanying scientific evidence. Even here, however, the focus was on Dr. Hatib's emotions rather than on the science backing his premise. The article again played on the widely accepted notion that Orientals are motivated by emotions and Westerners are motivated by logic. The title "Insulted" supported the article's focus on Dr. Hatib's outrage and as such, directed readers away from the questionable state tests.

In an article published by *Yediot Aharonot* (October 15, 1997), the reporter also homed in on this story but at a personal level. She followed the Omeisi family to the United States to witness a reunion between mother and daughter. The article, entitled "One Family Against the Whole World," drew attention away from the conflicting test results. Levine's understanding of the different DNA test results was minimized. She did state, however, that she had chosen a Palestinian scientist because "if a Jewish doctor could steal and sell babies, I prefer a doctor that is not from our people" (6). The scientific disagreement was mentioned but not pursued in the article. Overall, the reader could conclude that Levine had a problem "with the whole world." In reality, however, her problem lay solely with the state of Israel.

In a phone interview with Tzila Levine from her California home, she says her sorrow is not yet over. "I had no idea that I was going to go through this hell and come out with no answers. I am 60 years old and I am still crying because I don't know who gave birth to me. A person must know where are they coming from, but the state disappointed me from the start" (Interview, summer 2008). When Levine first ask for her adoption file in the adoption office in Haifa, when she was only 26, she said they told her it was burned in a fire. Years later, however, when her case got national media attention, she got a call from the State's main adoption office in Jerusalem notifying her that her file was miraculously found. "There are so many unresolved issues in regards to my case that I don't know who to believe anymore", she said.

This case also point to the complex quest of finding and reuniting children with their parents that was often oversimplified by the media. While the public was expecting hundreds of children to magically appear and

reunite with their biological parents, the several children found came to realize this new emotional discovery wasn't all that easy. Levine said, "I love Margalit very much, but I think it was hard for her because I loved the parents who raise me, and she thinks they kidnapped me. They were good people, I don't know who kidnapped me" (Interview, summer 2008).

Levine also said it was hard to maintain a long distance relationship with people she just met. Unfortunately her story remains without proper closure. She said,

> There is a lot to take in, and I think the different test results confused everyone. The problem is that Margalit now is not well, and she just wants to be left alone. It was all too much for everyone involved. In the end, with everything we went through I can't believe no one has asked for forgiveness yet. They are just waiting for us to die, so they don't have to say they are sorry.
>
> (Interview, summer 2008)

THE SUBJECTIVE POSITION OF REPORTERS AND THE MEDIA TEXT

When analyzing colonial or postcolonial text, questions of representation and the subject position become vital. Especially when looking at media text, it is important to ask who is being represented and by whom. As Hall reminds us in "New Ethnicities," it is only through representation/discourse meaning is constructed (1989, 443). Hall points to three things that play a central role in representation: subjectivity, identity, and politics. Moreover, he claims that when looking at representation we must take into consideration the "diversity of subjective position, social experience and cultural identity" (443).

Journalists I interviewed, Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, as well as Yemenite activists have said that the Yemenite's right to a fair representation was taken away from them by both, the Israeli media and the justice system. Furthermore, their point of view, identity and politics were ignored. Yael Tzadok, a journalist with Israeli Radio, thought that the ethnic background as well as the political stand of reporters significantly affected the depth and quality of their investigative work. As a Yemenite, she said, she was driven to research the Babies Affair in depth and truly listen to parent's testimonies, while most Ashkenazi journalists tried to silence it. Moreover, in the case of this Affair, Tzadok said, "The political stand and the subject position of many journalists often override their professional integrity" (Interview, summer 2001).

This is not to say that the subject position of the reporter will always predict their point of view. After all, as Hall writes "films are not necessarily good because blacks make them," but the complete absence of the

Yemenite point of view in the media and the lack of depth in the coverage of this Affair must also be examined in relation to the lack of Yemenite or Mizrahi representation among the senior journalists in Israel. This directly led to silencing that Tzadok characterizes as "aggressive in its attempt to protect the status quo" (2003, 10).

THE STATUS QUO OF ASHKENAZI REPORTERS

Shelly Yechimovish, a senior Ashkenazi journalist, agreed with the above assertions. She said that most of her Ashkenazi colleagues voluntarily conformed to the state's party line, which ultimately denied equal representation to the Yemenite story:

> The media did not like the Yemenite Babies story; it is too shocking; it is similar to the kidnapping of slaves in Africa. When the media are primarily Ashkenazi, why would they want to deal with this story? It is not censorship on the level of editors and owners, but a voluntary censorship that individual journalists take upon themselves.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Other prominent Ashkenazi journalists such as Ilana Dayan and Ehud Ein-Gil[28] also agreed. Ilana Dayan said that the media's support of Ashkenazi hegemony was absolute, and contributed to the silencing of Yemenites. Ehud Ein-Gil, an editor for *Haaretz* weekend magazine, was an exception. He initiated the critical series of articles in *Haaretz* and said he was motivated by his critical views of Zionism an personal interested in this story he had been following it for 20 years:

> I knew Yemenite people and I heard many stories since the 1970s.When the last Commission was appointed and the nurses started to testify, I showed it to the editor of the weekend magazine, Dov Alfon, and convinced him that there is something to it. So we sent Yigal Mashiah to write the first story and it was so powerful that it became a series of articles. I think that it was one of the most substantial series of articles that ever appeared in the press in Israel.
>
> (Interview, May 2002)

Although the magazine's editors were ostensibly given editorial freedom, Ein-Gil found the overall attitude of colleagues and staff at *Haaretz* to be critical of their approach:

> I know that many people in the newspaper didn't like what we were doing. People in the newspaper did not want to be the Yemenite newspaper; they did not want to be seen as serving the interests of Rabbi Meshulam.

> Some people are also relatives of nurses and doctors and other camps staff and they felt very uncomfortable, as if we were ignoring the hard work they did and so on. Some of the talking I heard at the newspaper was shocking; as if the Yemenite mother's pain was not legitimate.
>
> (Ehud Ein-Gil, interview, May 2002)

When *Haaretz* began to publish the series, Yemenites people called for wider distribution in their towns. The newspaper failed to dispense papers to Yemenite towns such as Rosh Haayin.[29] Moreover, Ein Gil said to his surprise *Haaretz's* editors didn't approach him to comment on the Kedmi Commission's conclusions.[30] Nevertheless, he initiated and wrote an article strongly criticizing the commission's final report. Ein Gil published his final analysis in the weekend magazine,[31] which turned out to be one of the only two printed criticisms in the press of the commission's conclusions.

Interviewed members of the Yemenite community believed that the subjectivity of reporters played a major role in silencing the Babies Affair. Yosef Dahoah-Halevi, the publisher of *Afikim*, spoke of a media that is still controlled by an elite group of secular Ashkenazi men who prevented fair coverage of this Affair. "Many of them feel personally involved. It is their families who were in charge in the 1950s; they will do anything to control this information; they will not let history judge them negatively while they are still alive (Interview, summer 2001).

Rafi Shubeli, a prominent Yemenite activist, noted that editors and editors-in-chiefs did not assign prominent journalists to cover this Affair:

> For instance, Nahum Barnea, who is one of the most prominent journalists in *Yediot Aharonot*, claimed publicly that this Affair should not be investigated. This senior Ashkenazi journalist has the power to set agendas in the mainstream media. He had no problem voicing his opinion and I am sure that a lot of other powerful Ashkenazi journalists share his opinion.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Yemenite activist, Avner Farhi said that his longtime experience with second generation Ashkenazi journalists taught him that they would do anything to avoid incriminating people of their parents' generation. Farhi felt that the Yemenite community was denied a fair representation.

> Once Tom Segev[32] was interviewed on the radio and he denied any government responsibility and claimed that all these children died from diseases and so on; I called the radio as the Chairman of the Yemenite Babies Organization and they did not let me respond on the air. On the other hand, when Rabbi Meshulam Affair was going on, the media were always interviewing the neighbors that said how much Rabbi Meshulam was interrupting them.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Activist and researcher Shoshi Zaid agreed that Ashkenazi reporters had fixed views about the Affair. As such, they looked for material that reinforced these views. Zaid said that whenever the media approached her for interviews, the questions always focused on her connection to Meshulam's revolt. The findings of her research and her challenges to the status quo were minimized or ignored:

> I think that the media coverage of this Affair was by far one-sided from the beginning. While the event in Yahud took place, the media was eager to show the violent side while disregarding the state's crimes. I was asked to be interviewed by the media many times. Each time they just wanted to talk about my daughter who is in Meshulam's cult, as they liked to phrase it; they didn't let me talk about the Yemenite Babies issue. Journalists told me that they are sick of the Yemenite Babies Affair.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Rabbi Korah said he closely followed the media coverage and was disappointed with what he called the "collective thinking" of the reporters. He thought that the coverage was one-sided in support of the government's point of view; and that reporters, as a group, influenced each other greatly to form a unified front: "They [the journalists] function as if they are part of a herd. There is no discussion. Everyone thinks the same; that is what is so wrong about it (Interview, summer 2001).

STRATEGIES OF CLOSURE

The media primarily used two strategies to finalize discussion of the Yemenite Babies Affair. The first was to publish the testimony of doctors and nurses who irrevocably claimed that, rather than being kidnapped, the Yemenite Babies had died from disease. And the second strategy was to report the end of the investigation prematurely since the mid 1960s. Titles such as "The Destiny of Most Missing Yemenite Babies is Now Made Clear" (*Maariv*, November 7, 1967) or "The Investigative Commission of the Yemenite Babies Affair had finished its Work" (*Maariv,* March 7, 1968) prematurely reported the investigation's conclusion.

Relative to the first strategy, the newspapers featured articles such as "The Yemenite Children Died in Hospitals" (*Tel Aviv*, December 20, 1985); "The Show Just Like the Different Commissions . . . Determines That There Were No Kidnappings and No Criminal Acts" (*Maariv* September 25, 1986); "There Is No Proof That Children Were Kidnapped" (*Maariv* December 7, 1994); "The Yemenite Children Were Not Kidnapped and Did Not Disappear" (*Laisha* April 11, 1994); and even "The Doctors Saved My Two Children When We Immigrated from Yemen" (*Yediot Aharonot* January 21, 1996).

Other articles pushed for closure even more aggressively. For example an article entitled, "Is the Search Over?" (*Yediot Aharonot* September 26, 1994), supported the notion that the babies died in the camps. Further, it criticized parents for not accepting the conclusions of the investigations, which further prevented closure. Such thinking was at its peak when the show *Mabat Sheni* aired (Channel One February 12, 1996). The show followed a Yemenite family on a journey of disbelief. Despite being presented with official documents, they did not believe that their son was dead. The program intimated that the Yemenite families are "the problem." As such, they became obstacles to putting the Affair to rest.

The Kedmi Commission published its conclusions in November 2001. *Yediot Aharonot* and *Maariv* published large front-page articles with identical titles: "The Yemenite Babies Were Not Kidnapped" (November 5, 2001). The articles were not only sparse, they contained misleading information that led readers to believe that justice had been served: it was time to move on. Protests by Yemenite activists were sidestepped. Aside from alternative venues such as the magazine *Afikim*, and the religious newspaper *Makor Rishon*, Ehud Ein-Gil was the only journalist to publish a critique of the Kedmi Commission's conclusions:

> I think that the press from the beginning largely ignored this story. No newspaper had an assigned journalist that followed all the commission's meetings. They all published the conclusion just by reading the first and last pages. It is hard work to sit and read 1,800 pages, so they did not do it.
>
> (Interview, May, 2002)

Ein-Gil stated that the press and commission members tried too hard to refute the kidnappings. As such, they overlooked what they did find: "They admitted to some horrible racist things that were done to the Yemenite community. They admitted that children were buried without their parents' presence." This alone was a crime that could be pursued with civil lawsuits for damages against the state of Israel.

Natan Shifris, a history student who investigated the Affair and followed the commission 's work closely, characterized the Kedmi report as disconnected from the reality painted by the testimonies they heard. From the many testimonies given to the commission by people from the establishment it was clear that the main problem was the disconnection between mothers and babies who were taken away without proper registration. "The Kedmi Commission basically ignored this fact," wrote Shifris in the journal *Afikim* (April 2003, 55).

> In its conclusions the commission clearly favored the establishment's version claiming that the children died. This document is another attempt

> by the government to cover up the old sine of the absorption in the 1950s . . . The state of Israel cannot be called a democratic state as long as it remains stained with this outrages immoral Affair.

Despite the media's eagerness to bring the Yemenite Babies Affair to an end, many in the Yemenite community felt that the last commission had not been appointed with the best of intentions and further, that investigative work had been superficial. Justice had not been served.[33] Rafi Shubeli, a Yemenite activist, noted that the investigation was far from exhaustive. He believed that Yemenite families would do anything they could to see justice done:

> We are trying now to exercise freedom of information and asked to see all the records that were collected by the commission. So far we haven't been granted the freedom to do so. We are also trying to form an appeal to the Supreme Court that would force the state to reopen the investigation.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

Rabbi Korah was less optimistic:

> They treated us as inferior creatures; that is why they lied to our faces. It was a spiritual abuse. I knew that this commission would come up with nothing; it is just a burial commission. They worked hard to cover it up for 50 years, and they are not going to let it out now.
>
> (Interview, summer 2001)

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CHAPTER 5

Israeli Media and the Articulation of Resistance: Rabbi Meshulam's Revolt

On March 10, 1994 (before the Shalgi Commission released its findings), Rabbi Uzi Meshulam, a Yemenite leader, and some of his followers protested against the Israeli government's handling of the Yemenite Babies Affair. The protesters, who reportedly had a weapons cache, wanted the Israeli government to establish a public investigative commission to investigate the Affair.

In response to Meshulam's public protest, the Israeli police mounted an armed attack on the compound where he and some of his followers lived. For more than a month, police and army troops surrounded Meshulam's house in Yahud. On May 10, 1994, they attacked and killed a 19-year old follower of Meshulam. The Rabbi and others from his group were arrested and served prison sentences. Shortly after the protest, the state established the requested public investigative commission.

When this incident broke, I was assigned by the editor of the weekly *Shishi* to cover the Affair. While my prior requests to cover this story had often been rejected, the media was now willing to highlight the Yemenite Babies Affair on the heels of the violent incident described above. In media terms, the violent incident was perceived to be "sexier" than kidnapped babies. The media were comprehensive in their coverage but I believe they told the wrong story.

The primary focus of this chapter is on coverage of the Meshulam incident, known in Israel as "the fortification in Yahud." This important story played a significant role in shaping public perception of the Yemenite Babies Affair. The incident magnified Israel's internal conflict as well as

definitions of violence and justice. It illustrated how Orientalism as a practice of knowledge and of violence operated in Israel and demonstrated its complexity in light of the state's demarcation of people.

To illustrate my claim, I draw parallels with the Gulf War and images of Saddam Hussein that were created by Western media. Both situations raise questions about violence, resistance, and Western domination.

My analysis of the coverage of the Affair is based upon: newspaper reports about Rabbi Meshulam's resistance, my experience as a reporter covering the Affair; and first-hand observation of Rabbi Meshulam's resistance.

ARTICULATION OF RESISTANCE: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Mizrahi resistance against the Ashkenazi establishment has occurred since the days of mass immigration to Israel in the 1950s. These acts of resistance were not viewed as politically potent until distinct political parties were organized (e.g., Tami in the 1980s and the Mizrahi political party Shas in the 1990s). Sami Shalom Chetrit (2000, 51) noted that despite the majority position of the Mizrahi in the early days of the state, their resistance "took the form of short outbursts that never managed to rise to the level of independent, nationwide political organization."

Some of the major protests in Israel have included Yemenite protest against forced secularism in the absorption camps in Israel during 1949–1950, Wadi Salib in 1959, Black Panthers in the early 1970s, and the Tent movement of the late 1970s. Regardless of the political significance of these acts of protest, the important common thread between them was their contribution to the overall Mizrahi social struggle. As opposed to other events such as the Yemenites' deportation from Kibbutz Kinneret or the selection in the immigration of North African Jews in the 1950s, which were accompanied by little or no protest, the events mentioned above did not pass unnoticed. As Ammiel Alcalay (1993, 224) pointed out, these "presentations of demands, strikes and outbursts were not unusual occurrences and in fact set the tone for the whole period of the 1950s."

Later Mizrahi movements and protests addressed the homeless plight in the 1980s; the educational alternative of Kedam in the 1990s; the Keshet Movement in the mid 1990s, and Rabbi Meshulam's revolt in 1994. In the media, these acts of resistance, with the exception of the Keshet, were not perceived to be motivated by political or social agendas or by demands for equality in the public sphere. Rather, they were mostly represented as displays of violence that were endemic to the primitive Arab character of Mizrahi protesters.

Early Yemenite Resistance

Yemenite resistance to state regulations during the mass immigration to Israel was evident early on. As early as 1943–1944 when about 4,500 Yemenite Jews immigrated to Israel and were situated in Ein Shemer Transit Camp they were protesting the massive policy, dictated at the time, to force secular education on their children. Baruch Kimmerling (2004) stated that secularizing of Yemenite children was an overt policy that was part of their "re-education" and absorption into Israel. Protest picked up in April 1950 when guards at Camp Ein-Shemer shot and killed Salem Jaraffe, a young Yemenite man who was leading the protest and had "got into trouble" with camp authorities many times before this incident.

This is one of the acts of resistance that led to an investigative commission known as the Frumkin Commission. The commission pointed out to many acts of forced secular education at the transit camps such as, cutting the Yemenite *payess* (side locks in each temple required by Jewish law) disturbing torah study and disrespecting religious practices such as Shabbat and Kosher rules. Dov Levitan (1983) noted that disturbing religious life manifested in many places and in many ways such as not letting religious people enter the camps and encouraging children to disrespect Shabbat practices. Levitan claims that despite some serious allegations confirmed by this report, much like the commission investigating the Yemenite Babies Affair, it didn't change much of the policies on the ground.[1] "In both cases [Yemenite Babies and Secularization] the writers of the reports managed to steer the discussion to a less dangerous venue, to find justification and to clear the State from direct responsibility" (201).

The resistance described above, however, was rarely noted as such in public discourses and the overall image of the Yemenite community is of 'obedient' and quiet people; an impression that helped stir the discussion during Rabbi Meshulam's revolt from the substance of his protest to the very idea that Yemenite would be involved in such actions. As Adriana Kamp (2004) notes, the distinction between resistance and no-resistance is within itself artificial. Kamp claimed immigrants, many of them Yemenites, living in the periphery, where they were situated by the state with disregard to their will, shows independence and can be characterized as an act of resistance to the state's hegemony. She noted that in 1951 Yemenites left as many as 14 settlements, which triggered an article in *Haaretz* calling this event "the end of the legendary Yemenite hard workers" (38).

Kamp claims that Israeli historiography usually ignored these event; even sociologists who focused on protest and resistance, mostly related to Wadi Salib and the Black Panthers. This absence is a result of what Kamps (2004, 41) identifies as a failure to recognize "the political empowerment embodied in practical daily resistance."

WADI SALIB

The first substantial and organized Mizrahi protest took place in Wadi Salib during the summer of 1959, and was condemned by the government, the media, and the public. After 1948, Wadi Salib, formerly an Arab neighborhood in Haifa, was mainly populated by North African Jews (especially Moroccans). As opposed to Haifa's wealthy Ashkenazi population, the 15,000 citizens of this crowded neighborhood lived in extreme poverty with very high unemployment rates (Chetrit 2004).

Similar Mizrahi uprisings spread into other areas such as Migdal Haemek in the north and Be'er Sheva in the south. In Wadi Salib police arrested 60 protesters, including the leader David Ben-Harush. Police blamed the protesters for the violence and the protesters, in turn, denounced police actions as "brutal and extreme, while biting women and children as well" (Chetrit 2004, 102). Wadi Salib provoked a well-crafted response by the establishment designed to delegitimize the impact of this political act to nothing but a violent criminal action that reportedly threatened the country's unity. As Swirski (1989, 45) noted, the Wadi Salib and Black Panthers riots were dismissed by the press and the government as "expressions of violence-prone Moroccans." They were never perceived to be protesters for social justice or people pursuing the right to basic necessities such as running water.

Chetrit (2004, 104) claimed the method of handling protesters as criminals served to "recognize the claims but not the protesters." The Minister of Police labeled the uprising "ethnic poisoning" and claimed, "The entire nation rejects this minor group of criminals." Furthermore, ethnic stereotyping penetrated the judicial system. During the first hearing of David Ben-Harush's trial, the judge told him "anyone who will come to me and say he is Moroccan will get a more severe sentence . . . you are only contributing to the separation of this nation" (105). In a conversation with a group of North African youth, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion asked them if they thought the Wadi Salib events were a result of ethnic discrimination. When one person answered "no one breaks glass windows just for fun, there is deeper reason," Ben-Gurion dismissed this claim by stating, "I was born in Russia . . . there is only one word in Russian to describe what I saw in Wadi Salib: 'pogrom'" (Weiss, 64). In other words, Ben-Gurion refused to see these events as a protest of oppressed people but rather compared them to pogroms or terrorizing acts against Jews in Russia.

Mizrahi struggle has always been perceived as ethnic and divisive rather than as a national force and the media has been vital in reinforcing this notion. Chetrit (2004) believes that media coverage of the uprising in Wadi Salib was a case in point. With the exception of some fair representation in the newspapers *Ha'olam Haze* and *Kol Haam*, Chetrit claimed that

newspaper coverage had been inconsistent and negative. Most articles were placed in the criminal section of the newspaper, which served to further label the protesters as criminals rather then political activists. "I have no doubt," wrote Chetrit, "that without the active cooperation of the press with then Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, the government would not have been able to stop the uprising and to alienate the protesters from their fellows Mizrahim" (108).

According to Yfaat Weiss (2007), the only media voice connecting the treatment of Palestinians with that of Mizrahim was written by Uri Avneri, the editor of the magazine *Ha'olam Haze:* "Who ever arrests and deports Suliman [typical Arab name] without trial, will arrest and deport Nissim [typical Mizrahi name] without trial. If you spit today in Fatma's [typical Arab name] face, you will spit tomorrow in Mazal's [typical Mizrahi name] face. What happened yesterday in Wadi[2] Nissnas must happen today in Wadi Sallib."[3] Avneri was a lone voice, at the time, linking ethnic oppression of Palestinians and of Mizrahi Jews in Israel.

THE BLACK PANTHERS

Israel's Black Panthers protests took place from 1971 to 1973. These events engendered a similar media and governmental response to the Mizrahi struggles described above. The veteran activist and researcher Sami Chetrit (2004) said that the Black Panthers movement provided a good model to those involved in the Mizrahi resistance since they were the first to join a universal struggle. This group, whose name indicated a connection to a broader protest movement, borrowed their name from the American Black Panthers, and included in the agenda of their protest resistance to the Palestinian occupation. Despite this major milestone in Israeli historiography, the Black Panthers movement is absent and often mentioned in negative connotations. Chetrit (2001, 7) wrote, "Not one book was written about them. Even 30 years later, many are still afraid to identify with them as if it was a struggle of a bunch of 'not very nice' guys from Jerusalem."[4]

Vicki Shiran (a professor of criminology and a longtime Mizrahi activist who joined the Black Panthers movement in the late 1970s) claimed the media interpreted their protest as an expression of inferiority. This depiction controlled public discourse for many years:

> As opposed to Wadi Salib and other Mizrahi protests since the mass immigration, the Panthers were protesters who were born in Israel. It was the first generation of Mizrahi Jews who felt ownership of the country; thus their demands became more significant and challenging.

> Despite unfavorable media coverage, the discourse has not stopped since. Although the movements have changed, the discourse has been consistent. There were Wadi Salib, Black Panthers, the Tents Movement, Tami, Homelessness, Shas, and now Keshet; the protests never stopped.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

The Black Panthers were the first to use the terms "resistance" and "uprising." They understood the social discrimination and marginalization of Mizrahim in Israeli society. Chetrit (2004) noted that their ideology was largely influenced by the struggle of Black people in America and by radical neo-Marxist theory. The media and the government, however, did everything within their power to discredit the Panthers' social agenda. Moreover, the Panthers understood their alliance with the Palestinian struggle and acted on it. Reuben Abarjel (2007, 142) said he participated in a meeting with PLO representative in Europe back in 1974. "Our stand was clear," wrote Abarjel, "there will never be peace without the participation of Jews from Muslim countries."

In April 1971, Prime Minister Golda Meir met with the Panthers for the first time. She did not recognize the legitimacy of their social protest. In fact, her meeting with them was described as: "having a conversation of a social worker with some street boys and defined them as not very nice" (*Black Panther* March 21, 2001). Meir mostly asked personal questions and expressed concern about their name choice, which she said belonged to "a group of Black Anti-Semites." The media used Meir's association to delegitimize the Panthers, even in the eyes of other Mizrahim. This tactic was later used during Rabbi Meshulam's protest to isolate him and delegitimize his protest, when the media compared his group to the Koresh cult in Waco, Texas.[5]

Sometimes, the Black Panthers were even linked to terrorists groups[6]: "Black Panthers from Israel participated in an international terrorist conference in Florence, Italy" (*Maariv* April 17, 1972). Like the protesters of Wadi Salib, the press labeled Panthers as "violent" and "radicals." In fact, as Abarjel (2007, 141) noted, when police first heard about the organized group, they arrested several members before they were involved in any action. Headlines highlighted different demonstrations emphasizing the need for police interference to stem the violence: "Black Panthers rallied again in Hatikva neighborhood. Things quieted down only after the police returned three boys to their families" (*Maariv* August, 28, 1973). "About 60 Panthers took over a supermarket in Jerusalem. They tried to sell items at a 20% discount and were stopped by the police" (*Maariv* April 6, 1973).

The discourse formation (Foucault 1972) in the media statements above marked what is known in public as a typical Mizrahi resistance. There

was no link to Mizrahi social agendas or protests against government-sponsored racism and social inequity. The production of knowledge and meaning through this discourse (Hall, 1992) laid the foundation for common perceptions about Mizrahi resistance for years to come. In the public mind, Mizrahi was equivalent to "law breaker," "criminal," and "violent."

THE RESISTANCE OF RABBI MESHULAM

Similar to the depiction of Wadi Salib, and the Black Panthers, Rabbi Meshulam's ideological claims about the Yemenite Babies Affair were mostly absent from the public sphere. Like Mizrahi protesters before him, Rabbi Meshulam's acts were considered violent and a threat to democracy. This point of view provided justification for a retaliatory force to stop him.

According to Zaid (2001), Rabbi Meshulam's began his investigation of the Yemenite babies Affair in the 1970s. His group claimed the violent incident in Yahud was the result of a government-planned interference into a minor construction conflict between neighbors. "If over a thousand security forces did not siege a house with about 80 people that had a total of six licensed guns, there would not have been any violent incident" (Zaid, 2001, 92).

CREATING A LOCAL SADDAM HUSSEIN

An Orientalist state of mind contributed to feeble coverage of the Kidnapped Babies Affair, which continued even after the government faced a violent protest. Rabbi Meshulam's resistance was the first forceful protest in 40 years against the government. The media almost completely ignored the kidnapped babies story by focusing on Meshulam's unstable personality.

Although Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and Meshulam's act of protest differ significantly in magnitude and intent, their "evil" personalities were similarly constructed by the media and used against them as a way to dismiss their claims. Saddam Hussein and Rabbi Meshulam were perceived as unstable Orientals. In both cases, the media oversimplified these conflicts and reduced them to nothing but one crazy man's act. As Noam Chomsky noted in *Necessary Illusions* (1989), oversimplification is a common means used by the media to articulate conflicts.

In these cases, the media operated at two levels simultaneously. First, they established a common understanding of the conflict's central figure as irrational; and secondly, they found fault with their beliefs. Through these two steps, the media translated an instance of social injustice into one individual's pathology. The questions that were absent in both cases were about fundamental working assumption that dictated the nature of the media coverage. Why should we automatically assume that Kuwaiti oil is

more legitimately American than Iraqi? Why Meshulam's claims were less legitimate than those of the various commissions?

THE CONFLICT, THE RESISTANCE, AND THE ELEMENT OF INSANITY

By criticizing the centrality of the element of insanity in the discourse constructed by the media, I am not trying to determine whether Saddam Hussein or Rabbi Meshulam were insane at the time or not. I have neither the interest nor the skills necessary to do so. Rather, I argue that the construction of both images of insanity is irrelevant to the public discourse concerning the issue in dispute.

In *Madness and Civilization* (1972/1991, 218), Michel Foucault pointed out that declaring people insane translates into removing them from legitimate discourse. Anything they say can be dismissed as irrational and as a symptom of their disease. Nowadays, the category of madness overlaps with the category of the "other." Declaring the central figure of a conflict "insane" provides an easy way out for a government and disallows for the possibility of dialogue between said government and opposition leaders.

During the Gulf War, the "evilness" and "madness" of Hussein's personality played a central role in the public arena both visually and in writing (Mutman 1992). The media concentrated on close-up pictures of his face and his eyes. The obsession with Hussein's face, claimed Mutman, encouraged the notion of "the face that should not be saved (21)." These pictures were followed over and over again by the question, "what is in Saddam's mind?"

Zizek believes that this question demonstrated how racist dialogue is constructed: "The other's actions are always suspected of being guided by a hidden motive. The point therefore becomes to know what are his hidden desires, his hidden plans, his hidden weapons (Quoted in Mutman 1992, 21)." Such assumptions led to the fundamental conclusion that Saddam must be stopped.

The Israeli media followed a similar formula when creating Rabbi Meshulam's image. Cameras focused on close-ups of his face in an attempt to portray insanity in his expression. Such a picture became the logo for a series of articles in Israel's most popular daily newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*. This picture was placed at the top center section of every page of each article. His face, like Hussein's, became the "face that should not be saved."

This point is crucial to the Kidnapped Babies Affair. Although Rabbi Meshulam was critical of the overall Zionist treatment of Yemenite Jews, and mainly fighting against the government's inaction in relation to the Affair, his "insanity," as mentioned, was an effective way to dehumanize him and depict him as a danger to society.

The headlines of the two main Israeli newspapers, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Maariv*, indicated that Meshulam and his followers were a dangerous cult.

"Meshulam's Cult" (*Yediot Aharonot* May 17, 1996); "Guru of People Who Will Kill and Get Killed for Him" (*Yediot Aharonot* May 14, 1994); "The Fanatic From Yahud" (*Yediot Aharonot*, March 25, 1994); and "Madness Planned Ahead" are several examples of how this group was labeled by the press. They have, in fact, been compared to the Koresh Cult of Waco, Texas: "The Police Have Learned the Lesson from the Koresh Cult" (*Yediot Aharonot* May 11, 1994). Police claimed they therefore lied to Meshulam to prevent more violence. Another article, entitled "The Koresh Fortification—is there a Resemblance?" (*Yediot Aharonot*, March 2, 1994), summarized the Koresh Affair, saying nothing more.[7]

Two years after the Meshulam incident, the press published a report on the Meshulam group, proclaiming them, once again, a "Dangerous Cult" (*Yediot Aharonot* May 17 1996).[8] The article claimed to be publishing "a first secret report" prepared by the police's intelligence department about Meshulam and his followers. Key points made about their "dangerous" nature included admiration for their leader and the group's hostile position regarding Israeli society. The report used questionable sources to support their claims and was at times contradictory.

For example, one articulated theory made by police was that Meshulam's group existed mostly because of its charismatic leader. The report, however, did not explain how the group continued to function two years after its leader has been put in jail. As Meshulam noted in his publication *Evan Ma'asu Habonim*: "I left for the meeting with police knowing I was going to be arrested. I wanted to prove two things: 1. The police, contrary to what they say, don't respect agreements; and 2. I want to prove to everybody that Rabbi Utzi is one of many, and arresting him will not harm the group's activities" (*Evan Ma'asu Habonim* May 12, 1994).

Another unsubstantiated claim was the group's continued existence although their aim, social protest, was supposedly achieved. What the report failed to recognize is that the aim, establishing a public investigative commission, was far from achieved. If the researchers carefully read the group's publication they could have seen that Meshulam repeatedly criticized the public commission and diminished its credibility.

The Kedmi Commission operating at the time (1996) was established by the Israeli government after the incident in Yahud in 1994. Although technically a public investigative commission, as Rabbi Meshulam demanded, it neglected to function properly and therefore was criticized heavily by the Meshulam group.[9] For example, neglecting to use its subpoena power, it would wait for people to volunteer to testify. In addition, there was only one lawyer investigator, and the hearings were sluggishly run.

The above report succeeded in further establishing Meshulam's insanity and violent nature by soliciting the testimony of Yemenite public figures and experts who condemned his protest. Among those approached was

Professor Yehuda Nini from Tel Aviv University. Using his testimony, investigators tried to connect Meshulam's revolt to other violent actions committed by Yemenite people, including the murder of Yitzhak Rabin. Although Nini said there was no circumstantial evidence for such a connection, he did point to a connection between violent actions and the immigration process of Yemenite Jews and their absorption in Israel.

> Unlike their image as passives, the Yemenite community is very divisive without any tradition of an organized community life. The Yemenites lived the life of a tribe, not a state. This culture created a typical difficult and independent man, who when he believes he is right, will go to the far extreme unreasonable way, and will go with it all the way, without making any compromises.
>
> (*Yediot Aharonot* July 15, 1996)

According to Edward Said (1978) coming from an academic source, such Orientalist views were accepted at face value. Neither the report investigators nor the author of the newspaper article questioned Nini's analysis or the validity of his sweeping characterization of an entire ethnic group.

At its conclusion, the report indicated surprise about the continued existence of the Meshulam group despite jailed leadership, a fading ideology, and no strong political lobby. The investigative team thought "the reaction of the media and the enforcement of law on Meshulam is what gave this group the energy to continue to act and to maintain its uniqueness" (41). The possibility that the group continue to exist because their goal, for a fair and in-depth investigation of the Yemenite Babies Affair, wasn't achieved yet was never considered by the media or the investigators.

Another questionable factor that helped put the insanity stamp on Meshulam was the judge's view in this trial. The judge who oversaw Meshulam's trial was quoted in *Yediot Aharonot* as saying "Meshulam feels frequently haunted and feels as if different governmental factors are plotting against him . . . Meshulam sees shadows of mountains as mountains and comes up with unrealistic conclusions" (41). One can ask whether the judge or the media were qualified to analyze Meshulam's personality. One can wonder about the relevance of Meshulam's personality to what occurred. And finally, one must ask how these matters are connected to the Yemenite Babies Affair.

DISCONNECTING THE CONFLICT FROM THE RESISTANCE

In the process of constructing public dialogue about resistance, a major media tactic is to disconnect and isolate a conflict from an act of resistance,

thereby crippling it. Establishing the insanity of a central figure within a conflict is the first stage of framing it separate from the resistance. To do so, the media tend to use what Said has defined as "familiar knowledge" of the West about the East. This kind of "well-known" information serves as background for other Orientalist statements and narratives. For example, Hussein was perceived to be an irrational ruler who "respects only force and will respond to nothing else" (Kellner 1995, 202).[10]

Israeli media created an understanding of Meshulam's resistance by using information about other acts of Mizrahi resistance (e.g., Black Panthers movement, 1970s; and the Wadi Salib riots of 1959), all well established within the public memory as moments of violent social protest. The media played on the public memory to eliminate any social agenda about the only act of resistance connected to the kidnapped babies scandal.[11] The media systematically disassociated him from the conversation about kidnapped babies. De-politicized as such, the intent of Meshulam's protest was diminished.

As in the Gulf War, Meshulam's resistance was a catalyst for increasingly complex East-West relations. The West aligned with a weakened facet of the East against an "evil" element of the East. Meshulam was perceived to be a threat to the Yemenite community just as Saddam Hussein was characterized as a threat to Kuwaitis:

> A fantasy machine was thus built around the stories of rape, looting, infanticide, and torture of Kuwaitis by Iraqis . . . stereotypes such as the Oriental other's savage sexuality were set in motion in full force.
>
> (Mutman 1992, 27)

The above story also included a White hero who was saving Kuwaiti women from an Oriental savage looking to rape them. This concept of raping the defenseless (metaphorically) was part of the image presented about Meshulam. The media created an impression that Meshulam forced his crazy ideas upon a group of innocent, naive Yemenites, some of whom followed him because they had no power to resist. They, too, needed to be rescued. Meshulam was seen as the "the dark rapist [who] must be punished and humiliated supposedly by the name of the rape victim. (Shohat 1994, 153)"[12] Yemenites were portrayed as illiterate, naïve, and "dumb" people who could be easily fooled by the Meshulam terrorist organization. At Meshulam's sentencing in Court, for example, *Yediot Aharonot* published the following report:

> The judge declared decisively that the Yemenite Babies Affair had no connection to the violent incident in Yahud . . . A long, silent and miserable line of old religious men and women were brought from Rosh Ha'ayin [a small

> town with a large Yemenite population] to the Court to support Meshulam. They where sitting there for hours, obedient and silent, chewing pita bread that the organizers have given them and drinking juice from plastic cups. On their clothes, was a big pin with the picture of Shlomi Asulin, the Meshulam man killed during the violent incident in Yahud. Doubtful if they could even read the dreadful words that appeared on those pins, words that identify Mengele and the Holocaust with 'the traitor' Itzhak Rabin. In their feeble hands, they were holding pink carnation flowers, like white flags.
>
> (*Yediot Aharonot* February 1 1995)

"They were brought to the Courtroom" implied that the Yemenites were passive followers with no will of their own. Their description as "silent and obedient" perpetuated racist stereotypes about them. The writer of the article enjoys what Said (1978, 94) defines as a great authority over describing an event. This authority, claims Said, give the author the ability to "create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe."

At times, information about the Yemenites was also invented by the writer to fit an image she wished to create. For instance, based on her previous knowledge and stereotypes about Yemenites, the author of the article determines that it was "doubtful if they could even read." In other words, they are not only quiet and naive, they are also stupid. The writer demonstrates complete ignorance by assuming the Jewish Yemenite community is illiterate. In truth, the Jewish community in Yemen was referred to, by the Muslim population, as *Ahal Al-Katib* (The People of the Book) since all boys and men could read and write. Moreover, most children in Yemen learned to read at the age of three and due to shortage of books, they even learned to read upside down.[13]

The writer of the article created descriptions based upon what she thought was common knowledge about old Yemenites. She developed new narratives based on old familiar stereotypes. By so doing, her article (and others) became another link in the disconnection between Meshulam's resistance and the Yemenite Babies Affair. The fact that Meshulam's nonprofit organization *Mishkan Ohalim* was registered according to state law to investigate the Yemenite Kidnapped Babies Affair was not mentioned in any of the articles.

Another issue central to the Meshulam newspaper coverage was an agreement, signed by the police, intended to stop the fortification in Yahud back in 1994. The agreement included 12 sections, six of which referred to Meshulam's demand for a state-run investigative commission. The other six referred to an additional investigative commission that would examine the Yahud incident. By publishing this agreement, the newspapers indirectly pointed to a tight connection between Meshulam's revolt and

the kidnapped babies affair. At the same time and while ignoring this contradiction, the press formed a counter discourse, saying "the man is insane, therefore he couldn't be possibly be fighting for a real cause."

Throughout reporting about the Yahud incident, the Kidnapped Babies story was conspicuously absent. One of the few articles to mention the Affair, entitled "What is the Yemenite Babies Affair?" was a single column within a three-page spread that was replete with contradictions and misleading information. The article stated that, within the first decade of Israel's existence, more than 1,000 Yemenite babies had disappeared from their parents in immigrant camps around the country.

> To this day, there is no official explanation to the babies' disappearance. In most cases, the babies were sick and were taken to the hospital. After a short time, the parents were told that their baby is dead. The parents never got any proof that the baby is really dead; they had never seen a body or gave their baby a funeral. Moreover, when it was time for the kids to get drafted to the army [at the age of 18], they got an order to show up in the army. The parents of the kids claim that they were naive and therefore manipulated by the authorities who kidnapped their babies and gave them for adoption. In 1988, Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir established an investigative committee on the matter. The committee will finish its work this year.
>
> (*Yediot Aharonot* March, 25 1994)

Meshulam and the media version of the Kidnapped Babies Affair differed mostly from the perspective of the government's responsibility. Meshulam protested the government's inaction while the media viewed the same in a forgiving manner. The article mentioned above reported the establishment of an investigative commission while Shamir was in power (1988) but neglected to mention, as Meshulam claimed, that the commission had no real authority. Moreover, the commission worked for more than six years without presenting any significant findings. Meshulam protested against the authorities disregarding a "sluggish" treatment of the Affair for 40 years. As stated in the article, "to this day there is no official explanation to the babies' disappearance." The difference is that Meshulam saw the delay as an abuse perpetrated by the government and the Israeli media did not.

FORCED SILENCED

In 1999 and after about five years in jail Rabbi Meshulam was released in a fragile physical condition. Rabbi Meshulam's son claimed that one of the conditions for his father's release was that he must not investigate the Yemenite Babies Affair any further and must avoid any contact with the media, a demand that many activists claimed was essentially undemocratic.

As a result Meshulam and members of his organization refused to give any more interviews to researchers or the press.

In November 2005, Emmanuel Meshulam (Rabbi Meshulam's son) left Israel with his wife and three children. He claimed his family and close friends were subjected to harassment by the Israeli government and that Shabac (Israel's secret service agency) agents demanded they reveal information about the Yemenite Babies Affair. The family sought political asylum in Canada. Shortly thereafter, the Israeli press reported in *Yediot Aharonot* that Israelis "fooled" the Canadian government into granting them political asylum. Allen Baker, Israel's Canadian ambassador, publicly stated that these Israelis were lying about political harassment claims: "By granting them political asylum, you are hurting the image of Israel and unjustifiably presenting us as a state where citizens are persecuted" (*Yediot Aharonot* October 31, 2006).

Other articles in the media framed Meshulam's request for political asylum, in similar terms to his father's 1994 struggle. Since the word Meshulam carried an already existing meaning in the media and with the public, familiar Orientalist references such as 'crazy' fanatic' and 'paranoid' fit perfectly with the new story. Some of the articles in the mainstream media defined Emmanuel Meshulam as "scary" and mentally unstable in a similar vein to description used to refer to his father over 13 years earlier. For instance, an article in *Yediot Aharonot* (March 14, 2007) reported, "His part imaginary part fantasy stories are meshed up to a 'paranoia' salad . . . This is a man that, if he wants, can sweep a fanatic crowd, just like his father did more then a decade ago."

In response to these articles and others conveying similar claims, including Canada's Jewish press, Emmanuel Meshulam wrote an open letter to Canada's Israeli Ambassador Allen Baker (February 15, 2007): "The same corrupt officials who ruined my father also saw to harass me and many of my entourage and the people close to me… I was banished from the land of my fathers….to a foreign land where I didn't even understand the language . . . Later I discovered that my 'Zionist' interpreter whose job was to explain what I was saying to the immigration authorities, had conveyed lies rather than my words."

In a phone interview with Emanuel Meshulam from his now Canadian home he said life isn't easy for him. He insists on defining his departure from Israel as a deportation and not immigration. "I was harassed since I was 14 years old" he said "I just couldn't take it any more and feared for the safety of my family." According to Meshulam the Israeli authorities accused him of holding documents, allegedly obtained by his father, proving that the state of Israel performed medical experiment on Yemenite babies. "They don't care about the kidnapping of babies any more," he said, "the medical experiments are the real issue they don't want to expose.

Since I don't have any documents they made me leave the country" (Interview Summer 2008).

In the end, just like the Black Panther, Rabbi Meshulam and his organization, who were inspired by the Panthers, paid a high personal price.[14] As Abarjel noted (2007, 144) "Meshulam's organization was a direct continuation of the Panther's radical politics, meaning: setting challenging agenda against the Ashkenazi hegemony. Just like us, [the Panthers] they paid a high price."

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CHAPTER 6

MULTICULTURALISM AND UNITY: FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNRESOLVED YEMENITE BABIES AFFAIR

The search for unity is a formidable power in domestic politics. On the one hand, citizens want to belong to a community in which they are appreciated and have their needs met. On the other hand, community leaders and politicians seek to foster this environment while forcing the dominant culture on minority groups. Too often, the legitimate needs of citizens are marginalized or eliminated in the name of the common good. As Iris Young (1990, 300) stated, "The ideal of community privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view."

This deception hinges on the understanding that the term "unity" can be defined in different ways. A heterogeneous unity, where many different cultures are blended, and a homogeneous unity, where a single culture is present to the exclusion of others. Young further noted that current conditions of modern urban societies require an alternative vision. "This alternative vision," she claims, "must be a politics of difference" (301).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the Israeli Zionist philosophy uses a homogeneous unity as a powerful tool to exclude others as well as silence critics from a dubious moral high ground. I show how the alleged pursuit of a unified Israel has allowed the state, media, and public to neglect acknowledging and solving significant internal conflicts. Those who speak up for marginalized groups are publicly labeled divisive and easily dismissed. Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to the unresolved Yemenite Babies Affair.

The effect of the politics of community is uniquely increased among Israeli Jews. As a whole, Jews have been recognized—not incorrectly—as victims. Jews perceive themselves as an eternally persecuted nation, with the industrial-scale slaughter of the European Jews still within living memory. This identity becomes an extremely powerful defensive force that binds many Israelis together and justifies any sort of aggression in self-defense. This self-centered view, however, when restricted to the European Jew alone rather than all Jews, or all the citizens of Israel, Jews and non-Jews, obscures public recognition of the victimization of anyone else, other Jews as well as Palestinians.

The Zionist notion of unity can be read critically through what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, 48) call "polycentric multiculturalism," which suggests that economic or political powers should not be "epistemologically privileged." At times, within an immigrant society such as Israel, the diverse cultures are celebrated; but "polycentric multiculturalism" offers a different perspective than that of the liberal pluralist definition of multiculturalism: "Whereas pluralism is premised on an established hierarchical order of cultures and is grudgingly accretive it benevolently 'allows' other voices to add themselves to the mainstream." Polycentric multiculturalism deconstructs the dominant discourse through shifting power relations. According to Shohat and Stam, minority groups must not be labeled as "interest groups" that should be added on. "Polycentric multiculturalism," in other words, is "about dispersing power, about empowering the disempowered, about transforming subordinating institutions and discourses" (48–49). Within such a polycentric approach, Shohat's work has addressed the problem of narrating Arab Jewish history and identity given the hegemonic Eurocentric meta-narrative.

Some critics of Shohat's work have argued that she misrepresents the thrust of her argument. Meir Amor (2005), for example, claims that Shohat's approach, as applied to Israeli society, is problematic since it relies on the notion that all Mizrahim share a similar Arab culture, and that this "imagined community" of the Mizrahim is viewed as a "mediating force" between Jews and Palestinians, when for Palestinians the oppressor is Jewish Israeli not Ashkenazi. Therefore, Amor claimed that this approach is "limited in its social and political relevance" (255). A more practical approach, he said, should center on citizenship, or what he calls "the intercultural approach" (2005, 339). It is not clear, however, what is the relationship between citizenship and interculturalism and furthermore what is the difference between interculturalism and multiculturalism, according to Amor. In any event, he calls for implementing citizenship that relies on geographic boundaries, replacing the current legal system, which grants extended rights to Israel's Jewish citizens, with civil-democratic equal rights to all the citizens of Israel.[1] "The challenge of Mizrahi activists today is

defining their citizenship and not their cultural and pseudo-ethnic roots" (Amor 2005, 341).

While I agree with Amor about the need to redefine Israeli citizenship, I don't see these two approaches as mutually exclusive; they, in fact, operate on different levels of analysis. But first, to be precise, Shohat's analysis did not equate the situation of the Mizrahim with Palestinians, even clearly suggesting that Mizrahim have been incorporated into an oppressive apparatus toward the Palestinians.[2] At the same time, her work also refused the facile nationalist narrative that tells the story of Arab Jews in the wake of Zionism as only beginning once they were incorporated into the Jewish state. Instead, she highlighted the historical links between the dispossession of Palestinians and the dislocation of Middle Eastern Jews from their countries of origins. She also pointed out the discursive links (i.e., Eurocentrism, Orientalism) common to the Zionist representation of the East as a whole, even if the positioning of Palestinians and Mizrahim vis-à-vis the nation-state differ, since Middle Eastern Jews—unlike Muslim Arabs and Palestinians—were seen as "the good Orient."

Moreover, Shohat has consistently argued against reductive culturalist essentialism as a future solution. Apart from the historical fact that some Arab Jews tried to mediate between Arabs and Jews and saw themselves as a bridge for peace,[3] Shohat's notion of Arab Jew as mediating entity was deployed as a way of calling attention to an in-between entity that most analyses of the conflict have erased. Shohat critiqued the isolationist approach to the question of Middle Eastern/Arab Jews, whose story is usually presented as beginning and ending with the narrative of the Israeli nation-state. Her analysis pointed to the antinomies and paradoxes of Arab Jewish identity in the context of Zionism, Arab nationalism, and colonial partition. The "rupture" of Arab Jews and their arrival to Euro-Israel was especially a pivotal moment as it created a situation, for the first time in their history, where they had to choose between their Arabness and Jewishness.[4]

All Mizrahim, despite some cultural differences among them, suffered from this oppression, even if— a la Amor—they did not share exactly the same culture or the same views on Zionism and Palestinians. In the case of the Yemenite Babies Affair, it was the powerful insistence of the state and the media to keep this story "Yemenite" that weakened the demand for investigation. A broader coalition of Mizrahim could have strengthened this struggle that always included kidnapped babies of families from other ethnic groups. Therefore, Shohat's call for a non-Eurocentric reading of history to analyze Mizrahi positioning and politics of culture in Israel is crucial for understanding the kidnappings as part of a systematic Eurocentric view of the East. Second, the contemporary reality in Israel with regard to identity politics, multiculturalism, and discrimination is so

complex that no one approach to future resolution can be adopted without offering a polycentric historical analysis.

One would need such an analysis to explain the contemporary multilayered reality of identity and inequality in order to offer a practical alternative. Most importantly, citizenship in Israel is so strongly linked to Jewish unity that to arrive at a more egalitarian idea of citizenship and overcome 60 years of cultural and political oppression, we must first deconstruct the concept of unity and adopt new ways to allow for other cultures and identities to coexist. A new generation of Mizrahim will not connect to their Arab roots before they get access to their parents' history and culture. Moreover, the desire to connect with cultural and ethnic roots cannot be oversimplified. As Cornel West (1995, 16) noted, "[Identity is] the desire for recognition; quest for visibility . . . a deep desire for association." There is no wonder why some young Mizrahim want to shun what is so strongly associated in public with negative and hateful images. In other words, the idea of citizenship as a solution cannot be separated from the arguments for a non-Eurocentric understanding of Mizrahi history. Reconstructing Mizrahi identity would involve a long and painful process, something for which, from our limited place in academia, we can only mark the starting point, but never guarantee the outcome.

THE MAGIC OF UNITY

While critics of multiculturalism advocate for unity, they often present unity and community as the polar opposites of multiculturalism, fostering a limited view of multiculturalism and presenting unity in unrealistic terms.[5] For example, Kenan Malik in *The Meaning of Race* (1996) and Todd Gitlin in *The Twilight of Common Dream* (1995) addressed the dichotomy between community and individualism. To them, community is the only alternative to self-interested competition within modern Western societies. Malik (1996) illustrated how identity politics, which he defines as "human zoo of differences," could only lead to fragmentation, while a global community based on universalism and humanism would lead to unity.

Gitlin (1995, 235) advocated for equality of means for all people, including "a right to a job, education, medical care, housing, and retraining over the course of a lifetime—these are the bare elements of an economic citizenship that ought to be universal." His hopes for American society are hard to fault; what we disagree over is the way in which we should get there. While Gitlin believed that multiculturalism and identity politics were divisive forces that interfered with social solidarity, he overlooked the gap that often exists between the vision and the practice of unity. As Young (1990, 300) argued, the current definition of community is doomed to fail; "community is a totality," she said, and "the process of totalizing will

always expel some aspects of the entity . . . [thus] the desire for unity or wholeness in discourse generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusion." Young, however, did not suggest that the formation of coalitions was impossible. Rather, she stressed that true unity could be reached only when viewed as "unity in diversity,"[6] to borrow Gadamer's definition.

Racist implications of the Zionist vision and practice are a case in point. Unity is a powerful concept often used by politicians and state authorities to quiet dissent, as was evident after September 11 and the Gulf War.[7] Slogans such as "united we stand," and "you're with us or against us" were intended to articulate solidarity and the strength of America and the West in contrast to nations, especially Arab, rejecting the idea of freedom and democracy. The concept of unity was utilized as a discursive weapon in the fight of the West against Muslims. The introduction of fear, then, was used to strengthen a call for unity and patriotism. At such times, challenges to prevailing government mandates are easily deflected and counter attacked.[8]

In a similar fashion, the ruling class in Israel constantly beats a drum to remind Israelis that unity is the only way to stand strong against the ubiquitous Arab threat. In practice, however, this "unity" camouflages growing social and racial tension that ultimately leads to fragmentation. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the Zionist vision called for erasing differences, which in turn led to a false image of national unity. The tension inherent in repressing minorities in the pursuit of an ideal community continues to surface. As Shohat and Stam (1994) emphasize, multiculturalism should not be viewed simply as a celebration of differences but rather as an intellectual project that must be articulated in relation to the critique of colonialism, racism, and imperialism as well as to Eurocentric epistemology. Their call for a profound restructuring of knowledge and cultural representation opens the way for a multi-perspective reading of history that would give voice to alternative views in an atmosphere conducive to progressive social change. It stresses what many of my interviewees identified as "a struggle over narratives."

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Israeli media has typically assumed a Western voice, voluntarily practicing censorship to achieve wholeness and unity. Internal conflicts, especially the Yemenite Babies Affair and the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi conflict, are casually disregarded or articulated as a threat. Ilana Dayan, a prominent journalist, said,

> I think that in order to survive, we need this ethos of solidarity, but the truth is that this solidarity was only between people who were similar to each other. It was a facade, a complete lie. If Mizrahi Jews had known the truth, that they were not part of the struggle or its fruit, it is possible that this society wouldn't have been established. It is painful, and now we must deconstruct this myth.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

My interviews with key media people reveal a perception that the Arab threat is immediate and urgent and justifies ignoring ongoing domestic conflicts. As Hanna Kim, a prominent journalist said, "The Arab threat is the only thing that unites us" (Interview, summer 2001). Other news editors and journalists said that media outlets focus on national security issues because they view social conflicts such as the Yemenite Babies Affair or the Ethiopian immigration crisis as less urgent and therefore not worth coverage. This notion of unity, then, has been a powerful driving force that exemplifies problems having to do with the politics of community.

UNITY AND RADICAL MIZRAHI POLITICS

In the Israeli public sphere, the notion of unity is perceived as sacred. Oppressive narratives are acceptable so long as they preserve unity. In contrast, radical Mizrahi politics are often viewed as divisive. Since the 1980s a new form of Mizrahi activism has developed. Intellectuals, artists, journalists, and students have challenged Ashkenazi domination, while some Mizrahi intellectuals have also challenged the Zionist narrative by reframing an alternative story about the Mizrahim. As Shalom Sami Chetrit (2000, 60) explained, the new radical Mizrahi discourse does not wish to take credit "for the Ashkenazi Zionist revolution, which their parent's generation had no say in shaping." While the emerging new Mizrahi story has been partially embraced by the media and the Israeli left, it still remains far from center stage.

New Mizrahi activism, such as Kivun Hadash, East for Peace, HILA, The Mizrahi Front, the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow Coalition, and the Educational Alternative of Kedma, is still often viewed by the media as separatist. For example, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi educators and activists who established HILA and later the Kedma schools in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in 1994 were motivated by a need to offer improved and equal education to children situated on Israel's margins. However, as Shlomo Swirski, one of the founders of Kedma, said, "[They] were perceived as advocates for separation between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, and separation never sounds good" (Interview, summer, 2001).

Other Mizrahi protests, such as that of Wadi Salib, the Black Panthers, the Tent Movement, and Rabbi Meshulam, were seen as acts of violence that threatened unity and the order of a democratic state. Police forcefully curtailed these protests, and these political struggles were never perceived as legitimate. While the protests had an impact, the Mizrahi activists were portrayed more as criminals by the mainstream media than as social and political campaigners.[9] As Swirski claimed, "There is an apparatus here [in Israel] that translates every Mizrahi protest for equality into an attempt for separation while at the same time presenting Mizrahi people as low level and low class" (Interview, summer 2001).

Like many Western media organizations, the Israeli media gravitates toward "feel-good" stories. Even within conflicts or social splits, the media is still focused on the stories and the people who made it. Thus, media coverage of social conflicts, from an angle that might provoke the public to rethink the Zionist point of view is almost nonexistent. The controlled narratives are still that of the melting pot and integration, despite its complete and longtime history of failure.[10] Chetrit (1999, 23) illustrated the practical manifestation of these concepts:

> When reasonable Ashkenazi people are talking to me about integration or melting pot, or the integration of the exiles and other national sugar-coated candy, I want to ask them in all seriousness—why are you troubled with the fact that I want to stay Mizrahi? Or what elements of my Mizrahi culture and identity do you wish to adopt or to inherit to your children? When Mizrahi people are talking about the need to create a new Israeli, I want them to show me the difference between this creature and the old Ashkenazi/Israeli. In other words, what is left of the Mizrahi identity after the integration? Nothing! The integration is nothing but a big eraser in White hands that erase any dark spot of their skin. Then, the White hands will give the erased and unthreatening Black person a big hug and will declare him as one of us, flesh of the flesh of the beautiful, the strong, the right Israel—the Ashkenazi state of Israel.

Historical Context and Identity

Resolving the Yemenite Babies Affair is crucial to a young Mizrahi generation trying to make sense of who they are. They must know their past and what constitutes their traditions and history before they can be part of the "common sense" that constitutes Israeli society. It is widely accepted among scholars that historical context is crucial to the process of identity formation. Stuart Hall (1992) suggested that we need historical context to examine what Gramsci has called the "common sense" that constitutes a society (73). In "Culture Identity and Diaspora" (1994, 394), Hall defined the process of consolidating one's identity as a "matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'." He claimed that cultural identity belongs to the future as much as to the past. Cultural identity is constantly negotiated between the retelling of history and an ongoing struggle about power and knowledge a la Foucault. When examining identity from this point of view, it is important to realize, as Edward Said (1978) noted, that part of the knowledge and history of minorities was constructed through the way the West influenced them to perceive themselves.

The state of Israel provided generations of Mizrahi children with a formal history that not only excluded their part, but also identified Mizrahim as the problem.[11] As shown in Chapter 1, the definitive recent history of the

Jewish people only reflects the recent history of the Ashkenazi European.[12] Only recently have Mizrahi artists, historians, and journalists communicated in their own words. Within such alternative narratives, as Shohat and Stam (1994, 307) pointed out, "re-inscription of the past inevitably also rewrites the present."

NEGOTIATING CULTURE AND DIFFERENCE

The role of history in determining the present and the future was a common topic in my interviews with Yemenite and Mizrahi activists. Interviewees stressed the need to address social conflicts such as the Yemenite Babies Affair to create a healthier social fabric. Many Yemenite families, however, have already lost whatever trust they had in state authorities and most believe that they will not see justice done in their lifetimes. Yemenite activist Rafi Aharon said,

> I wish the state had the courage to take responsibility for these acts or it will forever be a stain on our conscience. What I want as a second generation Yemenite is for the institution to recognize this Affair and to make historical justice with the Yemenite community.

Yemenite leader Rabbi Korah expressed sadness and frustration with the Zionist absorption of Yemenites into Israel:

> The Yemenite Babies Affair exposes the corrupt base which this country was established upon. My grandfather was already in Israel during the mass immigration and he was excited about the Yemenite immigration and the Zionist operation. However, when he saw the humiliating and condescending treatment that the Yemenite people were subjected to, he took a vow of silence as a protest of these events. He was among the greatest supporters of Operation Magic Carpet, but felt betrayed in the end and disconnected from the Zionist dream.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

Israeli critics of liberalism often misunderstand claims such as Rabbi Korah's description, accusing Mizrahim as having a tendency to foster an active memory of former injustice and thus threatening what they see as "Israeli unity." Like Todd Gitlin and Kenan Malik, Israeli writers such as David Ohana, Gadi Taub, and Nisim Calderon believe radical Mizrahi politics is divisive and driven by what they call "scars of the past." Taub (1998), for instance, viewed liberals as "conservatives in costumes." He said,

> They prefer to focus on the wounds and not to cure them because the very continuity of injustice is the continuity of its own justice . . . They are

> always presented as if they own justice; anyone who disagrees with them is a "racist," "fascist," or "oppressor."
>
> (221)

What Taub neglects to see is that basic human needs of justice and dignity are primary conditions for establishing any sort of dialogue. Dignity and trust must be restored to allow an appropriate and productive future relationship. Oppressed populations seeking redress insist on redefining the establishment's history to include all the truth, not just that convenient to the establishment. Yemenite families don't revel in reliving past anguish, but while the Babies Affair remains unresolved in accordance to the guiding principles of the most basic human rights, Yemenite families will seek justice. This is not, as Taub suggests, a refusal to get over their pain or need special indulgence.

Taub's writings projected a general concern that the Mizrahi community might not want to assimilate. His approach resembled what Lauren Berlant (1997) defined as a "cultural war over whose race will be the national one for the policy-driven near future and according to what terms?" (207). Berlant rejected William A. Henry's attack on multiculturalism and identity politics as causing the loss of "the dominant narrative" and putting "patriotism and national pride at stake" (206). As she stated, Henry and others, like Taub, really advocated for white supremacy or "hegemony of Whiteness" at the expense of minorities, most of whom were immigrants.

Similarly, Calderon (2000) viewed the postmodern consideration of different narratives as "a desire for isolation while ignoring community and solidarity that is at the heart of Israeli society" (146). He criticized Israeli academics for applying American theories of multiculturalism and cultural difference to Israeli society. In Calderon's mind, the two societies can't be compared, because Israel's inception and formation was driven by working for the collective good, whereas the United States is driven by the aim for individual gain. Calderon, however, neglects to recognize the facade of unity upon which this so-called collective society was established.

The Zionist relation to Mizrahim carries a history of oppression and deceit, making the inclusion of Mizrahim possible only on the condition that they remain subordinate to Ashkenazi power. In the name of unity, children of Mizrahi immigrants were taught to hate their identities and their cultures; they were encouraged to become "good Ashkenazi Israelis." The melting pot paradigm was not an inevitable reality, as Taub argues; rather, it was a "devastating mistake" that merited criticism in order to prevent similar ones in the future.[13]

Even if Calderon's distinction between the United States and Israeli societies was conventionally accepted, there are enough similarities between the two societies that American theories of not only culture and difference, but

also of affirmative action, can be applied. Despite its limitations, as West (1999, 495) said, affirmative action is still an important step in putting a "significant dent in the tightly controlled network of privileged white male citizens." And while both societies are far from identical, they have a striking resemblance of social inequality. West's description of white privileged people holding most important jobs and influential positions can be applied to Israeli society. After all, the melting pot philosophy was adopted directly from the United States; why not adopt some of the solutions for breaking white supremacy?[14]

UNITY AND EXCLUSION

As Young (1990) has argued, the politics of community suppresses differences and encourages further exclusion of people in that their experiences are unaccounted for. A case in point is criticism made by women of color of white feminism; they claimed oppression within feminism for years excluded women on the basis of race, culture, or sexual orientation. As hooks (1984, 49) pointed out, "The ideology of sisterhood as expressed by contemporary feminist activists indicated no acknowledgment that racist discrimination, exploitation, and oppression of multi-ethnic women by white women made it impossible for the two groups to feel they shared common interests or political concerns." The natural communal tendencies to totalize toward a single representation of many individuals, as argued by Young, create theoretical and practical problems.

This kind of analysis is applicable to the logic motivating Israel's politics of community. The same flaws of the feminist community that resulted in exclusion of minorities can also be found within Zionism, despite Israel's minority communities together constituting the majority of the population. As shown in Chapter 1, the philosophy and politics of Zionism assume the Jewish religion to be a fundamental category above all other political claims. In so doing, categories such as race or ethnicity have been discounted.

In "Blowups in the Border Zones" (1996, 74), Smadar Lavie claimed that such exclusions remain part of present-day Israel. Even educated Mizrahi artists are affected. Lavie wrote of third world Israeli authors who compromised their identities in their efforts to become Sabras, who nevertheless were rejected by the center. When these authors realized that the "Sabra Eurocenter" had the power "to require but prevent their entry to itself," they went back to the margins to remap their border zones.

EXCLUDING ETHIOPIAN JEWS

Elements of exclusion still dominate social policies in Israeli society and can been seen today, for instance, in the absorption of Ethiopian Jews into

Israeli society or the de facto segregation of foreign workers and their families from the simple motivation of racism, whatever higher needs or better intentions are ascribed. As Baruch Kimmerling (1998) noted, in part, Ethiopian Jews were excluded from Israeli society because of their "dark skin color, their doubtful Jewishness, and their poor human capital."[15] One painful incident of discrimination against Ethiopian Jews occurred when the Israeli government required those waiting for immigration permits in Addis Ababa to divorce their spouses if they were non-Jews. As Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled (2002, 323) noted, "This blatantly illegal requirement was motivated by the fear of Israeli officials that strict adherence to the letter of the Law of Return would result in a deluge of Ethiopians flooding the country."

In her book *Immigrants and Bureaucrats* (1999), Esther Hertzog showed how transgressions made by immigration officials in the 1950s, especially by defining Mizrahim as a problematic group, were made again in the 1980s with the Ethiopian immigrants.[16] Hertzog claimed that while categorizing Ethiopians as a group in need seems like assistance, in reality the state uses the bureaucracy to create social distance. Absorption centers, intended to aid in the integration of immigrations into Israeli society, instead increased isolation and marginalization.[17] Moreover, as Shlomo Swirski and Barbara Swirski (2002) noted, the decision to absorb the Ethiopian immigrant via the Jewish Agency strengthened this organization, which was on the verge of closing.

Hertzog shows how immigration policies governing Ethiopians in the 1980s, as in the 1950s, contributed to the isolation of immigrants both physically and socially, which allowed authorities to maintain control over many aspects of their lives. For example, a boy named Danny, who lived in an absorption center, was being denied entry to the center in which his father resided. When Danny insisted on seeing his father, the director of the center threatened to call the police if he did not leave. Not only were father and son separated, authorities maintained complete control over their time together.

Hertzog claimed that this dynamic was partially due to establishing closed absorption centers with tight security and guards, ostensibly for the protection of the new immigrants. In exchanges with Hertzog, the director of the absorption center, who set the policies that determined who could leave and enter, said, "I am like a mother to them . . . they are naïve and always believe me." The veneer of this solicitous attitude is thin, though, and it soon becomes apparent she despises her charges. "They are of very low standard," she said, "they are creatures from another world" (18). Hertzog believed this thinking created the negative perception about Ethiopian immigrants among others and among themselves. It resembles the power imbalance in the relationship between black and white people

as described by Frantz Fanon (1967) in *Black Skin White Masks*. Upon numerous observations, Fanon claimed, "A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening" (31).

In the absence of dialogue about the transgressions of the past, such as separation of Yemenite immigrants from their babies in the 1950s, acts of oppression will no doubt reoccur. Hertzog (2004) points to a direct connection between the kidnapping of Yemenite babies in the 1950s and what she calls the systematic removal of children from their families in Israel today. "There is great similarity between the methods used to take over kids in the 1950s and today . . . the children are still a resource for the government to maintain its power . . . all the while using rhetoric and ideology that justifies any means including violence by the controlling institutions all the while denying any responsibility for these actions" (12).

Hertzog's analysis demonstrated how state welfare and absorption organizations infantilized immigrants, despite good intentions. Major decisions, such as the children's education, were once again made without consulting parents. The children were usually channeled into religious vocational schools, boarding schools, or to the special education schools, often leaving them further behind and disconnecting them from their parents.[18] While removing the Ethiopian children to boarding school was done with their parents' consent, Hertzog (2004) claimed it was still an example of the great power the government had in taking over weak populations. In one case, state officials took all three children from Ethiopian parents on the basis of a social worker's observation that "they were not raised in proper conditions" (*Bamakom* May 14, 1999). The distraught father physically resisted and was arrested by police. "I want to know how anyone else might respond when someone is taking his children away," he said in an interview to the local newspaper *Bamakom*. "They [the state] are doing this to us because we are quiet. This is inhuman . . . If they would at least tell us where they are being taken."

As in the 1950s, the state exercised its power by separating children from their parents and by diminishing the importance of the nuclear family. Moreover, the personnel responsible for absorption of Ethiopian immigrants showed remarkably little respect for the immigrants' culture and their ability to function as parents. Taking a page directly from the mistreatment of Yemenite immigrants, Ethiopians were criticized for treating their children poorly. When a baby died at an absorption center, a paraprofessional who worked there said, "Poor little thing, he shouldn't have died . . . they [the immigrants] really don't look after their children. They don't dress them warmly enough. They themselves dress warmly but they bring the children out with very little on them . . . this is how they are. There's nothing to be done" (Hertzog 1999, 39). Hertzog also noted that

immigrants were patronized in many ways, which ultimately prevented them from joining the society as equals.

This is at once dehumanizing and sets the stage for immigration officials to manipulate the situation at will. Even in cases of good intentions, the general mistreatment of children is only steps away from neglect. The implication of incompetence is clear, and those who know better are obliged to help, making it the perfect justification for handling the Ethiopians' affairs for them. At this point, of course, the altruistic motivation disappears and the immigrants are "helped" in the way that best furthers the goals of those already in power. This includes interference of nurses and social workers in many aspects of family life, including family planning, childcare, and intimacy between partners.

Hertzog said that a nurse at the absorption center, for example, chastised an Ethiopian mother for carrying a child in her arms when she had access to a stroller. More recently, of course, the Ethiopian mother's preference has become the favored, more natural parenting style among Western mothers, commonly known in the United States as "attachment parenting."[19] While Israeli mothers were free to parent their children as they chose, nurses and social workers, claiming superior knowledge, dictated childcare to Ethiopian mothers. Hertzog said that this was not done "as an answer to [the Ethiopian mothers'] wishes or needs, but by way of instruction and criticism" (154).

According to Hertzog, the integration of Ethiopian families into Israeli society was influenced by the same Eurocentric biases that dominated descriptions of Mizrahi and Yemenite Jews in the 1950s. Both were seen as "traditional" societies in need of rescue and enlightenment.[20] Hertzog noted that "behind this image of patronage and responsibility lies also the suspicion and anxiety about criticism" (38).

As Ethiopian Jews were being excluded from Israel's center and closely controlled by the government, immigrants from the former Soviet Union were integrated into Israeli society via a program known as "Direct Absorption." Immigrants chosen for direct absorption were free to make different choices, such as a place to live, employment, and lifestyle, without government interference.[21] Shafir and Peled (2002) noted that by instituting direct absorption for Russian immigrants, Israeli officials hoped to "restore the declining share of Ashkenazim in the Jewish population" with European immigrants (310). The assertion that European-Russian culture was superior to Mizrahi and Ethiopian culture was upheld by Israeli authorities and immigrants.[22]

A Russian girl named Katy Amos and her mother, Lena, illustrated this sentiment in an interview to the newspaper *Hadashot* on Rosh Hashana eve, 1991. This girl, who appeared in a commercial produced by the Ministry of Absorption intending to promote tolerance and acceptance of

Russian immigrants, freely expressed her racist views about Ethiopians. Her mother, Lena, said, "Moroccans and Iraqis are like Arabs . . . we don't want them . . . they should go to other countries" (September 8, 1991). Katy, meanwhile, was appalled at the reporter's suggestion that she become friends with an Ethiopian kid.

In response to this interview, Yael Tzdok, a Yemenite journalist, pointed to what seemed to be the main problem caused by the absence of an open and constructive dialogue about racism in Israeli society. "If the Russians thought that hate towards Arabs, Ethiopian and Mizrahim will generate a negative reaction in Israeli society, they wouldn't be rushing to express these racist views in public . . . They allow themselves to talk this way, however, because they feel their words are falling on sympathetic ears and merry hearts . . . They know they are the white hope of the orient-detesters in Israel" (*Hadashot* September 20, 1991).

VICTIMS/VICTIMIZERS

A fundamental assumption in the creation of Israel was the recognition of Jews as long-standing victims who were entitled to a state of their own. To this day, the Jewish state justifies its actions on the basis of its victim status, all the while ignoring its own role in victimizing others. In fact, the image of Jews as victim is so central to the construction of Israeli national identity that any attempt to reframe this image is perceived as an attempt to disrupt the very foundation of our right to the state of Israel.

An incident in the Kedma School in Tel Aviv[23] illustrates this point. In May 1995, the school held a somewhat nontraditional Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony. It was the custom for six candles to be lit in memory of the six million murdered Jews. Sami Chetrit, then principle of the school, added a seventh candle, lit by a Holocaust survivor, to honor all other people murdered during the Holocaust and in other genocides around the world. Chetrit said he believed that the Holocaust should teach people about racism and the importance of recognizing other cultures and other people's sufferings.

The public and the media attacked Chetrit's idea despite its intention to enhance the traditional ceremony by emphasizing inclusion, peace, and equality. Essentially, he was accused of diminishing the suffering of Jewish Holocaust victims by recognizing others who had suffered or died. Chetrit's ceremony attracted an enormous amount of interest by the press, which seemed to confuse the students. Critics were averse to the idea of introducing a new element in the ceremony and portrayed Chetrit and the school as divisive forces. Taub (1997) claimed that Chetrit had tarnished a unique symbol of the Holocaust, depriving students in Kedma and people from the Hatikva neighborhood in Tel Aviv from their place in society.[24]

He further labeled Chetrit's memorial service as a "manipulative" struggle about victimhood: "By not recognizing the uniqueness of the Holocaust," Taub wrote, "Chetrit took his students out of the collective and told them that they didn't belong" (228).

What Chetrit's critics fail to recognize is that multiple narratives shouldn't threaten the collective. To the contrary, accepting other points of view is the way to enhance and create true unity, making everyone feel like they belong. Chetrit (2001) wrote,

> We tried to learn the universal lesson of the Holocaust . . . We learned that through history, in similar circumstances, a human monster grew. A monster that murdered and terminated other nations such as the Indians in America, the Africans that were sold as slaves, the Armenians in the beginning of the century and Rwanda of the late 20th century. We believe in many narratives that can exist next to each other and in no one narrative that silences all the rest.[25]

Mizrahi journalists and activists interviewed said that the media tends to minimize Mizrahi pain while emphasizing Ashkenazi trauma in the national narrative. The Mizrahi community, they said, would like a legitimate place within Israeli history that is recognized within the public domain. Shaul Bibi, a prominent Mizrahi journalist, stated,

> The Mizrahi narrative is still absent in schools and other public expressions. In Israel today, it is still hard to talk about these issues; you are immediately labeled as militant or whiny. All I am asking is for my story to be legitimate. It is inconceivable that in the postmodern arena, my father's story is still absent from the main narrative.
>
> (Interview, summer, 2001)

Yemenite activist Avner Farhi said that what hurt him the most about the Yemenite Babies Affair was the lack of recognition of the pain of Yemenite victims: "It is as if only one group in this country has ownership of history and even pain. Only Ashkenazi pain is legitimate" (Interview, summer 2001). Other Yemenite activists such as Rafi Aharon, Rafi Subeli, and Yosef Dahoah-Halevi agreed with Farhi's assertion and claimed that delegitimization of Yemenite and Mizrahi pain and the lack of recognition made them feel victimized again.

As shown in Chapter 3, the media played an active role in controlling public perception about the Babies Affair. As a collective, it served as a protector of public unity rather than a "watchdog of democracy." While so doing, it excluded the Yemenites' experiences and undermined their narratives, freely blaming the victim when necessary. The state, on the other hand, was cleared of wrongdoing in relation to inadequate investigations

of the Yemenite Babies Affair. As Hanna Kim, a prominent journalist, said, "The Yemenite Babies Affair was not covered properly because there is a great fear of what might be discovered" (Interview, summer, 2001).

The idea of Jews victimizing Jews is hard to comprehend. This in part is why the Affair was framed as a Yemenite problem only. On the other hand, Yemenites had no say about how the Affair could be resolved. Supporting the government's position, the media left the story vague for a long time. The Affair was "artificially closed" in November 2001, even though Yemenite victims harshly criticize the commission's report and continue to feel betrayed and wounded. As Yossi Dahan, a professor and a columnist, said, "It is not just one more issue, the Yemenite Babies Affair. It is a crime with no remorse. It is a crime with no equivalent in Israeli history" (Interview, summer, 2001). Yael Tzadok, a journalist with the Voice of Israel, explained,

> Organized crimes performed by people against other people of their own nation have occurred all over the world, including similar affairs where babies were used as an "asset" that is negated from "unworthy" families and granted to "more worthy" ones (in Canada, Sweden, Argentina, Guatemala, Australia). We didn't invent it. Yet, while other countries have started a process of revealing the truth, listening to the victims, healing the wounds and heading towards forgiveness and reconciliation, here in Israel we won't even admit that it happened. We believe that we, Jews, are more moral than other nations. In addition, this was just a few years after the holocaust; we were expected to be especially sensitive to evil and prejudice. And yet here we are, with our own homemade racism. It's very hard for us to perceive that something so cruel and inhuman was committed, here, in the holy land, to Jews by other Jews. And mind you, it happened when we gathered here, in the Promised Land, to redeem all the Jewish tribes from the Diaspora's hardships. What does it say about the Jewish state? This is why you find massive silencing from the government and the press. We are a society that lives with a very big gap between what we pretend to be and what we really are.
>
> (Interview, summer 2008)

Lack of Closure, Future Costs

The appearance of giving closure to the Yemenite Babies Affair is a ruse. As shown in chapters 3 and 4, "closure" of the Yemenite Babies Affair was orchestrated by the state, more as the result of its refusal to investigate further. Objecting Yemenite activists and families were accused of standing in the way of closure. To this day, many of these families continue to seek more satisfying answers because they want future generations to understand their past. These families are in search of a fair and accurate portrayal of what really happened in order to put this sad piece of history

to rest. Moreover, Yemenite activist Rafi Shubeli said closure of this Affair is closely linked to the fight about narratives and the deconstruction of Zionist hegemony.

> There is a great imbalance between the state's power and the Yemenite Community. The state has enough power to prevent real closures and exposure of the truth. On the other hand, the Yemenites despite their little power managed to be heard. We are saying anywhere we can—this isn't over yet. I personally see this Affair as a way to fight about my place in Israeli society. I want this narrative to be recognized. In the process I also wish to deconstruct the Zionist narrative that currently serves as the foundation of Israeli society.
>
> (Interview, summer 2008)

The debate over multiculturalism and identity politics lies at the heart of Israeli society, affecting public attitudes and social policies. It is time for the public to recognize that state-mandated concepts of integration, melting pot, and community have never been inclusive. Today's Israel, which is a divided and fragmented society, must change. It is time to embrace a more effective approach to living with differences.

Young's alternative, the "politics of difference," embodies two central points we should consider in achieving unity in diversity. First, recognizing differences not only in celebrating them, but also in understanding that not everyone must be assimilated into the dominant culture. Secondly, recognizing that we cannot fully understand others as they understand themselves. Young defines the ideal city as one that has "openness to unassimilated otherness." Group differentiation is a fact of social life. Multiculturalism does not denote a lack of solidarity or unity between groups. Rather, it provides a way to identify groups ideologically while ensuring political representation of their interests and celebrating the distinctive cultures and characteristics of diverse groups. Only when different people's experiences, narratives, and cultures are equally accounted for can we coexist over time.

The ongoing debate about unity within Israeli society should not scare the advocates of community. The new Mizrahi politics does not seek separation but recognition, not fragmentation but diversity.[26] It should be viewed as a healthy vision for a place that many consider home. This vision fits with West's description of the "new cultural politics of difference," which "neither romanticizes nor idealizes marginalized people." As West pointed out, the new cultural politics of difference "shuns narrow particularisms, parochialisms and separatisms, just as it rejects false universalism and homogeneous totalisms. Instead [it] affirms the perennial quest for the precious ideals of individuality and democracy by digging deep into the

depths of human particularities and social specificities in order to construct new kinds of connection, affinities and communities" (1999, 137).

Most Mizrahi activists I interviewed emphasized they do not approach this debate from a place of hatred or some sort of reverse racism. In fact, they all rejected and condemned attempts of counter racism. As Mizrahi journalist Shaul Bibi said, "The truth is that we must have a dialogue. With all our problems we have, I am crazy about this place; it is like having an argument inside the family" (Interview, summer, 2001).

Chetrit also considered dialogue to be the main instrument in achieving a more fair and equitable society. He said,

> I intentionally write to shock people, to generate an extreme reaction to one side or another. In most cases, harsh reaction generates thought; the thought leads to questions; and the search for answers leads to a dialogue; dialogue forces recognition; and recognition forces fair solutions. Dialogue is my main purpose.
>
> (1999, 10)

Epilogue

The unresolved tragedy of the Yemenite Babies Affair will not fade with time, as some state leaders hope. Time may even have deepened the wounds of long-suffering mothers and fathers as well as younger generations that see injustice wrought upon their families and community. The kidnapping of my aunt's baby remains a vivid memory. Many people of my generation have made an unbreakable connection with the past and have vowed to fight for recognition of their parents' narratives. To avoid consequences stemming from civil discontent, more dialogue is needed. The state and the public must listen and truly regard parents' narratives. These parents have a right to be heard.

To date, more than 1,000 complaints have been filed with one or more of the three commissions designed to investigate the Yemenite Babies Affair. However, some activists estimate that hundreds of complaints were not filed because many Yemenite parents lost all faith in state authorities. Despite many legal hurdles facing the final commission's investigation, the numbers are still horrifying, making the often-cavalier attitude of decision makers and the media even more shocking.[27]

The state and the media have told parents of Yemenite descent as well as other Mizrahim that their experiences, memories, and pain are not relevant. No society can build a healthy future or conscience with a stained past. As Boaz Sanjero (2002, 75) stated, "The road to achieving true peace goes through exposing and agreeing on the past, not through hiding it."

Notes

Introduction

1. Over 1,000 complaints were submitted to all three commissions combined. Rabbi Meshulam's organization claimed to have information about 1,700 babies kidnapped prior to 1952 (450 of them from other Mizrahi ethnic groups) and about 4,500 babies kidnapped prior to 1956. These figures were neither discredited nor validated by the last commission (Shoshi Zaid, *The Child is Gone* [Jerusalem: Geffen Books, 2001], 19–22).
2. During the immigrants' stay in transit and absorption camps, the babies were taken to stone structures called baby houses. Mothers were allowed entry only a few times each day to nurse their babies.
3. See, for instance, the testimony of Naomi Gavra in Tzipi Talmor's film *One Way Road* (1993) and the testimony of Shoshana Farhi on the show *Uvda* (1996).
4. The transit camp Hashed in Yemen housed most of the immigrants before the flight to Israel.
5. This story is based on my interview with the Ovadiya family for a story I wrote for the newspaper *Shishi* in 1994 and a subsequent interview for the show *Uvda* in 1996. I should also note that this story as well as my aunt's story does not represent the typical kidnapping scenario.
6. The Hebrew term "Sephardic" means "from Spain."
7. For more on the problems with both terms, Mizrahim and Sepharadim, see Ella Shohat's work in *Taboo Memories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 333–336.
8. It becomes hard to gather accurate data on ethnic origin since the Statistical Bureau in Israel now refers to all third-generation children as "Israelis."
9. Israeli army pilots are considered the elite.
10. The selection regulations governing the immigration from North Africa lasted from 1951 to 1956.
11. Giyora Yoseftal was a powerful man within the Jewish Agency at the time. He was the treasurer and chairman of the Israeli Absorption Department. He is quoted in Malka 1998, 78.
12. The Yemenites, however, were always perceived as hard workers and were even defined by the Zionists as "natural workers," which is why they were brought in 1911 to work the land. See more on this topic in the next chapter.

13. See also Shohat, "The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: The Case of the Mizrahim," *Critique* 10 (1997): 3–18.
14. In 2006, the newspapers reported that Ashkenazi people in an affluent town near Tel Aviv would not allow Ethiopian children to swim in the community pool. In the town of Petah-Tiqva, Ashkenazi parents insisted that their girls, who attended a public religious school, would not study in classes with Mizrahi girls. In September 2007, 80 Ethiopian kids were rejected from the public school system in Petah-Tiqva.
15. In March 2004, Lavie with the Mizrahi-Palestinian Coalition against Apartheid in Israeli Anthropology (CAAIA) filed a complaint with Israel's State Comptroller asking the state to explain the nearly total absence of Mizrahim and Palestinians in Israeli universities. See also Shlomo Swirski's book *Education in Israel: Schooling for Inequality* (Tel Aviv: Breirot, 1990) (Hebrew).
16. Lavie delivered this speech at a rally protesting the demolition of 30 homes in the neighborhood of Kfar Shalem in southern Tel Aviv on July 7, 2007. The speech was also published in *The Electronic Intifada*, August 3, 2007.
17. Housing policies and unequal distribution of land are major reasons for Mizrahim's marginal economic and social position. For a detailed analysis see Claris Harbon, "Affirmative Squatting: Women Correcting Past Injustice," in Studies in Law, Gender and Feminism, eds. Daphne Baraq-Erez (Tel Aviv: Nevo publishing, 2007), 413–462 (Hebrew), and Oren Yiftachel, "Nation-Building and National Land: Social and Legal Dimensions," *Iyunei Mishpat* 21 (1998): 637–647 (Hebrew).
18. For the full legal analysis of the last commission's (Kedmi) report, see Boaz Sanjero "When There Is No Suspicion There Is No Real Investigation," *Teoriya Ubikoret* 21 (2002): 47–76 (Hebrew).
19. This is mainly the media's version of the Meshulam protest. Meshulam's organization reported a very different chain of events, discussed further in Chapter 5.
20. The data are from the Kedmi Commission report (Jerusalem 2001, 21–27).
21. "Absorbed" is the official term used in Israel. A more accurate description would be "forced integration."
    For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term "absorption."
22. On the flip side, Ashkenazi pride as the pioneers of the state is accepted naturally; any attempt to deconstruct this image is perceived as damaging their pride and is usually answered with almost violent counter discourse.
23. What he meant is they are more Ashkenazi in character.
24. This, however, was part of an election campaign to get Mizrahi votes and basically meant "sorry we didn't respect you." No action was taken by the Labor Party to correct this inequality or convey its repentance.
25. Likud is a right wing party associated with Menachem Begin, who won the election for the first time in 1977. This victory was associated with Mizrahim finally breaking off the ruling power of the Labor Party and protesting racism. Shas is a Mizrahi religious party that gained political

power in the 1990s, and its members are depicted as the ultimate Mizrahi "bad guys."

26. Shimon Peres is a former prime minister and Rabin's foreign minister at the time. In 2007, he was elected to be the president of Israel.
27. For more on Mizrahi identity and relationship with the right, see chapters 1 and 6.
28. The tendency to dismiss Yemenite narratives is part of the overall approach that assumes Mizrahim are subjective and emotional as opposed to Ashkenazim, who are objective and rational. This is also part of the reason why Mizrahi oral history is considered an inferior form of historiography.
29. For the print media discourse I had access to the inclusive archives of the newspapers *Maariv* and *Yediot Aharonot*, which included newspaper clippings from all daily newspapers (and magazines) that published stories on this Affair. This includes *Haaretz Davar Al Hamishmar Ha'olam Haze Laisha* and some local newspapers.
30. I conducted most of my interviews during June–July 2001. I spoke with most interviewees again during May–June of 2008. Some interviews were conducted for the first time during the summer of 2008. All my interviewees agreed to be quoted in their full name.
31. See Shlomo Swirski, Orientals and Ashkenazim in Israel: The Ethnic Divisions of Labor (Tel Aviv: Segal,1981) (Hebrew).
32. Although Israeli academics have sometimes characterized her work as dichotomous, in fact, it is quite the opposite; her work rejected essentialism and deconstructed the received binarism of East versus West. She has especially elaborated on the question of Mizrahi identity as hybrid in "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1 (1999): 5–20.
33. For Shohat's argument for a cross-border analysis on the question of Arab Jews, see "Staging the Quincentenary: The Middle East and the Americas," *Third Text* (London) 21 (1992–1993): 95–105.
34. For Shohat's proposal for critical Mizrahi studies, "Rupture and Return: The Shaping of a Mizrahi Epistemology," *Hagar: International Social Science Review* 2:1 (2001) 61–92 and "The Shaping of Mizrahi Studies: A Relational Approach," *Israeli Studies Forum: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 17 (2002): 86–93.
35. Shohat examined the analogies between the two "posts," that is, postcolonialism and post-Zionism. The essay also critically examines the way Said and Bhabha have been represented by recent Hebrew postcolonial writers, often portraying Said as dichotomous and Bhabha as complex, in a context where Bhabha was translated into Hebrew before Said's *Orientalism* and before Fanon's work. See Shohat, "The Postcolonial in Translation: Reading Said in Hebrew" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33 (2004): 55–75.
36. See Shohat, "Anomalies of the National: Representing Israel/Palestine," *Wide Angle* 11:3 (1989): 33–41 and "Exile, Diaspora, and Return," in *Discourse and Palestine*, eds. Annelies Moors, Toine van Teeffelen, Sharif Kanaana, and Ilham Abu Ghazaleh (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis Press, 1995), 221–236.

37. See Shohat's postscript to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Hebrew translation by Bavel Press, Tel Aviv, 2006.
38. Shohat, "Kidnapped Memories: A Mizrahi Critique of Gender and Zionist Discourse," in *Women and Gender in the Middle East and the Islamic World Today,* ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Berkeley: Center for International and Area Studies, University of California, UCIAS Digital Collection, Spring 2004), http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/

CHAPTER 1

1. Quoted in Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 43.
2. Quoted in Sami Shalom Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 49 (Hebrew).
3. The above quotes are from Hayim Malka's book *The Selection* (Israel: Self Published, 1998), 51–52.
4. For a further elaboration on Mizrahi-Ashkenazi conflicts in Israel, see Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East / West and the Politics of Representation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1989); Shlomo Swirski, *Orientals and Ashkenazim in Israel: The Ethnic Division of Labor* (Haifa: Machbarot L' Mehkar Ulbikoret, 1981); and Sami Shalom Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel.*
5. More on the Mizrahi accent in Chapter 2.
6. Swirski's publication wasn't received well by others in Israeli academia. Shortly after publishing his book, he was fired from Haifa University.
7. Quoted in Chetrit, 34.
8. For more on history textbook see Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel.*
9. Quoted in Chetrit, *The Ashkenazi Revolution is Dead: Thoughts about Israel from a Dark Angle* (Tel Aviv: Bimat Kedem Lesifrut, 1999), 127 (Hebrew).
10. I discuss further the notion of fear created by the media, with regard to Mizrahim, in the next chapter.
11. In contrast to Malka's conclusion, other academic studies, such as Deborah Hacohen's *Immigrants in Turmoil* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi) (Hebrew), justified and accepted the concept of selection. Ignoring cultural bias, Hacohen, for instance, claimed that selecting people during the mass immigration with "objective criteria" was inevitable. As Malka notes, "She never questions the fact that the selection applied only to immigrants from North Africa, and . . . were particularly severe in regard to issues of health and social status" (14–15).
12. For more on what has been said privately by Ashkenazi elite, see the author's interview with journalist Amnon Dankner in Chapter 2.
13. Shenhar gave this interview in July 1994 to the press. Shortly after, in an interview to Israeli radio, she was asked by Yael Tzadok to clarify why we needed to be "saved from becoming Levantine." Shenhar explained that we are in "danger" of being taken by what she defined as Levantine's

"superficial culture," which, she claimed, doesn't necessarily relate to ethnicity (Yael Tzadok, Interview, summer 2008).

14. For more on Zionism as colonialism, see articles in *Iton Aher* (Hebrew*), News from Within,* and Ilan Pape's "Zionism as Colonialism," in *From Vision to Revision: A Hundred Years of Historiography of Zionism,* ed Yechiam Weitz (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1997) (Hebrew).
15. Anat Meidan wrote the story for *Hadashot* (May 11, 1990).
16. To this day, Yemenites are stereotyped as "sweet, quiet people," as are Ethiopian Jews. As such, violent protests against racism and discrimination by Yemenites and Ethiopians were shocking to the public. People could not understand how such "docile" people could be so violent. Rarely did people publicly deliberate about what would push "sweet, quiet people" to this point.
17. The interview was reprinted in the journal *Afikim* September 1990, 70.
18. More on the New Historians and old historians in the final section of this chapter.
19. Karkotzkin emphasized that he was not comparing the actions of SS officers to Zionists, and there was no place for such comparisons. Decisions about race, however, were made in both cases and affected the well-being of entire populations.
20. For instance, the first group of immigrants in the late 1880s, known as the Biluyim, of the first Aliya (immigration) were a total of 18 people, but nevertheless became symbols of Jewish heroism for generations to come.
21. *The Unpromised Land*, directed by Ayelet Heller, is a documentary (1993) that relays the story of Yemenite settlers in Kibbutz Kinneret in 1912.
22. Rafi Shubeli and Emanuel Mudahi, "A Tale of Commemorating," *Afikim* (October 1997): 32 (Hebrew), also claim that in the process of negotiation with kibbutz members they refused to both the Yemenite version and a much "softer" version composed together using the term "moved" rather than deported. Shubeli and Mudahi also believe that kibbutz members had an aversion to the idea of forming a sign together with the Yemenites and wanted sole control over the text.
23. More on the subject of memory and history textbooks in the final chapter of this book.
24. More on the secularization of Yemenite Jews and their protest in Chapter 5.
25. Ge'ula in Hebrew means salvation or deliverance.
26. Quoted in Levitan, "A Socio-Political Analysis of the Immigration and Absorption of the Yemenite Jews in Israel in Modern Times" (Masters thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 1983), 139.
27. The letter written by Ovadia, who was a representative from the Jewish Agency, is quoted in Y. Harris, *On Eagles Talons* (Bnei Benei-Brak: Torat Avot, 1988), 62 (Hebrew).
28. See more on the harsh conditions in Camp Ge'ula also under the direction of Dr. Olga Fienberg in Nisim Binyamin Gamlieli's book *Yemen and Ge'ula Camp* (Tel Aviv: Afikim, 1978) (Hebrew).
29. The Yemenite community, on the other hand, calls this operation *Al Kanfei Nesharim* (On Eagles' Wings), a verse taken from the Book of Exodus:

"And I will transport you on eagles' wings and bring you to me." This exemplifies their messianic excitement about the immigration to Israel.

30. My mom said she still remembers how her mother's necklace was ripped from her at the transit camp in Yemen, because she refused to give the necklace away.
31. This includes academic research, salaries, and of course money exchanging hands between private sellers and buyers. For more see Smadar Lavie's article "Cultural Property Rights and the Racial Construction of the Mizrahi as a Trade-Mark: Notes on the Revolving Door of Israel's Academe-Regime," in *Rainbow of Opinions: A Mizrahi Agenda for Israel*, eds. Yona Yossi, Naaman Yonit, and Machlev David (Jerusalem: November Books, 2007), 198–204 (Hebrew).
32. I should note that Morris, who is associated with coining the term "New Historian," has made a dramatic shift in his writing in recent years. He now blames the Palestinians and claims a peaceful coexistence in the Middle East is not possible. For more details see his article "Peace? No Chance," *Guardian,* February 22, 2002. See also Avi Shlaim's reply, "A Betrayal of History," *Guardian,* February 23, 2002.
33. The biggest difference, however, between these two camps is that Shapira's narratives are in the history textbook while the New Historians are still far from the mainstream; thus, their power in shaping the "national memory" is still relatively weak.
34. Further information about this violent incident and the pursuant legal investigation can be found in chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 2

1. The show was written and produced by Mizrahi director Ron Cahlili.
2. TGI/Teleseker is an independent Israeli survey company. This readership survey was taken between June 2007 and July 2008, for the adult population of 18 and above. The 10,000-person sample represents a cross-section of 3.73 million people.
3. *Hadashot* was the third daily newspaper published by the owners of *Haaretz*. This newspaper took a comparatively liberal and critical approach toward Israel's political and social issues. Years of financial difficulties and lack of advertising led to the paper's closure in 1993.
4. Information about *Briza* was gathered in an interview with channel CEO Ron Cahlili.
5. For more on current media ownership see *Ha'ayin Hashviit,* November 2006.
6. The Palestinian citizens in the territories could have watched the speech broadcast on Jordanian or Egyptian TV.
7. For more on economic control and economic coverage see "Economics and Society: Who's Best Interest Is to Keep Them Apart?" by Yossi Dahan, in haoketz.org (December 2004).
8. Hertzog encountered difficulties with the editors of the op-ed page in *Maariv* and in 2008 left to write for *Yediot Aharonot's* web addition *ynet*.

9. Rabbi Meshulam led the only forceful protest against government inaction despite assurances of thorough investigation of the Yemenite Babies Affair. He was pilloried for the violent nature of his action. Very few columnists, including Hertzog, supported him in the press. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion.
10. Yechimovish reported these results in the media and an interview with me in 2001.
11. Zohar Argov was known as "the King of Mizrahi music." If you ask a Mizrahi DJ to play something by "the King," you are more likely to hear *Badad* (Alone) than "Blue Suede Shoes."
12. Dankner worked for *Haaretz*, *Hadashot,* and *Maariv*; he was known for writing racist columns about Mizrahim. He has changed his views recently, protesting what he calls "Ashkenazi domination," especially within the judicial system.
13. This article was published in *Ha'ir* on September 25, 1998, and featured three Ashkenazi writers who felt burdened by "Mizrahi domination."
14. Linguists consider the Mizrahi/Sephardic accent the correct Hebrew pronunciation; for further explanation, see Derek Penslar, "Broadcast Orientalism: Representation of Mizrahi Jewry in Israeli Radio, 1948–1967," in *Orientalism and the Jews,* ed. Davidson Kalmar Ivan and Pensler Derek (Waltham: Brandise University Press, 2005), 181–200.
15. Hanoch Levin was a famous theater writer and director. His work had a distinct anti-establishment tone and made fun of society and social rules.
16. I elaborate more on Mizrahi resistance in Chapter 5.
17. I analyze Meshulam's protest in depth in Chapter 5.
18. Shiran, who was known as a prominent social activist, died in 2005.
19. Amud haesh (lit the line of fire) aired on Channel One in the 1980s and presented itself as a definitive version of important moments in Israeli history. Mizrahi subjects were represented unjustly, being relegated to supporting role in the Zionist project. Shiran, with a group of Mizrahi activists, petitioned the Supreme Court to block the television broadcast, since broadcasting laws require Channel One to reflect different ethnic groups in society. The motion was denied.
20. Avraham does not use the term "Orientalism," but his analysis reflects and demonstrates the meaning.
21. This was the first research (a masters thesis from Ben-Gurion University) to examine representation of minorities on Channel One. Bar-Lev concluded that Channel One failed its obligation for fair representation.
22. By carpet she refers to the mass immigration from Yemen during 1949 known as "Operation Magic Carpet."
23. While they didn't record births in Yemen following the Western way, many people did have similar records. My grandfather wrote all the birthdates of his children in a handwritten poem book. His remarks about each of his children's birth was poetic. On my father's date of birth, he wrote, "Today I have received the beautiful flower, my son Aharon"
24. *HILA* is a non-profit organization advocating for equal rights in public education, especially in special education.

25. Yechimovish decided to run in the 2006 election campaign with the Labor Party and is now a member of the Israeli parliament.
26. Both Kotler and Ailon are news hosts on Channels Ten and Two.
27. The results of this research can be found on the webpage of the second broadcasting authority. Another research released in 2006 found similar results. According to researchers, while some change can be marked, the representation of minority groups is still mostly in connection to a conflict they represent, or reinforcing stereotypical images (www.rashut2.org.il/, p. 3).
28. These claims were made by Shalom Kital, CEO of Channel Two, and Ram Landes, CEO of Channel Ten. They are quoted by Esther Hertzog, *Maariv,* August 19, 2004. "How are they going to explain the only 3 percent Arab images on TV?" asked Hertzog, "Are these the only talented people in the Arab population?"
29. President of the Supreme Court, Aharon Barak, coined the term "Buzaglo Test" in an attempt to illustrate the need for closer examination of equality issues between the upper classes and the common man. Because comparison requires some frame of reference, Barak chose a common Moroccan name "Buzaglo" to define the lower end of the Israeli social strata, a move that many considered to be racist. *Maariv* recognized the prejudice inherent in the title "Buzaglo Test" when it adopted the name for a series investigating Mizrahi oppression in literature, sports, academia, the judicial system, advertising, and other cultural arenas.
30. Many in the Israeli left express racist views toward Mizrahi Jews, oblivious of the fundamental contradiction between supporting Palestinian struggle and rejecting Mizrahi struggle. I elaborate more in the last chapter.
31. For more on the representation of Shas in the Israel press see Sara Helman and Andre Levi, "Shas in the Israeli Press," in *Shas–The Challenge of Israeliness*, ed. Yoav Peled (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2001), 390–424 (Hebrew).
32. Shas, of course, is due some criticism. The party failed many of its secular Mizrahi supporters by neglecting efforts on behalf of over two million Israelis living in poverty. Shas also objected to a critical equal opportunity public housing law (Chetrit 2001) and supported other forms of social discrimination. For further social analysis of Shas see "Catch 17 between Mizrahi and Ultra-orthodox," in *Shas: The Challenge of Israeliness* by Sami Chetrit (2001).
33. Following allegation of sexual harassment, Katzav was impeached in 2007. Shimon Peres was elected to take his place.
34. Most writers ignored the fact that similar political deals are made to elect all presidents or to achieve other political gains.
35. Ashkenazi journalists predicted Peres' victory from the beginning. Wishful thinking was presented as news, and headlines unequivocally predicted a Peres victory. His loss embarrassed the media elite on both personal and professional levels.
36. Amos Oz is one of Israel's most acclaimed authors.
37. Miberg is an important journalist and columnist. He wrote for *Kol Ha'ir* in Jerusalem and now writes for *Maariv*.

CHAPTER 3

1. Megori is quoted in Y. Harris, *On Eagles Talons* (Bnei Benei-Brak: Torat Avot, 1988), 11 (Hebrew).
2. With the exception of the TV show *Uvda* and the newspaper *Haaretz*. I will elaborate more on the alternative discourse at the end of this chapter.
3. Some activists such as Rafi Shubeli and Rabbi Meshulam claim that they have documents of babies' abduction as early as the 1920s and the 1930s, from the Hashed Transit Camp in Yemen. The Israeli government refused to expand the investigation beyond 1948–1954.
4. In Israel, army service is mandatory. Every 18-year-old is drafted for three years after high school (two years for women). The first army notice usually arrives when a child is 16 years old. Since the Yemenite babies had not been erased from the roster they got army notices. Yemenite parents interpreted these army notices as an indication that their children had been kidnapped and were not dead, as they had been told.
5. *Yediot Aharonot*, during the 1960s published a handful of small items focusing on the demand for investigation and the outcome of the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission.
6. Rabbi Meshulam's revolt, in 1994, prompted the government to finally appoint a public investigative commission called the Kedmi Commission. This revolt is described more fully in Chapter 5.
7. The *brith* is a Jewish religious ceremony of circumcision performed on baby boys on the eighth day after birth.
8. This, of course, raises the question whether it was a reporter or a government official writing the article.
9. For a further elaboration on this issue, see Chapter 5 on the press coverage of Rabbi Meshulam's revolt.
10. *Davar* was one of the leading and most influential daily newspapers at the time and was associated with the Labor Party. See Chapter 2 "Map of Israeli Media."
11. This quote is from an interview I conducted with Ahuva Goldfarb, one of the head nurses in the absorption camps. Part of this interview was published in the article "The Women in Front" written for the Israeli feminist journal *Noga*, summer 1996.
12. All four were important daily newspapers at the time.
13. For more on Rabbi Bergman and these charges, see the last segment of this chapter.
14. Yossele was seven and a half when his ultraorthodox grandfather kidnapped him, for religious and personal reasons, from his secular parents.
15. I elaborate more on this story later in this chapter (coverage from the 1990s).
16. This refers to fear of incest.
17. For a prime example of this argument, see my analysis of the show *Mabat Sheni* in 1996, later in the chapter.
18. Along the years I investigated this Affair as a journalist, I interviewed many families and viewed many death certificates that were not signed by a doctor and did not specify the cause of death.

19. "Second look" also has the connotation, in Hebrew, of a more in-depth examination.
20. This program was one of the most viewed programs on TV. It aired semi-news issues and was regarded as a magazine news show. As other shows aired on Channel One, it lacked a fresh critical outlook and tended to reflect more conservative institutional opinions. For more on the characteristics of Channel One, see Chapter 3.
21. I interviewed Shuker twice, and I am familiar with the details of his story.
22. Both "Eagles' Wings" and "Magic Carpet" were the names that were used to describe the Yemenite immigration from 1949 to 1951. Eagles' Wings was taken from a verse in the Bible, "Vee'le Etchem Al Kanfey Nesharim," and was used by Yemenites to describe the messianic feeling they had about what they thought was going to be the beginning of redemption (geula). The name Magic Carpet, on the other hand, was given to this immigration by the Zionist institutions, and it is aligned with the other Orientalist stereotypical views of this immigration.
23. It is interesting to note the ease with which Tamar's parents were located when the adoptive parents wanted to complete the adoption, but no one knew where to find them when the girl was abandoned in the camp. The case of Miriam Shuker presents a similar problem. The state determined that the baby had been legally adopted, although the parents had never signed adoption papers and continued to look for their child.
24. Tamar grew up in Hacarmel, an affluent neighborhood of Haifa, where the majority of people were of German descent. The term *shvartze* ("black" in German/Yiddish) was a negative term used by Ashkenazim to denote Mizrahim.
25. In interviews with parents of adopted children, I heard similar stories of their selecting children to take home because they knew a doctor or had access to the absorption camps.
26. This was the Shalgi Commission, which was appointed in September 1988 and worked until 1994 without making any breakthrough in the investigation.
27. I should also note, from my interviews with activists who are familiar with Rabbi Meshulam's organization, and from my interviews with him, months before the revolt, Rabbi Meshulm in no way planned the violent revolt. He carried a peaceful protest through his alternative publication and through numerous classes, where he analyzed the Yemenite Babies Affair. His analysis was also with regard to what he saw as Zionism's crimes against Mizrahim in general, not just with regard to the Yemenite Babies Affair. His alternative was what he called "healing through Judaism"; he claimed that this unresolved Affair is delaying redemption for the Jewish people.
28. *Yated Neeman* is a daily religious newspaper; and *Kol Ha'ir* is a local weekend newspaper published in Jerusalem.
29. For a full analysis of the Meshulam violent revolt, see Chapter 5.
30. As a journalist working at the time for the newspaper *Shishi*, my requests to cover this Affair were all denied. The newspaper allowed me to cover

the Yemenite Babies Affair only after the violent incident in Yahud in 1994. I interviewed Meshulam for the television program *Uvda* during a period when media awareness about the Affair barely existed. Nothing less then solid proof of a stolen child was considered to be valid material for the show. Two years later, when evidence of criminal activity emerged, the program was finally aired on Channel Two.

31. Rosh Ha'ayin is a large Yemenite city near Tel Aviv that grew out of the big absorption camp of Rosh Ha'ayin.
32. When immigrants arrived in Israel in the 1950s, they were decontaminated with DDT at the airport (see quote from Sammy Michael in the introduction). Yemenite people were also forced to cut their sideburns, which were traditionally maintained for religious reasons. Such demands were traumatic for many Yemenite immigrants.
33. I expand more on Hacohen's writing and the New Historians' criticism of Zionist discourse in Chapter One. I should note here that Hacohen did not research the Yemenite Babies Affair and refers to it in her book in a short paragraph out of 322 pages. Also her husband, Rabbi Menachem Hacohen, was for many years a Knesset member from the Labor Party, which was in charge when the kidnapping took place. This close personal connection demonstrates the tight relationship between the different elite groups in Israel and how these relationship serve to protect potentially explosive information from leaking.
34. Ethiopian immigrants of the 1990s suffered and still suffer from state discrimination as well as racist reactions form Israeli citizens. See more on the Ethiopian immigrants in the last chapter.
35. That is, finding an important document in the attic, which by the way could be found in any public library.
36. Hovav is the brother of two famous Yemenite radio announcers in the Voice of Israel.
37. Wizo is an international women's organization founded in the 1950s. In those early years, the organization owned state-sponsored children's organizations that accepted recovering children from hospitals.
38. Since Judge Kedmi served as the commission's chair until it concluded, I will refer to the commission as the Kedmi Commission.
39. This quote is from key testimony given to the commission by Dov Shilanski, a former chairman of the Knesset. His testimony was based upon information received from his friend Avigdor Peer, who in the 1950s oversaw childcare within the Department of Social Services. This important testimony, mentioned as a small news item, was not further investigated by the press, with the exception of Yigal Mashiah in *Haaretz*.
40. Hadassah is a Jewish Zionist women's organization established in the United States in 1912. These women were interested in the establishment of the state of Israel in the 1950s and according to testimonies made numerous trips to Israel while visiting children's institutions.
41. Hovav's testimony was published at the same time that a complaint against him was filed with the police, by the Kedmi Commission, for leading witnesses. The only article that treated Hovav's role in the investigation with

respect—and that exposed contradictory information—was published in *Haaretz* by Yigal Mashiah.

42. In the Hebrew quote, Segev used an inflammatory term closer to the word Nigger in English.
43. Some of the recycled footage from the 1986 show was presented to the viewer without stating that the material wasn't current.
44. The announcer called this commission "the third public investigative commission" when it was really the first. Public opinion influenced by the media of "we've had enough of this investigation" depended upon this false premise.
45. Afula is a city in the north of Israel. Many of the children were brought to the hospital there.
46. Later, Kuchinski was subpoenaed and testified before the investigative commission, which taped her testimony in her house.
47. I conducted the research for the program *Uvda* on Channel Two. Due to rumors that *Uvda* was going to air a special show on the Yemenite babies, the other two shows decided to air during the same week. Channel One's *Mabat Sheni* was especially eager to go on air first as it was presenting a different take on the Affair.
48. The Yemenite Jews are stereotypically perceived in Israel as quiet, naïve, and hardworking people.
49. The show *Uvda* aired another segment about the Yemenite babies two years later in February 1998. Director Uri Rozenvaks tried to open several graves to determine the identity of the skeletons. This time, his attitude was less sympathetic toward the families who remained skeptical of state institutions. However, no conclusions were presented because the head pathologist said that the identity of the skeletons could not be determined with the existing technology. Samples were sent to a special laboratory in London, but no further reports were made.
50. Problems with authenticity of adoption papers were already evident in other cases such as Miriam Shuker and Tamar Tzuker, where the adoption process clearly took place a while after they took the girls. Some activists claim that the process of adopting retroactively may have caused the confusion in dates.
51. Talmot died in 1999. I gathered some of the information through personal conversations we had when she was researching the Affair back in 1995–1996 and through phone interviews with her daughter Meital and her husband, Roni.
52. Tzadok recalled the technician calling her at home saying the station was flooded with phone calls from many parents wanting to share similar stories. "I think they had a strong desire to have their voice heard in a public space," she said.
53. In most of these examples Judge Cohen was still the chair of the commission.
54. "Yihye" is a typical Yemenite name.
55. Prosecutor Nahmani from the state attorney's office questioned some of the key witnesses in the investigation.

56. This particular institution was called *Em Vayeled* (Mother and Child) and was part of the Wizo organization.
57. This allegation was addressed in Tzipi Talmor's documentary, *Down-A-One Way Road* (1997), part of which was shown in the television program *Hasifa* (February 11, 1996) on Channel Two.
58. *Haaretz* was also the only paper that printed the objections made by the activist Rafi Shubeli and his non-profit organization *Amutat Yogev*, on the day of the release of the Commission's report. Shubeli said he had mailed written commentary to all the newspapers but was ignored by all other newspapers.

CHAPTER 4

1. The nurse was audio taped by Avner Farhi, whose sister was kidnapped from the Ein-Shemer Camp in 1950. This testimony was first published in *Yediot Aharonot,* December 20, 1994.
2. The articles in *Ha'air* and *Haaretz* were published in 1995–1996. The programs *Uvda* and *Hasifa* aired on Channel Two in February1996.
3. In the 1980s, Shohat noted that after a major demonstration (in 1986), demanding investigation of the kidnapping, the Israeli media ignored the protest, but the Israeli TV (owned by the government) produced a documentary that blamed the parents for the disappearance of the children, producing an Orientalist narrative. Ella Shohat, "Sepharadim in Israel: Zionism from the Stand Point of its Jewish Victims," *Social Text: Theory, Culture and Ideology* 19/20 (1988): 18–19.
4. Boaz Sanjero, professor of law in the Academic College of Law in Ramat-Gan, published the only legal analysis of the Kedmi Commission's work.
5. Shohat "Master Narrative/Counter Readings," in *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, ed. Robert Sklar & Charles Musser (Temple University Press, 1990).
6. Even the superficial work of the Kedmi Commission indicated that separation of children from their parents was intentional. Improper identification and paperwork were primary contributors to the separation of parents from their babies.
7. Both historians conducted research about the mass immigration to Israel and the country's first decade, during which this Affair occurred. No one conducted exclusive historical research about the Affair. This point was not made or clarified by the media.
8. See similar quotes and cycles of "balance" in the discourse from the 1980s and the 1990s in Chapter 3.
9. According to the commission report the most vital archives that could shade light on this Affair including: absorption camps, babies houses, hospital and graveyards were not located. Also, hospital Hillel Yafe in Hadera that was asked to present documents, destroyed them instead because of an "administrative failure" (117–119).
10. *Uvda* was the first show on Channel Two to examine the Yemenite Babies Affair. Oded, who supervised the research, participated in all editorial meetings that led to the program's broadcast on February 13, 1996.

11. *Uvda* asked me, as a journalist who had already written about this Affair, to conduct the research for the show.
12. Yemenite embroidered cloths; and the jewelry is made with gold, silver, and beautiful stones. The traditional Yemenite outfit has been exhibited in museums throughout Israel and Europe. When Ashkenazim realized their value, many of these items were stolen. Yemenites who I interviewed (including my family members) said that they were told to put their jewelry and some clothing aside because the airplane could not carry this weight. The government never investigated this thievery.
13. Sociologist and education activists Shlomo Swirski reported a similar experience. When he requested help from the human rights organization for violation of laws in education to Mizrahim in the periphery, he said, their response and unwillingness to help was chilling (Interview, summer 2001).
14. Very few articles differentiated between investigation and inquiry commissions.
15. Inconceivably, the Supreme Court indicated that commission members were not apprised of hearing locations in one of the country's most discussed public investigations. This reaction was puzzling since the former president of the Supreme Court, Meir Shamgar, had nominated the commission members.
16. Meretz is a left wing political party. The youth group is affiliated with the political views of Meretz.
17. This was Judge Cohen, in his 80s at the time, who was appointed by the president of the Supreme Court, Meir Shamgar. Testimony about Cohen's tendency to appear sleepy and not well versed was given to Shubeli by Shlomo Gamliel, a Yemenite activist who attended all Commission's hearings (*Afikim*, February 2002, 11).
18. More on the commission 's conclusions in the last section of this chapter.
19. Among other things, the fact that Yemenite mothers nursed their babies for two or three years was seen as a sign of ignorance and primitive behavior that resulted in poor nutrition. Needless to say, nursing for at least a year is considered, by pediatricians, to be the best thing a mother can do for her baby.
20. See testimony in the next paragraph.
21. This assumption emanated from accusations made by camp and hospital staff, as if parents parting with thin and sick babies would not recognize them when they were brought back to health.
22. Todorov (1984) is quoted in David Morley (1996, 338).
23. Explained in detail in the previous chapter.
24. Dr. Hatib's test used chromosomal DNA testing, the most acceptable genetic DNA test used in the United States.
25. The scientific testimony that Giat gathered supported the explanation given in the previous note. Giat also claimed that the Kedmi Commission did nothing with documents he provided on Yemenite babies adopted in the United States. When Giat asked why this information was not being used, Judge Cohen reprimanded him by saying that Giat could not tell

the commission how to conduct the investigation. Giat proceeded to find Levine's biological mother on his own.

26. Dr. Hiss is no longer the director of Israel's pathology institution.
27. I can only imagine the reaction had Dr. Hatib conducted his tests in a lab in Gaza or the West Bank.
28. I should note that Ein-Gil is anti-Zionist in his ideological and political approach. He was a member of the anti-Zionist party Matzpen and saw the Yemenite Babies Affair and part of Zionist victimization of "others."
29. *Haaretz* was mainly distributed via home delivery systems. Although found on newspapers stands, circulation is primarily in big cities such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. When the series of articles was published, *Haaretz* repeatedly received requests from the Yemenite community for a wider newspaper distribution.
30. This should have been the natural step since he was an expert on the topic.
31. Where he was, at the time, the Vice Editor with more power to determine the content of the items.
32. Segev is a historian and a columnist.
33. Boaz Sanjero's "When There Is No Suspicion There Is No Real Investigation," *Teoriya Vebikoret* 21 (2002): 47–76 (Hebrew) analyzed the commission's report from a legal standpoint. Sanjero exposed the investigation's superficiality and oversights. The commission's position lacked epistemology of suspicion. Instead, Sanjero pronounced commission members were doing their best to refute the claim that Yemenite babies were kidnapped.

CHAPTER 5

1. Baruch Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 160 (Hebrew) also noted that while the commission harshly criticized these forced policies, it cleared the government from all responsibility. Kimmerling said that although the commission made some useful recommendations for a more "multicultural" approach, they were never adopted in practice.
2. The word *Wadi* means valley in Arabic and Hebrew.
3. This quote is part of an editorial written by Uri Avneri, the editor in chief of *Ha'olam Haze*. It is quoted in Yfaat Weis, *Wadi Salib: A Confiscated Memory* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2007), 14–15.
4. Sami Chetrir and Eli Hamo directed the documentary *The Black Panthers* released in 2001. This is the only documentary about the Black Panthers.
5. I expand on this point later in this chapter.
6. The press and the government also often defined Rabbi Meshulam's group as a terrorist.
7. The Waco, Texas incident, well covered by the Israeli press, was a point of reference in Israel.
8. This article illustrated a lack of critical examination of official reports such as this police report. The journalist never questioned the police's conclusions despite evidence of inaccuracies and contradictions.

9. For example, well-known retired Supreme Court judge and at least two other well-known public servants led other similar investigative commissions in the past. This Committee was composed of two fairly unknown judges and a former Yemenite army general.
10. This example plays upon a familiar stereotype about Arabs—claiming they only understand power. This kind of framing subverted the position of the East and its right to resist the imposed positions of the West.
11. The media counted on public memory to categorize and de-politicize Mizrahi resistance. Incidents led by Mizrahi people, that were violent in nature, often ended with their arrest. In all cases, social reasons for protesting were diminished and the protests were quickly forgotten.
12. Shohat used this claim when referring to Saddam Hussein. I used the word "rape" to emphasize the media's use of this term vis-à-vis the Yemenite Babies Affair. In addition, Yemenites were characterized as quiet, modest, and obedient people. The Meshulam protest was shocking to the public because as a Yemenite, he was supposed to be quiet and nice.
13. Due to shortage of books in Yemen, groups of children would often form circles to learn from one book. Thus were they capable of reading the book from any position in the circle.
14. Abarji, who was one of the leaders of the Black Panthers, said Rabbi Meshulam and his group met with the former leaders of the Panthers a few times back in 1991: "They wanted to learn from our experience and we participated in several demonstrations carried by this organization." Reuben Abarji, "From The Black Panthers to the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow," in *Rainbow Of Opinions: A Mizrahi Agenda for Israel,* ed. Yona Yossi, Naaman Yonit, and Machlev David (Jerusalem: November Books, 2007), 144.

CHAPTER 6

1. Legal right, however, does not necessarily guarantee a discrimination free society. See Yifat Biton's article "Wishing for Discrimination?" *Sortuz* Volum 2 (2008): 39–92. She argues that the situation of Mizrahim is more complicated precisely because there are no formal discrimination laws against Mizrahim.
2. Shohat makes this point clearly in several articles (see 1988, 1993, 1997, 2003).
3. See Abarjel (2007) on the Black Panthers meeting with Palestinian representatives back in 1977.
4. See Shohat's "Ordeals of Civility" section in "Zionism From the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims" (1988), and especially, Shohat's "Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab-Jews," *Social Text* 75 (Spring 2003) (also in her *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*). The essay also shows how Eurocentric scholars have emphasized Israel's rescue of Yemeni Jews from their Muslim oppressors, highlighting the kidnapping of Yemeni Jews by Muslims in Yemen. Yet in the same text they remain completely silent about the kidnapping of Yemeni Jews by Ashkenazim in Israel.

5. The kibbutz, for instance, was established as the "ultimate community," where everything was shared and individualism was discouraged. However, the concept of kibbutz failed and currently functions only on a limited basis.
6. Quoted in Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), xiii.
7. Howard Zinn (2002) pointed out that when bin Laden was an ally of the United States during the Afghan civil war, his religion or fundamentalism did not seem to matter. The media did not address the fact that millions of dollars in American aid were given to bin Laden's organization by the Bush administration before the 9/11attack. Neither were American ties with Saddam Hussein revealed by the media in the 1980s.
8. Often, even opposing views in a legitimate public discussion are articulated in the media as unpatriotic or divisive as was the case during the election campaign of now U.S. president Barack Obama.
9. See, for instance, Vanunu's protest against Israel's nuclear weapons. He was thought to be a traitor by the media and the public rather than a social activist who spoke up about the immediate and long-term consequences of nuclear arming.
10. A case in point is the high rates of Mizrahi students who drop from integrated schools in northern Tel Aviv.
11. It is important to note that the distorted depiction of Mizrahi history is not a thing of the past. Exclusion, distortion, and the representation of Mizrahim as "primitive refugees in need of rescue" still exist in history books and in the media. See, for example, an item of Channel One titled "This Week in History" on February 12, 2004.
12. By "formal history," I refer to the history text used in today's schools. These history books have yet to be revised such that Mizrahi stories don't continue to be minimized, distorted, or absent.
13. Unfortunately, in the absence of real dialogue, the mistakes of the past continue during the absorption of the Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society. See discussion in the next section of this chapter.
14. Shohat argued that since over the years Israeli academics and policy makers have imported ideologies and adopted theories from Europe and the United States (including modernization and integration), critical scholarship about Israel must engage the alternative critique of such ideologies and theories developed in the United States and Europe. See Shohat's essay "Mizrahi Feminism: The Politics of Gender, Race, and Multiculturalism," *Mitzad Sheni* (5–6) October 1996, 30.
15. Kimmerling is quoted in Gershon Shafi and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 322.
16. About 7,000 immigrants arrived in two waves of "Operation Moshe" during 1983, 1985.
17. By analogy, this is parallel to Americans helping a new immigrant by putting them on welfare, with a subsidized apartment in an inner-city housing complex.

18. For more on the education policies regarding Ethiopian immigrants, see the Equality Monitor published by Adva Center, February 2002.
19. For more on the Attachment Parenting style, see *The Baby Book* by Barry Sears (1993).
20. For Shohat, the kidnapping formed part of the broader Eurocentrism of the Zionist Enlightenment discourse of Progress and modernization, viewing itself as rescuing Middle Eastern Jews (Shohat 1988). See also her analysis in "The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: the Case of the Mizrahim," *Critique* 10 (Spring 1997).
21. Researchers at Adva Center (2002) noted that an experiment of direct absorption done with a group of 263 Ethiopian families in 1994 shows it is a better option for Ethiopians as well. This method was proven to be both cheaper and contributed to the immigrants' independence (*Equality Monitor*, February 2002, 3).
22. For more see Smadar Lavie "Arrival of the New Cultural Tenants" *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, June 14, 1991.
23. Educator and activist who wished to form an academic alternative for Mizrahi students established the school in 1994. After major attacks by the media and lack of funding by the municipal of Tel Aviv, the school was closed in 1996.
24. Great support for Chetrit's innovative ceremony came from Holocaust survivors. They congratulated Chetrit for "daring to break the silence" in an op-ed in the newspaper *Hakibbutz* (1995) and in private letters. "The power of our cry as Jewish people," wrote one survivor, "is by feeling and identifying with other human beings who are not Jewish." (Chetrit 2001)
25. This article was written by Chetrit for the Kedma website in February 2001. It is available at: www.kedma.co.il
26. See also Chantal Mouffe's essay in *The Identity in Question ,* ed. Jhon Rajchaman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 44. Despite her criticism of some forms of pluralism, she too stresses that politically successful pluralism requires a "common bond"; otherwise, she says, it will "explode into separatism."
27. These findings were often presented to the public as low numbers, as if "only 69" missing babies could be overlooked and forgotten.

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