

NISSIM MIZRACHI

BEYOND

SUSPICION

THE MORAL CLASH

BETWEEN

ROOTEDNESS

AND

PROGRESSIVE

LIBERALISM

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Beyond Suspicion

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Beyond Suspicion

*The Moral Clash between Rootedness
and Progressive Liberalism*



Nissim Mizrachi



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*To my late parents,
Doris and Rachamim Mizrachi*

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Beyond the Sociology of Suspicion

INTRODUCTION

How do ordinary people understand social justice? How do people who belong to marginalized groups make sense of their disadvantaged status? Drawing on extensive empirical research, this book attempts to answer these questions by probing the ways Mizrahim—Jews of Middle Eastern or North African origin—view social difference and inequality.

Understanding how people make sense of social justice and inequality is especially crucial in the current moment, when liberalism is floundering throughout the world, unable to contend with surging religious fundamentalism or right-wing nationalism in countries such as France, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and the United States (Mizrachi and Mautner, 2016). We are witnessing challenges to democracy in Eastern Europe; conflict over the diversified, multicultural reality emerging in post-Cold War Western Europe; disillusionment and authoritarian rule in the wake of the Arab Spring; growing resistance to the liberal left in Israel; the disregard for human rights in East Asia; struggles between human rights agencies and local authorities in Africa; and the election and presidency of Donald Trump in the United States, followed by the events of January 6, 2021. Without suggesting that these frequently violent political manifestations reflect legitimate political claims, this book seeks to shed a light on one deep and often misrecognized source of these clashes.

Liberalism is under attack not only from its ideological rivals, but also from working-class and other disadvantaged groups who are its ostensible supporters. Many of the very people liberals have long believed to be the main beneficiaries of their policies have rejected the progressive political agenda (Hochschild, 2016;

Mizrachi, 2016b; Wuthnow, 2018). In the American context, two decades ago, Thomas Frank (2004) referred to voters in poorer states who continued to vote for Republican candidates “against their own interests” as the “great paradox.” This paradox became even more striking during the 2016 elections.

In Israel, this “great paradox” expresses itself in a broad division into two major camps: the liberals and their opponents. The liberal camp is dominated by people who are educated, secular, upper middle class, and predominantly of European origin. In terms of their political positions, however, they do not form a monolithic group. On the left wing, one finds a non-Zionist minority that rejects the very concept of a Jewish and democratic state and advocates for a state of all its citizens. Some hold that the very notion of a Jewish state flies in the face of universal equal citizenship. Toward the center is a Zionist republican majority that, in accordance with the liberal democratic model of society, believes Israel should be a Jewish state and at the same time a democratic and egalitarian civil space for all citizens.

Their opponents, who come from religious and traditionalist groups and disadvantaged Mizrahim from Israel’s social periphery, reject the agenda of universal human rights and other core values of the progressive liberal left (Mizrachi, 2016b). The rejection of liberalism by marginalized groups has frustrated human rights advocates and liberal politicians who see themselves as acting in the defense of these same groups, as well as sociologists and social scientists who attempt to understand and explain the roots of this behavior. This book probes this quandary. In doing so, I take what may seem to be an unusual route. Rather than placing the explanatory burden on the subjects of the research, I seek to reverse the direction of inquiry. I suggest that the behavior of marginalized Mizrahim in Israel—or for that matter, poor voters in the United States—is not a paradox in itself; rather, the deficiency in the understanding of their behavior lies in the liberal grammar with which their behavior is read.

The Liberal Grammar: A Preliminary Glance

By *grammar*, I am referring to the unwritten set of analytic and normative principles that guide the interpretative act. These principles channel the processes of data collection and the articulation of analysis toward the emerging insights. Of course, I consider this grammar to be an ideal type (a la Weber)—that is, a category that emphasizes certain features for analytic purposes and is therefore a deliberate over-simplification.

I wish to make another clarification, which relates to the distinction between the terms *liberal* and *progressive*, both of which I use. The distinction comes from American political discourse. In many ways liberals and progressives belong to the same camp and share an individualist ontology, which posits an autonomous individual who is separate from the social space in which he/she acts, whether the free market or the democratic political arena. However, the progressive camp

is characterized by a radical position with regard to the existing economic, cultural, and political order. For example, many progressives take a critical view of neo-liberal economics, associating it with the tyranny of capitalism and the reproduction of structures of oppression, marking a clear difference from other liberals, whose position toward the market varies considerably. However, the distinction between the camps extends beyond neo-liberalism and its implications for ongoing inequality. Progressives in the United States, for example, are more supportive of ethnic and racial diversity and open borders for immigrants from a wide variety of backgrounds; they tend to be more negative than others in their assessment of the quality and moral character of life in the United States; they are skeptical of social change that does not entail the reconstruction of institutions they view as racist and gender-biased; and, finally, they place great value on identity and its expression and promote a mode of politics focused on the inclusion of diverse identity groups (Pew Research Center, 2021). The progressive agenda has gained prominence in American civil society and public discourse, and since the end of the 1980s has become the ideological basis for critical-academic research in the social sciences. From the United States, it has migrated to Israeli academe (Jacobs and Mizrachi, 2020).

Thus, when discussing the liberal grammar, I am most often referring to the progressive position now dominant in critical research, even though my focus on the concept of the autonomous individual is also relevant to more modest liberal positions. When modifying the word *grammar*, the adjective *liberal* refers to the progressive moral and political vision of the world embraced by contemporary critical sociology, through which it theorizes and investigates society.

This grammar, which I will discuss in greater depth below, joins together three positions. First is an *ontological position* that places power relations at its center. In its progressive iteration, this approach views the autonomous, equal, and free individual as oppressed by and trapped within those power relations. Second is a *political position* that glorifies the politics of liberation, an approach that, in its progressive iteration, seeks to liberate the individual from oppressive power structures. Third, we find an *interpretive stance* propelled by over-suspiciousness and constant negation of overt reality.

This skeptical analytic mode comes from a position of certainty about the nature of oppressive social structures—known to critical researchers but hidden from the eyes of the subjects in the field. The tendency toward negation depends on the view of deconstruction as the sine qua non of critical thinking (see Felski, 2015).

In this book, I seek to free the critical gaze from the shackles of liberal grammar and to reverse the direction of inquiry. Instead of observing the “non-liberal” disadvantaged subject through this familiar lens, I propose to turn the critical-progressive gaze upon itself by peering through the eyes of the non-liberal subject, exposing its parochial roots, cultural particularity, and social boundaries.¹

This reversal of the direction of inquiry involves activating non-liberal subjects by transforming them into critical analysts and shifting them from one interpretive position to another vis-à-vis the data they help to produce. I call this form of inquiry *multiple hermeneutics*, the methodological route that allows me to detect my own mode of suspicion during the data analysis.

Beyond the Liberal Grammar: The Emergence of Rootedness

The insights that emerged out of my theoretical and methodological turn led to the identification of an alternative grammar centered around the rooted ontology of my Mizrahi working-class subjects, rather than the individualistic ontology of liberal grammar. These subjects are deeply connected to a whole that is greater than themselves, engrained in history, and self-situated in a continuum that stretches from the imagined past through the present and into the future. They experience their lives within a greater Jewish whole; they feel obligated to maintain this whole in the present and to ensure its continuity for the coming generations; and they view the state as the epitome of this Jewish whole. Through examining this alternative grammar, we are able to learn about the subjects' relationship to structures of stratification; the temporalities they assign to their understanding of inequality, representation, under-representation, recognition, and misrecognition; the meaning they attach to religious-national identities together with collective and religious boundaries; and the ways they view social change, defiance, and "emancipation."

My subjects not only recognize but can tolerate inequality. From their point of view, inequality is not a static condition resulting from a continuously reproduced structure. Rather, they experience inequality as changing over time. While critical observers often frame reality pessimistically, shaped by mechanisms of social reproduction and power relations that are hidden from social actors, these rooted subjects are aware of social inequality yet are optimistic regarding the possibility of change, both in their own situations and for the whole within which they live. As we will see, their optimism is supported by independent empirical evidence (for example, data that chronicle upward social mobility for Mizrahim).

In the same vein, the politics of recognition and representation, which constitute the second principle of the overarching logic in liberal thinking, also take on different meanings for these rooted subjects. They measure representation according to its implications for the "greater good" and not solely according to the good of the individual subject. Here, too, the under-representation of Mizrahim in national narratives and symbolism—a reflection of the group's subordinate status within the Jewish whole and the bias they face—is viewed as temporary and expected to improve over time.

The liberal progressive and rooted worldviews attach diametrically opposed meanings to group boundaries. By examining the subversive political possibility of an Arab-Jewish identity, I shed light on the roots of the objection on the part of

these Mizrahim to the removal of national and religious boundaries in the name of Arab-Mizrahi solidarity. In the liberal progressive imagination, the ability to cross social, familial, and political boundaries is necessary for the creation of a respectful shared space, coexistence and peace; therefore, religious, national, and ethnic boundaries are viewed as obstacles to individual autonomy. By contrast, for rooted subjects, including Muslims and Mizrahim as well as other Jews, maintaining such boundaries is a requisite for a mutual acknowledgment of their shared humanity and for the creation of a mutually peaceful and respectful space (see also Mizrahi and Weiss, 2020).

Finally, defiance of the traditional order has been a feature of the liberal political imagination since the French Revolution. In critical discourse, overthrowing tradition is seen as key to social change. By contrast, the rooted subject views the common civil practice of defiance of the state as reprehensible, holding instead that continuity with the tradition is necessary for social change (see also Mizrahi, 2014).

The image of rootedness sketched here is by no means limited to the Mizrahi case; marginalized Mizrahim are far from the only rooted subjects in Israel, and certainly not all Mizrahim are rooted. We also note that rootedness, which has yet to be explored on a global scale, may appear in different guises across national borders and continents.

In this case, rootedness reveals itself as an organizing principle for the political behavior of Mizrahi right-wing voters from Israel's social periphery. The reading of these voting patterns suggested here differs from the accounts commonly found in the social sciences. The more prevalent readings view the persistent right-wing voting patterns among Mizrahim as a reaction stemming from their inferior economic, social, and cultural position; a "populist" outgrowth of a structural pathology in liberal democracy; or an expression of a social "disease," racism, or right-wing nationalism. Rootedness, by contrast, appears to be a generative social force stemming from a fundamental need and desire to belong.

In order to understand rootedness, it is crucial to recognize its temporal dimension. In the rooted perspective, time is defined by the origin of the "whole," which shapes a vision of current political reality focused on fulfilling or preserving this whole. The temporal serves as a heuristic for an initial typology of rootedness, which I'll briefly sketch here in "ideal types" and elaborate on later. Ultra-Orthodox rootedness in Israel defines the chronicles of the whole as originating in the mythic, ancient time of divine revelation. This view of temporality, which is, of course, shared by other religious—Jewish and non-Jewish—communities, aligns with a political vision. As against the sacred sphere, the civic sphere for the ultra-Orthodox and many Religious Zionists is secondary, profane, mundane, administrative, non-Jewish, external, belonging to "others," and outside of the sacred Jewish whole. I refer to this as *closed rootedness*. By contrast, the rootedness of the democratic, secular national camp, referred to in

Israel as the center left, draws on Zionist time, a temporality based on the narrative of the rebirth of the nation: “From Holocaust to Redemption.” To them, the secular civic space, a key feature of liberal democracies throughout the world, is the whole from which their Israeli civil identity derives. This identity is articulated in terms of modern nationalism and the aspiration for the State of Israel to be like other Western nations. I refer to this as *open rootedness*, since it eschews religious and tribal criteria but sets the Israeli civic space that defines the boundaries of the collective. The liberal progressive identity, which I define as *rootless*, aligns perfectly with the liberal grammar, since it vehemently rejects any social connection (national, religious, or tribal) that does not translate into universal citizenship (according to which group identity is seen as secondary to the autonomous, equal, universal citizen). In this view, the state should be neutral and free of any ethnic or religious bias in its definition of the boundaries of the political community.

As I will show below, the Mizrahi rootedness discussed here moves along the boundary of religious and national time and between the civil and the religious conceptions of the whole. While I have not lost sight of its essentialist, orientalist, and racist connotations, I make use of the term *primordial* in my discussion of Mizrahi rootedness, although I want to reappropriate it by de-essentializing its usual critical meaning. What I call primordial is an elementary form of belonging that is most familiar in secular progressive circles in the context of familial relationships. Of course, rootedness among Mizrahi right-wing voters is by no means an essential “Mizrahi characteristic.” Nevertheless, the sense of Jewish continuity and loyalty to the Jewish whole are evident among right-wing Mizrahim (see Buzaglo 2008). At the same time, it is important to note that Mizrahim can be found at all points along the various spectrums, and their worldviews are embedded in social networks of meaning, moral experience, and political position. I consider the sources of Mizrahi and any other rootedness to lie firmly within history and culture. Fischer (2016) points to a direction of research that aligns with this assumption and demonstrates how Mizrahi rootedness contrasts with the more universalist trends of the Jews of Ashkenaz, stemming from the different conditions in which these two communities encountered modernity. While a discussion of the historical sources of Mizrahi rootedness is far beyond the scope of this study, I will return to a discussion of Fischer’s research below.

Returning to the present, we are already getting ahead of ourselves, since “rootedness” was not the original subject of the research. Rather, it emerged as a conceptualization of the findings from the data. At its inception, this journey was motivated by my desire to closely examine the ways Mizrahim, and especially Mizrahim from Israel’s social periphery, make sense of the connection between their inferior socioeconomic position and their hawkish political positions, which has been at the center of sociological interest for several decades. However, the choice to focus on Mizrahim is not self-evident to general readers. In the

following chapter, I will detail the rationale for this choice, and I will provide the historical, social, and demographic background that is crucial for our understanding of this case.

WHY MIZRAHIM? MIZRAHIM
AND THE “GREAT PARADOX”

Some readers may be surprised that I have chosen to focus my research on Mizrahim rather than on Palestinians.² In order to understand this decision, I must address the status of Palestinian citizens of Israel and the meaning of nationality in the Israeli-Palestinian context, together with the intra-Jewish cleavages in Israeli society³.

Palestinians and Jewish Polity

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Law of Return, passed in 1950, declared the right of all Jews in the world to immigrate to Israel and receive an expedited path to citizenship. As codified in a Basic Law, enacted in 1992, Israel has defined itself as a state that is both Jewish and democratic and therefore not neutral with regard to issues of citizenship. The Israeli polity is Jewish, and Jewishness is the most valuable asset for entrance into the national collectivity and participation in the polity.

Palestinians who are born in Israel are citizens of the country, unlike those who reside in the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War. Their *de jure* status provides them with all the benefits of citizenship, including the right to vote and be elected to public office, social benefits (such as health care, free compulsory education, etc.), as well as civic responsibilities such as taxes (although they are exempt from Israel’s otherwise mandatory, near-universal conscription). In actuality, however, they are not fully part of the Israeli polity. While political parties representing the Palestinian constituency participate in general elections, they have only once participated in a governing coalition.⁴

De facto segregation between Arabs and Jews is almost all-encompassing. Jews and Arabs speak different languages; with few exceptions, they live in different places; they maintain separate educational systems; they largely vote for different political parties; and they adhere to different religious faiths. In most cases, this separation is mutually acceptable and is not the result of exclusion by one side. For example, both sides object to intermarriage (Lamont et al., 2016; Mizrachi and Herzog, 2012). Most importantly, Jews and Arabs have different national identities. For Jews, Israeli citizenship and Jewish identity are inextricably intertwined; by contrast, many Palestinians citizens feel part of the larger Palestinian people and view their Israeli citizenship only in formal and instrumental terms. This separate national identity is not neutral, since Israel has been actively engaged in a bloody conflict over its legitimacy, borders, and its very existence for over a century.

Hence, with regard to Palestinian citizens of Israel, issues of social justice are confounded with issues of nationality and religion. Their stance vis-à-vis the state is civic rather than national, and often ambivalent. Palestinian citizens of Israel often cooperate with Israeli civil and human rights organizations, left-wing NGOs, and progressive and radical-left parties. However, given the national and religious orientations of Arabs in Israel,⁵ this does not necessarily indicate that they accept the progressive agenda in its entirety.

In sum, Arabs are the most excluded group in Israel society and largely vote for sectoral Arab political parties. From a progressive perspective, their behavior is neither “self-defeating” nor “paradoxical,” and they are not, therefore, at the heart of the Israeli version of the “great paradox.”⁶

Mizrahim: An Overview and Brief History

Mizrahim⁷ comprise the largest socio-demographic group⁸ in the Israeli Jewish population but suffer from under-representation in elite positions and over-representation in the lowest economic strata. Despite their under-representation at the top, Mizrahim, especially those who are members of the lower socioeconomic classes, have supported right-wing political parties for the last four decades.⁹ Mizrahim thus typify the Israeli version of the “great paradox.”

According to a census conducted shortly after the end of the hostilities in 1948, there were approximately 800,000 inhabitants in the new state of Israel, 18 percent of whom were Arab and 82 percent of whom were Jewish. Among the Jews, 80 percent were Ashkenazi and 20 percent Mizrahi (Rebhun et al., 2009). Over the next eighteen months, due to immigration, the Jewish population doubled, reaching 1,550,000 a decade after independence.

This massive population increase led to a dramatic transformation of the country’s ethnic makeup. In the years before and immediately after the establishment of the state, most of the immigrants were Ashkenazi, including large numbers of Holocaust survivors who began to arrive in Israel after 1945. In the 1950s, however, the government of the young state encouraged immigration by Jews from Arab countries, driven by its aim of increasing the Jewish population and offsetting the high Arab birthrate (see Shenhav, 2006). In the decade that followed the establishment of the state, only 44.5 percent of immigrants were Ashkenazi, whereas 53.4 percent were Mizrahi. The Ashkenazi portion of the Jewish population decreased from its high of 80 percent after the war to 58 percent in 1960, with the Mizrahi portion rising from 18 to 42 percent. The Mizrahim have a higher average birth rate than the Ashkenazim, so their percentage of the Jewish population has continued to grow.¹⁰

At the time we began our research, in 2008, Mizrahim constituted 38.4 percent¹¹ of the Jewish population, compared to Ashkenazim, who comprised 25.8 percent; 14.6 percent were third-generation Israeli-born and/or mixed groups, and

21.1 percent were new immigrants (Y. Cohen, 2015).¹² In fact, the majority of Israeli Jews now have some Mizrahi ancestry (CBS, 2014).¹³

Mizrahim as the “Unfit”

The arrival of almost half a million Jews from Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African countries in the 1950s and 1960s created a new challenge for social integration. It was only during this period, in fact, that the word *Mizrahi* came into use as an umbrella term covering a range of social types and ethnic identities. Many Western Zionists viewed Mizrahi Jews as vulgar, premodern, and even primitive (Shiloah and Cohen, 1983). Using region of origin to distinguish the veteran Ashkenazi residents from the newer Mizrahi immigrants served to signify each group’s place in the diversifying social hierarchy (Herzog, 1985).¹⁴

In Israel, Mizrahim have often been viewed through one or another universalist prisms, whether socialism,¹⁵ modernization and secularization, or liberalism, all of which are ultimately products of Enlightenment thought. Ironically, both the earlier views of modernization theory, which would be dismissed as “establishment” by the later critical theories, and the critical theories themselves held that Mizrahi consciousness was a direct product of their position within a dominant power structure: the Mizrahim, according to the former, found themselves in a premodern stage in the linear, universal, progress towards modernity, or, in the view of the latter, they were victims of modernization, globalization, or neo-liberalism. Both schools viewed the hawkish and traditionalist Mizrahi positions as reactive, anomalous, or symptomatic of a problem or social ill.

In the early years of the state,¹⁶ modernization theories explained Mizrahi aversion to the secular left as an outcome of their backward cultural development.¹⁷ This theoretical frame was based in essentialist attitudes and was congruent with the Zionist project. As an inherently modernist national movement, Zionism not only sought to conquer the land, establish a nation-state, and exert control over the natural and social environments, it also sought to create a new kind of subject and identity, the “new Jew”—secular, Western, rational—fit for modern life in a liberal democracy with a modern economy (Mizrachi, 2014). Mizrahim, like ultra-Orthodox Jews, were initially considered “unfit” for the Zionist project.

Ever since their arrival in the early 1950s, Mizrahim have been judged according to entrenched orientalist stereotypes (Hever et al., 2002; Mizrachi, 2004; Shohat, 1988). State policies have also contributed to their marginalization in the economic-political (Grinberg, 1989), educational (Shavit, 1984), and cultural spheres. The state, for example, largely placed the new Mizrahi arrivals into lower-class occupations and settled them in “development towns” that were far from the centers of population (Bernstein and Swirski, 1982). To this day, the Hebrew term *periferia*, meaning both a social and geographic periphery, is closely associated with Mizrahim. To make them fit for the modern nation-building project, these

immigrants were thought to need moral, cultural, educational, and psychological development (Khazzoom, 2003; Mizrahi, 2004; Shenhav, 2006).

The vision of a Zionist melting pot is the ideal of the “ingathering of exiles,” that is, the coming-together of all the Jewish diasporas into one place, culminating in a single Jewish national entity. Although it constitutes a powerful, inclusive and unifying narrative, specific markers still serve to distinguish Mizrahim from Ashkenazim. These include their place of residence (“the periphery”) along with a specific class and ethnic habitus, expressed through a distinctive accent, “look,” and sets of cultural practices, such as musical taste and typical sonic cues (Katz-Guerro et al., 2007; Schwarz, 2015). The term “Mizrahim” is still understood by many Israelis as a stigmatized identity or degrading social label (DellaPergola, 2007; Lamont et al., 2016).

Measures of Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Inequality

The control of the secular, socialist, Zionist Ashkenazim over state institutions, culture, the economy, and especially politics was finally disrupted three decades after the founding of the state by a political reversal in 1977 (Kimmerling, 2001). In the elections that year, the Labor Party, which had founded the state and had never been out of power, lost to the opposition Likud, identified with the revisionist right and headed by Menachem Begin, a charismatic leader of Polish descent who received massive support from Mizrahim from Israel’s social periphery (Kimmerling, 2001). To this day, this reversal is regarded as a political earthquake that changed the face of Israeli politics and society.¹⁸

By the late 1980s, with the growth of a Mizrahi middle class, Mizrahim had begun to achieve political clout in both municipal and national politics. Nevertheless, they remain to this day overrepresented in the lowest rungs of the social strata and under-represented in elite positions in politics, the economy, and culture when contrasted with Ashkenazim (see Y. Cohen, 2015). This inequality persists despite substantial mobility among educated Mizrahim and the blurring of social boundaries, and even though 35 percent of all Jewish marriages are inter-ethnic (Stier and Shavit, 2003). Income disparities between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews have remained fairly constant throughout the first decade of twenty-first century, although Mizrahi Jews are slowly gaining in income.¹⁹

Educational inequality is even more striking. By 1995, 32 percent of male and 40 percent of female Ashkenazi Jews were college graduates, compared to only 10 percent of male and 13 percent of female Mizrahim (Swirski et al., 2014). When we began this study, Mizrahim held only 9 percent of tenure-track positions in Israeli universities (Blachman, 2008). Although between 1992 and 2010, the number of second-generation Mizrahim holding academic degrees and belonging to the middle class rose considerably (M. Dahan, 2016; Swirski et al., 2014)—which I will discuss further in chapter 3—at this point I emphasize that the strong correlation

between Mizrahi origin and low social status remains, especially in Israeli's social and geographic periphery.

Over the past three decades, socioeconomic inequality has decreased, and Mizrahim have achieved upward mobility, mainly through education (M. Dahan, 2016). These changes have also been associated with increased political representation (Rahat and Itzkovitch-Malka, 2012). Nevertheless, Mizrahim have remained under-represented among the elite and overrepresented in the lower class (Cohen et al., 2007; Haberfeld and Cohen, 2007), and orientalist attitudes and stereotypes remain entrenched (Mizrachi and Herzog 2012).

Voting "Against Their Own Best Interests"?

The 1977 political reversal, with all the changes it entailed (upon which I will expand in the chapters that follow), did not "solve the Mizrahi problem." In many spheres of life, inequality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim remains empirically measurable and obvious. Theoretically, within liberal circles in academia, civil society, and politics, the fact that Mizrahim persist in voting for the Likud and other right-wing parties has only exacerbated the paradox. As I will attend to below, critical sociology only appeared in Israel after 1977, reaching its peak in the 1990s, though it has since continued to dominate the field.

From the point of view of the critical academic and political left, Mizrahi support for the political right, which pursues oppressive neo-liberal policies, maintains hawkish positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and encourages settlement in the occupied territories, which are largely populated by Palestinians, seems to be self-defeating. The Likud is perceived as part of an oppressive structure that has sucked the Mizrahim in. Their support for the Likud hasn't helped Mizrahim break any glass ceilings, nor do they lead the party. Within the progressive critical discourse in general, and in particular the critical discourse on Mizrahim, the massive support for the Likud by Mizrahim from the periphery has enabled the party to entrench its oppressive neo-liberal policies, deepen the occupation, expand the settlements in the occupied territories, and spread its national-religious chauvinistic attitudes toward minorities.

In his 2004 paper "Class Aspects of the Occupation: Some Remarks," Danny Gutwein, a central figure in Israeli critical discourse, argued that in the three previous decades, Israeli society had been shaped by two central processes—the privatization revolution and the persistence of the occupation—so that the expansion of the settlement project comes at the expense of the Israeli social periphery (Gutwein, 2004). According to Gutwein, the settlements, which had been increasingly populated by Mizrahim, served in part as a compensation mechanism for the structural inequality and privatization policies that had deepened inequality and which were particularly damaging to Mizrahim and other excluded groups. The Mizrahim were thus unwitting partners in the process of expanded inequality

in Israel and oppression of the Palestinians. I will return to this interpretive logic below. For the left, Mizrahi support for an agenda that keeps them at the periphery is an example of a public that votes “against its own best interests.” It is a riddle or, to use Thomas Frank’s phrase, “the great paradox,” and it echoes powerfully in Israeli political discourse.

Avi Dabush, a social activist and politician who had a realistic chance of being elected to the Knesset with Meretz, the liberal left party, in 2015, provides clear evidence for this. His book *The Rebellion of the Periphery*, published in 2021, was not meant to be academic, yet Dabush reviews a variety of data that echo Arlie Hochschild’s (2016) description of the gaps between the right-wing Republican areas of the United States and the Democratic areas identified with the progressive left. Dabush presents, among other factors, the tremendous discrepancies between the center and the periphery among high school graduates who receive highly ranked matriculation examinations that will enable them to continue on to university and those with more vocationally oriented certificates; the large differences in average salary; and gaps in the quality of the healthcare system and even in life expectancy. He also points to the educational tracking systems that are still in existence in the periphery, the emigration of successful young people from the periphery to urban centers, and the persistent structural inequality between the more established Ashkenazi-dominated towns and the development towns populated by Mizrahim and other ethnic groups, such as Ethiopians and Russians, who came to the country later.

For liberal left activists and politicians like Dabush, the question of how to “break the code” of the voting patterns of marginalized Mizrahim is the million-dollar question, since their turn to the right has been a game-changer in Israeli politics. However, the code refuses to be broken. Analysis of voting behavior in 2009, the period of time during which we prepared this research, revealed that in disadvantaged neighborhoods and towns populated primarily by Mizrahim, a majority had voted for right-wing or religious parties. In more affluent areas populated primarily by Ashkenazim, a majority had voted for left-liberal parties, a pattern that has remained stable to this day.²⁰

It should come as no surprise that the term “the great paradox” was easily assimilated into Israeli academic parlance, as readers encountered the phrase, borrowed from Frank, in Arlie Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016). Despite the obvious differences between the Israeli and the American political and cultural contexts, this phrase seemed to capture the similarities.

But is there a paradox? What are their “best interests”? Like Hochschild, I felt that in order to disperse the clouds surrounding “the paradox,” I should turn to the missing link—the subjects themselves. However, this research journey was not only about entering an “unknown land” to resolve a riddle, but rather an opportunity to explore the limitations of my own intellectual terrain. This was an opportunity to turn my sociological gaze upon itself and to read the parochial

assumptions of my critical sociology through the eyes of my disadvantaged Mizrahi subjects.

Nor was this turn solely the result of a theoretical epiphany that burst unbidden into my mind. I would be remiss if I kept my own story out of the text. I am aware of the risk of sinking into the auto-ethnographical narcissism that leads to endless cycles of observing oneself observing. Rather, I want to integrate my own experience as a Mizrahi critical sociologist and activist in the field and to describe how it fueled my theoretical and methodological search.

FROM PERSONAL JOURNEY TO THEORETICAL TURN

During the first years of my graduate studies in the United States, my social and political concerns were quite detached from my academic work.²¹ In fact, I had felt rather alienated from what I experienced as the intrusion of identity politics into the academic field. Although I sympathized with people of color and women who studied subjects that were personally relevant for them as well as politically important, I stuck to my areas of interest, focusing on medical sociology and the sociology of science and knowledge. While in the United States, I had the opportunity to meet with other Mizrahi graduate students, who, like me, came from disadvantaged backgrounds and were now attending top American schools. These events were organized by the Israel Scholarship Education Foundation (ISEF), an American-Israeli Jewish foundation dedicated to decreasing disparities in Israeli education.²² As we shared our stories as marginalized Mizrahim, the emancipatory power of the well-worn feminist slogan “the personal is political” came to life for me. This framework revived memories and helped me piece together my Mizrahi experiences and turn them into a powerful political narrative. I realized that as an undergraduate in Israel I had never met even a single Mizrahi professor, which was astonishing in view of the fact that Mizrahim then comprised more than half of Israel’s Jewish population.

Academic programs in the social sciences were preoccupied with the study of race, ethnicity, and gender, identity politics, multiculturalism, and all forms of social inequality. This progressive critical discourse dominated US campuses and equipped us with ideas and a common language. This political zeitgeist extended beyond the classroom; it was alive and kicking in extracurricular life. During my graduate days in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I proudly carried a placard reading “Unity, diversity, a better university” and participated enthusiastically in the constant debates over curricula, admissions policies, and funding. We were gaining tools to tell our own story.

At the same time, the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow had been founded in Israel by a core of Mizrahi academics and activists, some of whom had also graduated from leading American institutions. The Rainbow, as it was commonly called, was the flagship of the new Mizrahi critical discourse. Incorporated as an NGO in

the 1990s, it described itself as “an apolitical, non-parliamentary social movement whose goal is to affect the current public agenda in the aim of bringing a change into the Israeli society as a whole and to its institutions. The organization is Mizrahi (Jews from Arab and Muslim Lands and the East) in its goals, universal in its beliefs, and open to all those who identify with its values. The movement strives to bring about a meaningful change among the Israeli society and implement values of democracy, human rights, social justice, equality and multi culturalism.”²³

I returned home equipped with my American sociological toolkit and fueled by the emancipatory spirit of critical sociology. At the time, as noted above, Mizrahim held only 9 percent of tenure-track positions in Israeli universities (Blachman, 2008). In the early 2000s, I began a tenure-track job at Tel Aviv University. The school was then at the cutting edge of the new critical discourse, led by Yehouda Shenhav, a prominent critical scholar and one of the founders of the Rainbow. I soon joined the handful of Mizrahi academics engaging in social and political activism. Linked to the influential international network of critical scholars centered in the United States, we were empowered by the opportunity to tell our local story within this universal, progressive moral and political framework.

In this local version of the universal critical-progressive script, the old Ashkenazi establishment, represented by the Zionist state, was assigned the role of “victimizers,” and the Mizrahim—alongside Palestinian Arabs, Ethiopian Jews, asylum seekers, the LGBTQ community and people with disabilities, among other oppressed groups—were cast in the role of its “victims.” My role was that of the Mizrahi progressive critical sociologist and activist. I met with parents and students in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods; I participated in demonstrations against discrimination, racism, and exclusion; and I crafted alliances between marginalized groups. In all these ventures, my colleagues and I attempted to recruit Mizrahim to the struggle for equal opportunity and opposition to the Ashkenazi mainstream that stifled and limited us as individuals and as a community.

Returning to the community I had grown up in was heartwarming. Our shared background and upbringing made me feel at home and intensified my sense of purpose and dreams of social change. And for the most part, my colleagues and I were received with warmth and sincere appreciation. Yet these close and affectionate relations were always limited to the interpersonal and the communal; they never extended to the political. Our audience did not seem to embrace our “personal is political” concept. A clear line separated personal and communal gratitude from political discontent with any attempt to frame their lived experience in progressive, liberal terms. Put bluntly, they were reluctant to accept their roles as “victims” in our pre-packaged progressive script.

In my private life, my role was just as difficult. Among my extended family and friends, I could feel the strong dissonance between the enthusiasm and warmth expressed toward me personally and the responses to my political agenda, which ranged from reticence to feelings of insult and resentment. Their fidelity to Zionist

discourse and their loyalty to the State of Israel appeared unshakable. Any attempt on my part to question their unequivocal allegiance to Israel's dominant narratives—the “history of the victorious” (Gandler, 2010)—or to free them from the “shackles of the oppressive powers” was met, in the best of cases, with stubborn refusal and, in the worst, with fierce counterattacks and anger.

The “great paradox” seemed to be coming alive. When I turned to my sociological toolkit for answers, I found it was quite impoverished.

MIZRAHIM AS AN ANOMALY IN ISRAELI SOCIOLOGY

Throughout their history, the social sciences in Israel have viewed Mizrahim through universalist prisms, such as socialism, modernization, secularization, and liberalism, all of which share an Enlightenment heritage. According to each of these universal programs, Mizrahim were an *anomaly*, a problem seeking an explanation or awaiting a solution. They were insufficiently “modern” according to modernization theories, lacked “class consciousness” in Marxist terms, or lacked “political awareness” from the point of view of post-colonialism and identity politics.

By the 1990s modernization theory, which held sway in the field for several decades, had come under attack from the critical approaches branding it “establishment sociology,” arguing it disguised itself as neutral science when actually serving the Ashkenazi vision (Ram, 2006; Swirski, 1989). In the view of critical sociology, which has continued to dominate the field, labeling Mizrahim “premodern” was a form “blaming the victim.” Hence, critical researchers shifted the position of the Mizrahi subject from “premodern” or even “primitive” to that of the “blameless victim.” Three major critical approaches have dealt with Mizrahim in the role of victims: class-structural, post-colonial, and the multiple-citizenship approach.

According to the *class-structural* approach, Mizrahi conservatism derives from the group's socioeconomic position within the Israeli class structure (Swirski, 1988). Mizrahi right-wing preferences are described as the outcome of competition between Mizrahim and Palestinian citizens of Israel over access to limited resources such as jobs and wages (Peled, 1990; Swirski, 1988), given respective places on the lowest socioeconomic strata. According to class-structural research, Israel's political left, while employing dovish rhetoric on matters of security, pursued the interests of its upper middle class constituency, neglecting and oppressing the lower classes (see Gutwein, 2000; Swirski, 1988). In this view, Mizrahi hawkishness is seen as a rational response to class exclusion and discrimination.

The *post-colonial* approach combined an emphasis on identity politics with attention to power relations.²⁴ As previously noted, Mizrahim were thought unsuited to the Ashkenazi Zionist project, based on the image of them as non-Western and unmodern (Khazzoom, 2003; Mizrahi, 2004). A salient example of the post-colonial reading of Mizrahi political attitudes can be found in Shohat's

(1988) pioneering work, in which she presents Mizrahi hawkishness and hostility to Peace Now (a left-wing NGO) as a reaction to social pathology, that is, to the oppressive, exclusionary and unequal treatment of Mizrahim

Echoing the arguments of the class-structural approach, Shohat points to the hypocrisy of the Ashkenazi left, who excluded Mizrahim from their ranks, as the cause of the Mizrahi drift to the right. Shohat views Mizrahi animosity toward Arabs as a form of revolt against the Ashkenazi elite's orientalism.²⁵ Sami Shalom Chetrit (2004) likewise suggests that the Mizrahi rejection of the liberal left's agenda is a symptom of a social malady, resulting in what he calls the "Mizrahi identity complex," a desire for recognition and integration into the Ashkenazi Zionist nation-building project. In his subversive post-colonial genealogy of the category of Mizrahi, Shenhav (2006) characterizes Mizrahi identity as caught between *Jewish* and *Arab*, which, he argues, explains Mizrahi right-wing attitudes and hostility toward Arabs. He traces Mizrahi identity to its historical ground zero, where Zionist discourse created a binary opposition between Arabs and Jews. The "religionization" of the Mizrahim by the Ashkenazi Zionist establishment, intended to be an act of inclusion, simultaneously demanded that they negate their stigmatized Arab identity. Any traces of Arabness were painted in culturally degrading orientalist colors and threatened identification of Mizrahim with the active external enemy. The unqualified loyalty of Mizrahim to their Jewish identity, the State of Israel, and the Zionist narrative is once again explained as an understandable outcome.

Finally, the *multiple-citizenship* approach, most notably associated with Gershon Shafir and Yohav Peled (2002), argues that the reluctance of working-class Mizrahim to embrace the liberal progressive agenda is a perfectly rational choice. According to Shafir and Peled, the liberal discourse is just one of the three civil discourses, along with the republican and the ethno-national, that shape the boundaries of Israeli civil society during different periods. In their explanation, the liberal discourse extols individual rights, autonomy, and private property while downplaying the meaning of group identification. In the republican discourse, civil status is conditioned on active participation in the polity, embracing state goals, and willingness to contribute to the national good and the fulfillment of national goals. The Jewish ethno-national discourse, by contrast, endows rights exclusively to Jews as Jews. In the republican discourse, Mizrahi membership in the national collectivity has been marginalized, while the liberal discourse, as represented by Israel's Labor Party, has never been more than an exclusionary sham that failed to uphold the universalism it espoused. Shafir and Peled argue that the Mizrahi exclusion from both the republican and the liberal discourses explains their adherence to the ethno-national discourse—it was the only choice left for them. The authors' argument implies that in a "true" liberal democracy free of constraints, Mizrahim would not have to cling to the ethno-national discourse.

This brief review suggests that all three critical approaches, whatever their intellectual tradition or heuristic power, view Mizrahi aversion to the progressive liberal agenda as a reaction to their victim status. Their political behavior is regarded as a symptom of a structural pathology, the post-colonial condition, or discursive constraints. Put succinctly, Mizrahi right-leaning, ethno-national tendencies have always been considered a run-off, never a wellspring. As different as they are, all three theories view Mizrahi reservations about modern, universal, and secular reforms (from early socialist to recent liberal progressive agendas) as an *anomaly*, a social malady awaiting a cure.

I became increasingly uncomfortable with what appeared to be the essentialist, missionary, and paternalistic views underlying the emancipatory spirit of these critical visions. It was obvious that there was a dramatic rift between Mizrahi activists and academics like myself and other segments of the Mizrahi population. We molded them into one imagined entity—a “group” (see Brubaker, 2004)—to whom we had attributed “real interests” derived from their structural position. We had reduced their subjectivity into an assigned fixed role and muted any of the voices that could have ruined the precious story that we so zealously wanted to tell. Striving for liberation had never felt closer to tyranny.

I had come to feel that the same critical-progressive vision that had been my only avenue for thinking about ethnic inequality in Israel was now taking me down a path that could not lead to any new or refreshing insights. And I came to realize that the problem was much broader. This was not merely a failure of Israeli sociology; my quandary pointed to issues in the discipline of sociology throughout the world.

THE CRITICAL-LIBERAL BLIND SPOT: THE DOMINANCE OF US SOCIOLOGY

In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States became a major—if not *the* major—producer of professional sociologists, and the center of gravity in the field shifted from Europe to America. In many countries, the United States is now also the arbiter of professional success, and publication in top American journals provides sociologists with the imprimatur of excellence, grants worldwide scientific recognition, and determines career success (Azarya, 2010; Jacobs and Mizrahi, 2020). The international field has become stratified, and American sociology has a tremendous impact on theoretical and research agendas in many countries (Jacobs and Mizrahi, 2020).

In his 2004 presidential address to the American Sociological Association (ASA), as well as in a later article entitled “For Public Sociology,” Burawoy (2005) argued that during the second half of the twentieth century, sociology and the world had moved in opposite directions—sociology to the left, the world to

the right. Burawoy used the metaphor of a “scissors movement” to describe the process and noted that while sociology had taken a critical position toward the political and economic order, the world had gone in reverse, as evidenced by the expansion of the global market economy, the rise of neo-liberalism, and the recurrence of human rights violations. Burawoy’s observation was not only descriptive; it was prescriptive. The synthesis of sociology and civil society, he argued, was an ethos that needed to be cultivated. His address, described as electrifying, was widely applauded in the American sociological community as it reflected its dominant political and professional sensibility (Brint, 2005).

Almost two decades later, the distance between the blades of the scissors has grown wider. Voters in many blue-collar areas have continued to vote Republican (Hochschild, 2016; Wuthnow, 2018). At the same time, American sociology’s explicit commitment to liberal justice and human rights has taken on a messianic fervor. Tellingly, the theme of the 2019 annual meeting of the ASA was “Engaging Social Justice for a Better World.” The 2021 theme was even more combative: “Emancipatory Sociology: Rising to the Du Boisian Challenge.”²⁶

Meanwhile, sociology’s sister discipline, cultural anthropology, has undergone similar developments. This trend has been particularly consequential in Israeli universities, where the two disciplines reside in the same department. New ideas and assumptions made their way onto the agenda of the discipline during the 1980s. The cultural approach that dealt with issues of meaning, identified primarily with the work of Clifford Geertz, was replaced by conflictual approaches (especially post-colonialist and feminist) that view culture as a field of power relations characterized by domination, exploitation of the underclass, repression, and various forms of inequality (Ortner, 2016). “Dark anthropology” emerged in this context, highlighting the cruelty and aggression in the human experience as well as the historical and structural conditions (such as neo-liberalism) that produce them. As anthropological research embarked on this new track, it was no longer the primitive, savage and (culturally) distant “other” that preoccupied scholarship, but rather the suffering subject (Robbins, 2013), and the field came to view vulnerability and exploitation as the nucleus of its research agenda (Kleinman et al., 1997).

As with sociology, this moral turn (Fassin, 2012) has had far-reaching implications for anthropology’s interpretative space, transforming it from a field whose mission was to understand the “other” and discern the meaning assigned to various forms of life to one that saw itself as politically committed to a mode of analysis that would protect the vulnerable and the oppressed. Notably, this turn did not emerge from theoretical reflection alone; it came from the cultural and political changes convulsing the West and the rise and institutionalization of humanitarian and human rights discourses (Robbins, 2013).

A glance at the history of relations between American anthropology and human rights discourse reveals the dramatic change that anthropology has undergone in the past two decades. The story begins in 1947, two years after the end of World War II, when the American Anthropological Association (AAA) was asked to sign

the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). The Association, then headed by Melville Herskovitz, declined to be a signatory, claiming that the AAA's fidelity to the values of scientific neutrality and cultural relativism barred it from doing so (American Anthropological Association Executive Board 1947). Half a century later, in 1999, the AAA made an about-face, publicly declaring its commitment to human rights (Engle, 2001; Goodale, 2006). Many AAA members supported the change in the organization's position, believing that it was now imperative for cultural anthropology to facilitate the translation of human rights into local, non-Western dialects, introduce cultural and socioeconomic rights into human rights discourse, and, most importantly, address human rights violations by going beyond mere description (Messer, 1993, p. 242).

The Liberal Grammar of Contemporary Critical Discourse

In American sociology and cultural anthropology, these trends have coalesced into what I refer to as the liberal grammar of contemporary critical research (see Mizrahi, 2022). To be sure, I make no claim that critical sociology represents the entirety of American sociology. Other branches, such as professional and policy sociology (in Burawoy's terms), are still alive and less politically committed (see Turner, 2019), while public sociologies, especially those that closely cooperate with liberal progressive NGOs, are by necessity politically committed. However, critical sociology, with its high levels of political commitment, holds a grip on American sociology and, as such, plays a crucial role in determining the current discourse in Israeli sociology.

Beneath this critical discourse is the liberal grammar. This grammar, shared by critical sociologists at the core of the discipline (in the United States) and its periphery (in Israel), consists of three major components, the ontological, political, and interpretive. A fourth, which I refer to as *moralistic methodological atheism*, while not always present among all critical researchers, nevertheless exerts a strong influence.²⁷

The *ontological* stance is made up of two building blocks. The first is a conflictual view of social reality, according to which relationships of domination are at the core of social life. The second is the belief in the sovereign, rational, equal, autonomous individual, awaiting rescue from the prison-like constraints of oppressive structures. Such structures can be national and religious boundaries, exploitative global markets or the neo-liberal order, the post-colonial condition, or pervasive structural inequalities—whether based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability (Abbott, 2016). These two components come into view in what Abbott describes as the *liberal contractarian ontology*,²⁸ which is essential to the normative underpinnings of contemporary social science.²⁹

Many conflictual approaches focus on power structures in economic, organizational, and institutional contexts and the inequalities they create without reference to the idea of the autonomous individual, and some of these approaches even deny its existence. However, it is important to emphasize that the focus on inequality is

related to the concept of the autonomous individual, even if the approaches that deal with inequality do not always attend to it directly.

As their organizing principle, these approaches share what anthropologist Louis Dumont (1980) called the *homo aequalis*, which is regarded as both a desirable and “natural” feature of the political and social order (the “is” and the “ought”). My use of “natural” indicates that the concept of the *homo aequalis* draws its validity from universal moral reason (rather than from God or other transcendental religious powers) as the transcendental determinant of the social order. This political vision, which stems from the Enlightenment, is nourished by the close connection between the principle of the rational and autonomous individual, who is differentiated from the society in which he/she lives, and by the principle of equality.³⁰ Dumont (1980, p. 11), characterizing the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, captures the relation of these two principles:

The ideal of liberty and equality follows immediately from the conception of man as an individual. In effect, if the whole of humanity is deemed present in each man, then each man should be free, and all men are equal. This is the foundation of the two great ideals of the modern age. By contrast, as soon as a collective end is adopted by several men, their liberty is limited and their equality brought into question.

Thus, the concept of the individual as an indivisible entity—the in-dividual—is the ontological Archimedean point of the liberal grammar (see, for example, Dumont, 1992; Abbott, 2016; Mizrachi, 2022). It is fundamental to the proper order of things, and from the progressive critical position, situations where individual autonomy is under threat require interpretive suspicion and are explained as false consciousness (see, for example, Enoch, 2020). The acceptance of the hegemonic order by subjects defined as its victims is a paradigmatic instance of false consciousness (with some variation among the approaches) because it stands in opposition to their only authentic choice, that of fulfilling their autonomy.

Readers from various critical schools may still wonder why I ascribe a common individualist ontology to such diverse approaches and intellectual traditions as Marxism and neo-Marxism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, different schools of feminism, queer theory, and communitarian approaches,³¹ some of which take the concept of the embedded individual as the theoretical starting point. It is, therefore, important to briefly distinguish between the concept of the “embedded individual” as classically figured in the discipline of sociology and its use in contemporary critical discourse. In the classical formulation, the individual was viewed as deeply embedded in a weave of social relations, within which the very meaning of personhood is constructed.³² Most contemporary critical approaches also perceive the individual as deeply embedded; however, in this formulation the individual is embedded in structures of domination and inequality that constrain his/her liberty.³³

The concept of the *homo aequalis*, which is deeply embedded in the individualistic ontology, gives rise to the liberal grammar’s *political* stance, which extols

liberation. In its progressive version, this stance prioritizes actions of “resistance,” “subversion,” and “disruption,” all of which are crucial to the struggle against repressive power structures. This emancipatory spirit can nonetheless warp our view of those communities (such as religious communities) that maintain continuity with, rather than break from, tradition, since such a break is considered necessary for social change. Yet the refusal to break from tradition might signify that these communities await neither liberal salvation nor emancipation from the “oppressive” past (Mahmood, 2005; Mizrahi, 2014).

This overview leads to the heart of my inquiry—the liberal grammar’s *interpretive* component, which is fueled by suspicion, the negation of overt reality, and an ethos of deconstruction.³⁴ When read according to the liberal grammar, social reality is determined by underlying power structures that are known to critical researchers yet invisible to the research subjects. This mode of suspicion becomes excessive when strong moral and ideological meaning is attached to the power structures.

I here note an additional aspect of the liberal interpretive mode: a *secular anti-traditional stance*, that is, the negation of any tradition as a source of authority if it seems to conflict with the secular and individualist ontology.

On the question of religion, the liberal interpretive mode is characterized by what I term *moralistic methodological atheism*, an interpretive stance according to which religious norms of behavior are judged by progressive moral and political standards, especially when they are viewed as harmful to the individual’s autonomy or bolstering oppressive social forces. My term draws on Peter Berger’s notion of *methodological atheism* (Berger, 1967, 1979), which he defines as “the practice of bracketing—or refusing to consider for the purpose of sociological study—the ultimate reality of such religious objects such as God, angels, or cosmic unity” (Porpora, 2006, p. 75). In contrast, my term refers to cases in which religious phenomena are “unbracketed.” This occurs when critical sociologists either stop maintaining neutrality regarding the true value of some religious phenomena or adopt an agnostic stance toward them (Porpora, 2006). Instead, they tend to vilify religious content and behavior, especially in cases where religious content and behavior deny the inherent priority of the *autonomous equal individual* (for example gender inequality).³⁵

What I call *primordial relations* serve as an organizing principle (Eisenstadt, 1998) of group boundaries and social roles and duties for some rooted subjects. These primordial relations are based on kinship, land, ancestry, and other “tribal” and familial affinities, and in the progressive secular vision, they are viewed negatively if they seem to threaten individual autonomy and social equality. Hence, while I am fully aware of the orientalist connotation of the term *primordial*, my reappropriation is based precisely on the interpretive space that lies beyond the liberal grammar. I will further clarify my use of *primordial* when I present my discussion of its connection to sources of collective identity.

To return for a moment to the repertoire of explanations for Mizrahi hawkishness, as reflected in their adherence to Jewish identity and loyalty to the Jewish

people and the State of Israel, we see that all of these approaches built around a conception of the embedded individual view Mizrahi political behavior as an inevitable reaction to broader social forces. Even if some are aware of the paternalism inherent in attributing the political positions of disadvantaged Mizrahim to “false consciousness,” their subjective consciousness and lived experience are perceived as a reflection of social and symbolic inequality. Ironically, the attribution of false consciousness to the victims of oppression who refuse to self-categorize according to the liberal grammar is intended to defend them from the possibility that they might be convinced of their own opinions and refuse the liberal redemption so fervently offered to them. If the researcher acknowledges this possibility, even if it stems from a reliable description of the attitudes of the research subject, he/she risks being suspected of essentialism. In other words, from the position of liberal certainty, the research subject, and especially the subject who has been identified as a victim, is expected to recognize universal reason and morality and realize their individual autonomy as the only human authentic choice.

However, giving voice to right-wing Mizrahim does not mean essentializing non-liberal subjects; rather, it aims to de-essentialize the liberal grammar by which they are read. This allows for the liberation of the interpretive space and bringing the non-liberal subject in. In order to do this, we must understand what enables the liberal grammar to reign as the *modus operandi* of critical discourse. We must ask why the sense of certainty held by the liberal-critical discourse has persisted, despite the refusal of so many subjects in the field to be classified by its components. To answer this question, I focus on the interpretive mode of the critical discourse and, more precisely, on its propensity to adopt an excessively suspicious mode of interpretation. As we will see, this is perpetuated by a circular logic: the position of certainty, based on the liberal grammar’s view of social structure and its moral and political meaning, nourishes an overly suspicious regard for any counterevidence. Adopting this heightened suspicion serves not only a meta-methodological purpose but is also intended to ensure an authentic mode of critique. Liberal certainty feeds on interpretive suspicion aimed at the production of truth, which does not allow much opportunity for counterevidence to disrupt the underlying grammar. All counterevidence is labeled anomalous, and the grammar itself is reinforced. To understand this, we must delve into notions of hermeneutics.

The Hermeneutical Bend: Becoming Overly Suspicious

I first used the term *sociology of suspicion* in a programmatic paper describing the critical movement in Israeli sociology (Mizrachi, 2017). Drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s notion of the hermeneutics of suspicion, I sought to probe sociology’s interpretive stance and to suggest a movement along an interpretive pendulum, from the pole of excessive suspicion to the pole of meaning.

In Ricoeur's monumental philosophical project, human interpretive activity mediates between the person and their surroundings, whether the object of that activity is a written or a social text. In his book *Freud and Philosophy* (1970), Ricoeur hails Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as the masters of a new art of interpreting. Despite the obvious difference among the three, what they share in common, as Rita Felski (2015, p. 31) describes,

is a spirit of ferocious and blistering disenchantment—a desire to puncture illusions, topple idols, and destroy divinities. In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur contrasts this iconoclastic verve to the yearning of the reader who approaches a text in the hope of revelation. Here meaning is disguised in a quite different sense. The reader luxuriates in the fullness of language rather than lamenting its poverty; the text's latent meaning 'dwells' in its first meaning, rather than exposing, subverting, or canceling it out. To interpret in this way is to feel oneself addressed by the text as if by a message or a proclamation, to defer to a presence rather than diagnose an absence. The words on the page do not disguise truth but disclose it. Such a 'hermeneutics of restoration' is infused with moments of wonder, reverence, exaltation, hope, epiphany, or joy. The difference between a hermeneutics of restoration and a hermeneutics of suspicion, we might say, lies in the difference between unveiling and unmasking.

However, the two forms of hermeneutics coexist, and thus, the interpretive act is dually motivated, according to Ricoeur, by the tendency to suspect, on the one hand, and the effort to decipher the text or restore its meaning as fully as possible, on the other. "Suspicious" interpretation is propelled by the desire to discover the text's "true meaning," assumed to lie beneath its surface. Texts thus require excavation, as it were, before their original meanings can be discerned. In the context of the social sciences, I refer to the hermeneutics of suspicion as an interpretive mode driven by a belief in an "essential truth," known to the critical observer but often hidden from the subjects in the field. As such, the hermeneutics of suspicion relates to Ricoeur's other mode of interpretation, the *hermeneutics of meaning or faith*, which he juxtaposes against suspicion. The motivation in this hermeneutic mode is to dig into the text in order to unearth and restore its inherent meaning, this time through its subject. As such, it calls for total attention to the text—studying it, learning from it, and being utterly open to its influence. This allows us to reconstruct its original meaning, its creator's "true" intent.

For Ricoeur, the interpretive act requires both the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of meaning. Each is constitutive of the act of interpretation; neither can be done away with. The balance between them, however, is difficult to maintain. On the one hand, an overly faithful interpretive mode may lead to naïve readings by taking the text/subject at face value. On the other, an *overly suspicious* reading may flatten the text/subject and reduce their meaning to what is "hidden" underneath. Ricoeur (1970) identified the two core factors that may induce an overly suspicious imbalance: a structuralist approach and ideology.

Put simply, when the observer (in our case, the social scientist) maintains a clear and robust vision of a social structure, the addition of an ideology endowed with absolute moral meaning may lead them to adopt an overly suspicious mode of interpretation.

If we think of the liberal grammar as a paradigm, as defined by Thomas Kuhn (1962), or, more precisely in this case, a metaparadigm, then understanding its principles of action will serve as the key to understanding the role of critical discourse as “normal science,” despite the aggregation of anomalies it has amassed (which, in this context, are referred to as paradoxes) that threaten its validity. Similar to the behavior of the scientific community when it confronts evidence that disrupts or contradicts its normal assumptions, the progressive critical community acts to defend itself against contradictory evidence and “paradoxes.” Critique or empirical discoveries that question the validity of the liberal grammar itself are headed off by community members, who seek to protect their precious story and vision of a moral and political order. Understood this way, their conditioned response to shy away from, reject, or treat as threatening any conflicting evidence is intrinsic to the mode of excessive suspicion.³⁶ A clear example of the interpretive significance of the uncritical movement of the hermeneutic pendulum from the pole of meaning to the pole of over-suspicion can be found in what I describe as the “failure of representation of the non-liberal subject.”

Subjects without Subjectivities: Chronic Misrepresentation

How are we to relate to subjects who refuse to perform their assigned roles in the meta-script rooted in the liberal grammar? Whether the critical observer labels the non-liberal subject a “victimizer” or a “victim,” the risk of misrepresentation is great—whether through flattening social reality, emptying the subjects of their subjectivities, or reducing the subjects’ experiences to their position in the hidden power structure (Mizrachi, 2016b, 2017).

The Non-liberal as Victimizer. With regard to the non-liberal subject as victimizer, the problem of representation has become increasingly acute with regard to what anthropologist Susan Harding (1991) defined nearly three decades ago as “repugnant cultural others.” Harding argued that this definition entails a homogenization of people into a marked group, and she questions the selective use of cultural criticism. “It seems that anti-Orientalizing tools of cultural criticism are better suited for some ‘others’ and not other ‘others,’” she quips (p. 375).

Harding’s observation of the creeping moral policing in the field of anthropology and its implications for the subject representation has been recently revisited. In 2019, a panel of anthropologists working with “repugnant others” described their marginalization in the field and their colleagues’ skepticism about their work and their subjects’ reliability, especially when those subjects are labeled as “victimizers” (see Carey, 2019). Colleagues, panelists reported, doubted that the

conservative elite, the police, and other “repugnant communities” were actually cooperating with them. These arguments, the panelists claimed, were based on several assumptions, including

- (1) that all people in such categories are politically, socially, racially, and economically homogenous; (2) that they are so insular and/or closeminded that *they* would not talk to anyone different from themselves; (3) that building intimate relationships with people means necessarily sympathizing with them; (4) that humanizing them in our writing is an act of supporting their political and other positions; and, (5) that all anthropologists share a homogenizing political orientation (Carey, 2019).

The Non-liberal as Victim. And what of the non-liberal subject who is not branded as a “bad subject”? This problem can be illustrated by paraphrasing Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) query “Can the subaltern speak?” I would ask: “Can the *non-liberal* subaltern speak?” And are we listening? As Spivak asked: Do we hear the voices of those subalterns who refuse to play their part in the critical script? Or could it be that the only ones who are allowed to speak are those who, overtly or covertly, echo the progressive view held by critical researchers? As anthropologist James Laidlaw (2014, p. 176–77) warns, “It is also important not to imagine or pretend that people (even or perhaps especially ‘subaltern’ people) will always use their freedom toward ends of which the ‘progressive’ observer approves.” Hence, when attending to “victims,” we must be wary of an interpretive danger that stems from the hermeneutics of suspicion which I will broadly refer to as “liberal paternalism.”

In the American context, sociologist Orlando Patterson (2006, 2014; Patterson and Fosse, 2015) describes a case in which critical sociology chose to define young African American slum dwellers as “cultural dopes” who must be saved from themselves.³⁷ According to Patterson, the view held by young African Americans that “culture” (in the sense of “ghetto culture” or “culture of poverty”) plays a constitutive role in patterning their life in the ghetto and has enormous influence on their chances of extricating themselves from poverty led critical sociology to characterize these subjects as dopes. The subjects’ position is at complete odds with the structural and ideological assumptions of critical sociologists. The term “culture of poverty” was in fact taboo in critical sociology for several decades due to the concern about shifting attention from poverty’s (“true”) structural causes to the behavior of the poor, a shift that entailed “blaming the victim” (see also Lamont and Small, 2010). Identifying the culture of poverty as the source of the problem was also portrayed as pathologizing black culture (Patterson and Fosse, 2015).

In retrospect, in my own past as a critical sociologist and social activist, I see that I, too, had adopted a protective position toward marginalized Mizrahi victims. I had silenced them when their voices were in dissonance with my own tune, and in many cases I had diminished and even dismissed the meaning they gave to their own lives. Putting it bluntly, I tended to reduce the Mizrahi subjects’ subjectivity to a fixed role in the structural meta-script of the critical story, and they became

components in the social structure with which I had imbued essential moral meaning. Most importantly, I silenced or denied my Mizrahi subjects' own reading of the same structure and the moral meaning they attached to it. In these situations, I simply separated the speaker's words from the speaker themselves, as if the story they were telling were not theirs. In my mind, the story they told was merely hiding a different story, known to me as a critical observer but hidden from them.

I have seen that this behavior occurs among critical sociologists especially when the situation "weakens" the essential story to which the critical-progressive researcher in the field is committed. In such cases, they may find no alternative to treating the research subjects' story as untrue and their consciousness as false. Critical sociologists are currently revisiting the concept of "false consciousness," but their *de facto* use of it is often implicit, unreasoned and undertheorized. Only a few critical sociologists nowadays would admit to using the concept in its Marxist sense.³⁸ I was not one of them.

In fact, the true meaning of the non-liberal subjects' story appears most clearly in those cases in which they are tagged as "bad subjects" or even as dangerous subjects. In these cases, the critical-liberal discourse overtly or covertly recoils from understanding the internal logic of one tagged as victimizer.

Within the Israeli left, Mizrahim from the social periphery are viewed as both victims and victimizers. As we have seen, overall, the critical discourse tends to view Mizrahim as victims of Ashkenazi Zionism. At the same time, however, there can be no doubt that they belong to the Jewish majority (see Mizrahi and Herzog, 2012), and, as a result, they benefit from Jewish supremacy in a state where being Jewish is a valuable civil resource. Because of their support for the political right (especially for Likud and Shas, the Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox party that has been part of the right-wing bloc for decades), they are a "problem" for the left: they constitute a large component of the coalition that prevents the secular-democratic left-center bloc from winning elections and facilitates the right wing in fulfilling its ostensibly unenlightened, oppressive policies. Finally, the active involvement of Mizrahim in anti-Arab activities, especially in mass riots after security-related incidents, and their calls for "Death to the Arabs" in soccer matches, as described by Rimón Or (2002), are perceived by the center-left mainstream as expressions of a fascist and racist worldview of Jewish supremacy, a victimizing, rather than victimized, position. Although the right-wing behavior of the Mizrahim is disturbing to left-wing Mizrahi activists and intellectuals, the latter have been a bit more tolerant of it than was the rest of the liberal left.³⁹

Whether victims or victimizers, non-liberal Mizrahi subjects often appear in the critical literature as empty vessels, subjects without subjectivity. This trend has intensified over the past decade or so, with the growing discourse on the rise of populism in both popular and critical literature. Right-wing Mizrahi voters from the social periphery are often identified in popular discourse as "populists." The term "Bibi-ism"⁴⁰—most often used pejoratively to describe Mizrahim who vote for Benjamin Netanyahu—appeared over a decade after the conclusion of

this research. However, the term pertains to our research population, which has remained loyal to the national-religious right, and it resonates with current interest in populism around the world. When I think of an imaginary reader today, I know that he or she will read this research through the lenses of the current discourse.

This identification has only intensified the tendency to attribute the political behavior of disadvantaged Mizrahi right-wing voters to the manipulative power of political leaders such as Netanyahu and populist parties such as Likud, populist rhetoric and discourse, and structural forces. As always, the voice of the illiberal subject—the Mizrahi as a “consumer of populism”—is completely absent from public and academic discourse in Israel. I will now move on to a description of the research and methodology, which were designed precisely to amplify this voice that has been silenced.

POPULISM, BIBI-ISM, AND RIGHT-WING NATIONALISM

Over the past decade, and most especially since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was investigated, indicted, and subsequently put on trial for alleged criminal offenses, the term “Bibi-ism” has flooded social networks and mass media.

Over the past two decades, the loyalty of Mizrahim from the social periphery to the political right has been a striking feature of every election. Likud, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, has formed the government coalition throughout this entire time, with the exception of the Bennett-Lapid government, which governed for less than a year (during 2021–22).⁴¹ Even during this period of constitutional crisis, support by Mizrahim from the social periphery for Likud and the national and religious right has remained strong.⁴² The difference between the poorer towns and villages, populated by Mizrahim and other disadvantaged groups, and the more affluent areas, which voted for the democratic-secular center or left, remains clear and consistent. This situation has been visually represented in interactive maps that detail the voting patterns according to location.⁴³

The central bloc of Netanyahu supporters among the Mizrahim from the social periphery continue to support him. They stand in opposition to the elite, whom they identify as the treacherous left-wing Ashkenazim who prefer foreign asylum seekers and Palestinians over Jews and greedily pursue status and power. They believe that the progressive faction among the elite represent a threat to their well-being, their Jewish identity, and the very existence of the State of Israel. As we have noted, it is difficult to escape the comparison between these Israeli phenomena and the divisions in American socio-political life galvanized by the populism of Trump and his supporters.

The recent surge of populism around the world includes parties and leaders from the right and the left, from the AfD in Germany to Núñez Feijóo in Spain ; from the indigenous former president of Bolivia Evo Morales to the pro-Flemish Vlamms Beland party in Belgium. We might also list Britain’s Brexit, the rise of

Viktor Orbán in Hungary, the increasing power of the populist right in France, Germany, Austria, Holland, and more (Brubaker, 2017; Filc, 2020) as a few of the key components of what some are calling a populist moment in world history. Until the 1990s, extreme right-wing parties, or populist radical right-wing parties (PRRP), enjoyed only limited electoral success (Barr, 2009; Betz, 1993; Mudde, 2007, 2010). It is their increasing control of the political center in recent years that has drawn the attention of researchers and the media.

The term *populism* is one the most contested in the contemporary vocabulary of the social sciences (Brubaker, 2017, 2020; Ron and Nadesan, 2020). It refers to a broad spectrum of political orientations—right-wing as well as left-wing political parties and leaders—and to diverse phenomena that cross states and continents and deploy distinct political and rhetorical styles. Populist leaders are often described as manipulative, using their charismatic power over their supporters (“the people”) and striving to bypass or undermine the power of stable institutions, the courts, the party, mechanisms of checks and balances, and the “hostile” media. They oppose what they refer to as the rule of the experts and the deep state and claim to defend the people from greedy, power-hungry elites. As a concept, therefore, populism has not led to a clear, articulated research tradition or to a comprehensive, linear body of work (see Brubaker, 2020). Rather, the literature on the subject suffers from ad hoc definitions employed to analyze specific case studies (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 527).

To be sure, analysis of the populist conjuncture throughout the world is a task that extends well beyond the boundaries of this research and its purpose. However, in Israel the reference to individuals and groups as “Bibi-ists,” along with the general term “Bibi-ism,” reflects the disparaging way in which opponents of Likud view the “fanatic devotion” of marginalized Mizrahim, their unconditional admiration for Netanyahu and his actions, and their uncompromising defense of him from attacks from the left, the media, the legal system, and the civil service.⁴⁴ Since it clearly resonates with the broad outlines of populism, it would be prudent to examine the similarities and differences between the so-called Bibi-ism of the popular discourse in Israel and the characterization of populism in the literature.

THE POPULIST MIND: A FEELING OF DÉJÀ VU

The study of populism shares some common assumptions. The first of these might ring a bell for readers, as it echoes the assumptions about the non-liberal Mizrahi mind in the critical discourse: the tendency to portray the consumer (or victim) of populism as reactive rather than generative. That is, subscribing to populist politics is not considered a behavior that stems from an independent source with its own internal logic (Brubaker, 2020). Its supporters are usually viewed as passive and subject to the leader’s rhetorical and emotional manipulation. Their reactive behavior is seen as a symptom of a social “pathology” or, alternatively, an expected behavior under the conditions of structural deficiencies and other failures of

liberal democracy. In either case, populism is viewed as an *anomaly* or a problem for the proper social order.

There is a tacit assumption here that in a properly functioning, welcoming, egalitarian liberal democracy, populism will disappear, since it has no generative sources of its own. This normative valance fuses “is”—the perceived nature of social and political order—and “ought”—what a proper social and political order should be (Brubaker, 2020). Indeed, the normative valence is revealed in the very use of the word “populism” as an ostensibly clean analytic category for the description of the increasing power of the extreme right throughout the world. In other words, the motivation for the research and its normative basis slide into a description and analysis of phenomena that represent a threat to liberalism, a concern shared by researchers and public figures. Furthermore, the academic effort is implicitly or explicitly directed at exploring the conditions that give rise to populism and strategies for overcoming “populist” forces.

The pathologizing of the non-liberal mind, as we have seen in critical sociology and anthropology, is now revisited in the guise of an analysis of populism. In some of these studies, populist voters are often presented as a resentful mass (Müller, 2016, p. 12; Ricci, 2020). According to Pappas (2019, p. 215), the “populist mindset” is motivated by “moral and other largely non-rational concerns, with little respect for institutional order.”

Some scholars in the field do have reservations about the depiction of populism as an attack on “the soul and body of liberal democracy” (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 501) and about the pathologizing and mystification of populism (see Canovan, 1999; Müller, 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). These scholars view populism not as a force external to democracy but rather as an integral part of it (Müller, 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) and find the source of the problem in the deficiencies in the democratic system of representation (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Kessel, 2015; Muis and Immerzeel, 2017).

Both approaches view populist behavior as an *anomaly*, a problem in need of a solution, and a reactive behavior to a social pathology or structural deficiency. The portrayal of the “consumer” of populism as passive and reactive brings us to the second broad tendency in the literature: to focus on parties, leaders, rhetoric, and discourse, as if the consumer’s mind were an empty black box in terms of input and output. Simply put, the research on populism tends to focus on the suppliers of populism rather than its consumers. This trend is particularly strong in the growing literature on right-wing populism that has come to define the views of the political center in Europe and elsewhere.⁴⁵ If, as discussed above, a researcher views populism as an anomaly, then it is unnecessary to look for the internal and generative forces that motivates its supporters, and the researcher can settle for the assumption that this behavior is merely reactive.

In the same vein, scholars have emphasized the constitutive role of discourse and rhetoric in determining the rise and decline of the phenomenon.⁴⁶ Bonikowski and colleagues, for example, have explored structural conditions that

exacerbate populist discourse (Bonikowski and Gidron, 2015), and looked to the efficacy of its rhetorical mode of operation, described as a “dog whistle.”⁴⁷ I do not rule out *a priori* the possibility of reactive behaviors, nor do I refute the validity of research that points to the efficacy of particular rhetoric on a target audience. At the same time, it is possible to identify rhetoric that is particularly appealing to liberal progressive populations, yet I doubt that this would be referred to as dog-whistle politics. It would appear that even in research on rhetoric, the rhetoric of the research itself—the conceptualization of the word choice—demonstrates the thin line between description and prescription, between “is” and “ought.” Bonikowski (2017) clearly recognizes the need to clarify the sources of the complementarity between “supply” and “demand,” that is, between the discursive strategies employed by politicians and the beliefs of the public. His in-depth research does indeed search for the sources of public support. However, here too he explains the support of various ethnic groups for populist leaders as stemming from threats to their position: behavior is viewed as a reaction to structural constraints.

The literature tends to portray populists as “democracy’s deviants,” neglecting the perspective of the people concerned (Bulli, 2022; Kemmers et al., 2016). This trend appears in its purest form in the Israeli literature on populism in analyses of rhetorical, structural, and economic forces. For example, the literature examines political and economic policies (Avigur-Eshel and Filc, 2021); populist rhetoric, its implications for change, and the need to keep the legal system independent of judicial populism (Harel and Kolt, 2020); Netanyahu’s behavior as a populist leader (Leslie, 2017); the role of national security in accelerating populism (Levi and Agmon, 2020).

In American sociology, Arlie Hochschild (2016) and Robert Wuthnow (2018), both of whom belong to leading departments of sociology recognized as progressive bastions, have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to reach out and listen closely to non-liberal subjects. Hochschild’s research has focused on right-wing whites in arch-conservative Louisiana bayou country, while Wuthnow’s has focused on rural, small-town America. Both have explicitly discussed the challenge that progressive researchers face in looking at an “other” who is geographically and politically distant and holds to a worldview that is perhaps diametrically opposed to their own.

As a first step, Hochschild notes, she had to turn her “moral and political alarm system off” in order to feel curiosity toward her subjects and follow their life experiences closely (Inequality Media Civic Action, 2017). She realized she must truly listen to their grievances and beliefs, their moral world, and their lived experiences. Hochschild enlarges upon her conscious efforts to bridge this gap by what she calls “breaking through the empathy wall” (2016). From this empathic position, Hochschild elicits what she refers to as the “deep story” of subjects who feel like strangers in their own land.

For me, Hochschild’s humble position towards her non-liberal subjects in the field, along with her empathic and nuanced reading of their stories, provided a ray of hope. Some of the similarities I found between Hochschild’s white Americans in

Louisiana and my Mizrahi informants in Israel's social peripheries were remarkable. One of the most striking was the threat that the liberal-progressive vision of the politics of universalism seems to pose to the core identity of both blue-collar voters in Louisiana bayou country and disadvantaged Mizrahim in Israel. But as I walked along Hochschild's pathway, I sought to take the act of empathic and curious listening a crucial step further. Listening is not only a means to elicit an adequate picture of the other's world of meaning; it is also an invitation to a new reading of my own position as seen through my subjects' eyes. This demanded recognition of the incompleteness of my own stance. My methodological turn therefore begins at the point that Hochschild concluded.

A METHODOLOGICAL TURN: MULTIPLE HERMENEUTICS

The emancipatory potential of knowledge is put to the test—and indeed, may be actualized—only with the beginning of a dialogue, when the objects of theoretical statements turn into active partners in the incipient process of authentication.

—ZYGMENT BAUMAN (1976, p. 106)

At this point, it should be clear why adherence to the liberal grammar may intensify sociology's suspicious mode of interpretation and hamper its ability to provide a fuller reading of the non-liberal subject. However, this step leaves us with a methodological question: how can we know if we are being overly suspicious? On the one hand, being overly suspicious is motivated by the desire to unmask oppressive social constraints and structures. On the other, an unsuspecting reading of a text can easily lead us to a naïve interpretation that takes reality solely at its face value. How do we open the social text to acquire a more balanced reading?

This swing of the hermeneutic pendulum, from suspicion to meaning, is an elusive task. It invites a conscious methodological and phenomenological effort to become suspicious of suspicion, vigilant against over-suspicion, and wary of the hermeneutics of suspicion. But how is this achieved? This vexing question invites rigorous interrogation. How can we sense that we are overly suspicious during moments of ethnographic reading, statistical analysis, in-depth interviews, and narrative analysis? Such modes of reading the field are yet to be articulated. At this preliminary stage of my inquiry, I suggest an intuitive rule of thumb for detecting an overly suspicious stance in sociological research: "If your findings match your moral position too frequently, suspect your sociology" (Mizrachi, 2017).

However, this is only possible in retrospect. In this study, I tried to stay alert to the pitfalls of excessive suspicion. I was able to sustain my alertness by turning my informants into active interpreters during the two stages of data analysis. That is, at each stage I put my own reading of the data that they themselves helped to produce to the test of their own interpretation. Hence, the participants became interpreters of my own interpretive repertoire. I term this method *multiple hermeneutics*.

This goal was facilitated by my choice of a mixed methods approach. It included a telephone survey of a representative sample of Israeli society followed by focus groups. The survey concentrated on the knowledge (not opinions) of respondents about social inequality in Israeli society, and the focus groups were composed of participants from the study. The survey findings served as a trigger for group discussions, a step that enabled the informants to shift from one interpretive position to another, first as participants in a form of a quiz examining their knowledge about inequality, and then as interpreters of the results of the survey that they had helped to produce.

Throughout the research, I confronted my subjects with heated issues of inequality, taken from the two primary pillars of liberal justice—distributive justice and the politics of recognition. In other words, I confronted them with the stratification of the social structure within which they live and asked them to explain the situation. At each stage of the research, the subjects' reading of the findings flew in the face of the interpretive progressive critical repertoire at my disposal. In this way, we were able to unpack an alternative logic that enabled them to "refuse to be liberated," recognizing their inferior position while simultaneously maintaining a sense of self-worth.

In the following chapters, I discuss how my informants understood the core issues of social inequality, including equal opportunity in education; identity politics; recognition and representation; group (religious and national) boundaries; social change over time (historical and temporal significance); and the role of protest and opposition as means of change. Through their eyes, I explore the binary portrayal of social reality inherent in the liberal grammar and its critical image of power, between "surrender" and "resistance;" "internalization of oppression" and "liberation;" and even "false consciousness" (in its widest use) and "political consciousness" (class, ethnic, or other).

*Mixed Methods: Nested Design and an "Actor-Researcher"
Abductive Analysis*

The methodological route I took in this research, which I have termed multiple hermeneutics, echoes certain prevailing methodological approaches. First, this methodology can be positioned among the growing number of approaches that seek to combine qualitative and quantitative data sets; these are generally referred to as mixed methods (Palinkas et al., 2019; Small, 2011). Multiple hermeneutics belongs to a specific subset of these mixed methods, known as "nested design," that entails the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from the same actors (Small, 2011).

In this case, the nested design is intended to transform research subjects into interpreters of statistical data, thus turning them into active participants in the broad process of meaning-making. Transforming them into analysts of the statistical data that they have generated turns them into both the objects and the subjects of the research, assuming each role during at least one stage of the study.

The participants' reading of the data played a double role. First, it enabled them to be present and to make their voices heard during the interpretation of the data, a stage from which respondents are missing in most research projects. Second, it added a crucial interpretive dimension to the statistical findings, which are at the heart of the "great paradox" that the research seeks to address. This enabled me to compare and contrast prevalent overly suspicious interpretations with the interpretations provided by the respondents themselves. In other words, the actors themselves nurtured the suspicion of suspicion that has been part of this research since its inception.

In this attempt to strike an interpretive balance between the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of meaning, I see a parallel to the methodological concern in the literature regarding the tension between a research position that is overly dependent on deduction and one that is overly dependent on induction (see Tavory and Timmermans, 2014; for a brief review see Thompson, 2022). Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans (2014) have described this concern extensively. They argue that an extreme inductive position could fall into the trap of "over-descriptiveness" by presenting a detailed picture of reality that does not provide any new theoretical insight. However, an extreme deductive position could lead to an unwarranted imposition of theory on the empirical field.

Drawing on the work of pragmatic philosopher Charles S. Peirce, Tavory and Timmermans maintain that if we limit our analysis to either an inductive or a deductive form of interpretation, it remains incomplete, as it cannot adequately account for what Peirce termed "inference" (2014, p. 122). According to Tavory and Timmermans, Peirce "realized that the structure of inference through which new insights are crafted is different, and termed this mode of inference abduction" (2014, p. 122–23). Abduction allows us to fit surprising, unexpected findings into our interpretive framework, even if they contradict prevalent explanations. Abduction is thus a crucial tool that enables us to recognize "anomalies" in the field and to expand and even reshuffle our theoretical toolkit.

This returns to Peirce's building blocks of the meaning-making process: signs, objects, and interpreters. In our case, the informants serve as both objects and interpreters. The statistical findings that they helped to create turned them into an object for interpretation—for themselves and for me. The statistical findings are composed of a "bundle of signs;" however, the interpretation of their meaning is not infinite.

At this point in the discussion, the research subjects/interpreters and I, as a researcher, were puzzled as we faced the findings and attempted to make sense of them. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that I did not entirely eliminate the boundaries between the participants and myself as a researcher. This will be clear throughout the entire process: I am the one who manipulates the meaning-making process. In contrast to my research subjects, I am motivated by the search for and interpretation of anomalies. Furthermore, throughout, I reflect on the theoretical meaning of the actors' accounts and position in the

wider theoretical context. This process continues as we progress across the different issues and findings. So, while most of the actors simultaneously fill the roles of objects and interpreters, their interpretation as active subjects serves as an object for my interpretation.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the shared interpretation was limited to a specific stage in the research. At the end of the meaning-making process, it is I who has combined all of the accounts of the actors into one greater, and hopefully compelling, account that cannot be categorized according to the prevailing progressive critical grammar. This marks the terrain for an alternative grammar. At the ontological foundation of this grammar lies the rooted subject.

THE STUDY

A Survey of Knowledge

I began my empirical investigation by conducting telephone surveys of a random sample of Israeli society, including Israel's three main population groups: Mizrahim, Ashkenazim, and Palestinian citizens of Israel. $N = 1,022$. All were interviewed in their native language (Hebrew, Russian, or Arabic.)

While the survey's sample represented the entire population of Israel, some of its questions focused more on Mizrahim than on other groups. Some of the items in the survey were taken from published research on social stratification, such as studies of the structure of opportunities in education (for example, the tracking system that channels Mizrahim into vocational programs), as well as ethnic, national, and gender representation on various rungs of the social ladder (politics, academia, high and popular culture, poverty and incarceration rates). The bulk of the questions focused almost exclusively on facts drawn from authoritative published sources and recognized databanks. The informants' responses were meant to reflect their knowledge about inequality rather than their opinions. The only question not strictly factual in nature was: "Could Mizrahi Jews who came from Arab countries and were Arabic speakers be considered 'Arabs'?" This question was meant to confront our informants with one of the most provocative identity issues in contemporary critical academic and political discourse in Israel (Shenhav, 2006; Shohat, 1988). This question will be the focus of our discussion in chapter 5.

Assembling the Focus Groups

This process laid the foundations for the next stage, in which we divided the informants into distinctly defined focus groups chosen from among the 25 percent of survey respondents who had agreed to continue participating in our study. All the group discussions were taped, videotaped, and transcribed.

We formed twelve focus groups. The ten original groups comprised two groups of Mizrahi men, one with and one without college education; two groups of Mizrahi women, one with and one without college education; two groups of

Ashkenazi men, one with and one without college education; two groups of Ashkenazi women, one with and one without college education; and two groups of Palestinian citizens of Israel, one with and one without college education. Subsequently we formed two additional mixed-gender groups of Mizrahim, one with and one without college education.

Two groups were not included in the analysis of the data: the group of educated Ashkenazi women and the group of Ashkenazi men with no college education. This is because the individuals who comprised these two mini focus groups were very different from the expected profile.⁴⁸ In sum, the analysis presented in the book is based on eight out of the original ten groups and ten of the twelve groups that participated in both rounds.

One initial statistical finding was the presence of a gender difference regarding knowledge of social inequality. Women from all demographic segments provided significantly fewer correct answers to most of the questions on the subject. Interesting in itself, this finding lies beyond the scope of this book and must wait for investigation in a different framework. However, as far as the focus groups were concerned, this finding was a decisive factor in our decision to divide all the groups by gender during the first round of sessions. This finding led me to expect that a unisex environment would enable the participants (especially women) to speak up and allow their voices to be clearly heard, uninhibited by the presence of the opposite sex.

The groups were formed in order to create an echo chamber, made up of participants who, we presumed, shared cultural, class, and political commonalities and a moral language. The rationale for this was that creating an environment similar to one they live in and a social network similar to the social network of meaning within which they are embedded would provide participants a safe and comfortable space to express their opinions and compare them with the positions of the other participants.⁴⁹

During the first round of sessions, we used the survey findings to trigger discussions in two ways. We began by asking the participants to reach a group decision about the correct answers to the questions they had already answered individually during the telephone survey. We sought to trace the participants' systems of classification and justification during their effort to reach an agreement about the "right" answers. The participants attempted to make sense of the survey data by applying public and personal narratives. We observed how participants moved from the *graphic* (the statistical data) to the *biographic* (their personal narratives) as part of the process of sense-making during the sessions.

At this point, multiple hermeneutics came into play. At each stage of the study, we exposed the participants to evidence taken from studies of social stratification and databanks relevant to social difference and inequality, the beliefs about inequality expressed by different groups in the study, and narratives used to classify hierarchies and social boundaries. We also asked them to explain how they

justified the moral meanings they attached to their own classifications. This process enabled us to reflect on our own normative stance and to scrutinize our suspicions, by putting them on hold and opening a space for our informants' alternative readings.

Had we stopped at this stage of the study, these findings might have reinforced our suspicion that Mizrahim exist in a state of denial or even false consciousness. Would their confrontation with such dissonance during the focus groups lead to a burst of consciousness raising? Would they be able to reconcile their awareness of marginalization by the state with their loyalty to the same state? How would they maintain their sense of self-worth in light of these presumably painful realizations? We placed our Mizrahi informants in a vulnerable position, where they were exposed to undeniable facts and a powerful critical reading of those facts' political meanings.

Shadow Cases: Arab Palestinian Citizens of Israel and Ashkenazi Jews

While this study focuses on Mizrahim, we have not lost sight of the other groups, without which the picture of the Mizrahim as described here would not be complete. Two groups are especially critical for an understanding of the context within which rooted Mizrahi subjects provide meaning to their lives and their surroundings: Ashkenazim and Palestinian Arabs. Therefore, while Mizrahim are at the center of our analysis, the two other groups serve as shadow cases; that is, they provide brief points of comparison with the Mizrahim who are our primary interest (Gerring and Cojocar, 2016).

We were able to see the how Palestinian citizens of Israel perceive the intra-Jewish ethnic divide and how they understand their own position with regard to that divide. Among the questions their responses allow us to pose are: Does the intra-Jewish ethnic division between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim matter to Palestinian citizens of Israel? Do they attach political meaning to that divide? Do they feel any bond with the hundreds of thousands of Arabic-speaking Jews in the first generation of immigrants who came from Arab countries? The point of view of the Palestinian citizens of Israel is intended to expand our understanding of the context in which Mizrahim make sense of social hierarchy and their own group's position. These voices can be fully heard in chapter 5, where the possibility of a Jewish-Arab identity is discussed. Other texts appear in appendix 1 and are cited throughout the book in the context of a specific question as it comes up.

Ashkenazi Jewish Israelis, our second shadow case, are unequivocally recognized by all groups in the study as the hegemonic elite, and they are the target of Israeli liberal critique. This is the group from which Israel's founders came, those who construed the narrative of Mizrahi rootedness in terms of modern nationalism. Critical sociology has been demonstratively suspicious of the Zionist "melting pot" narrative, especially given the exclusion, stigmatization, and disenfranchisement of Mizrahim. The ways average Ashkenazim make sense of issues

of inequality, the exclusion of Mizrahim, and so forth casts additional light on the inter-ethnic relationships in which the rooted Mizrahi subject lives, acts, and makes meaning of the dual experience of fully belonging to the national story while recognizing the persistence of inequality and discrimination.

I have chosen to discuss these two groups (Arabs and Ashkenazim) at the end of the main text in order to avoid losing focus and maintain a clear, coherent argument throughout.

LOOKING AHEAD

In chapter 2, I seek to uncover the meaning of an intriguing empirical finding that seemed to hint at a group consciousness among the group of Mizrahim. The survey findings indicated that Mizrahim knew significantly better than the other groups that their educational opportunities in the 1970s had been inferior to those of Ashkenazim and Arabs. That is, they recognized ethnic inequality and their own marginalization. In the course of the focus groups, the Mizrahi respondents collectively reached the same conclusion. Yet, this realization was not accompanied by resentment of the state, a sense of injustice, or even personal grievance.

Rootedness appeared here as the organizing principle of their indifference as well as their discomfort at the comparison between Jews and Muslims, which completely erases the differences between the separate “wholes” to which, in their view, each of the groups belongs. In contrast to the liberal notion of the autonomous individual who is entitled to free and equal fulfillment at all times, the rooted Mizrahi subjects viewed themselves as part of a whole (“the People of Israel”) and as participants in the story of Israel’s nation-building, which takes place in Zionist time. From this rooted ontological stance, any comparison between them and the Palestinian other—based on socioeconomic perceptions or the view of the two minority groups as the universal citizens of a neutral state—is a category error. It is from this grammar of rootedness that we can understand the Mizrahi subjects’ view of the other and of fairness versus equality.

Chapter 3 focuses on notions of time, history, and temporality. We explored the ways in which our informants maintained their optimistic view of social change over time and embraced the “history of the victorious” despite their marginalized role in the Zionist grand narrative. Their connection to Zionist time organizes the manner in which they create meaning for past events, including cases of discrimination against them; understand the present; and imagine the future.

We further confronted their optimistic view of history with a critical reading of the nation-building narrative. The informants firmly rebuffed notions of social reproduction and pessimistic views of history. They shed new light on critical assumptions about stability and the reproduction of oppressive structures over time. The informants’ optimism appeared to be supported by independent empirical evidence.

Chapter 4 investigates Mizrahi views on the liberal notion of recognition and representation. Here we exposed our subjects to evidence of presumably unforgivable under-representation not only in the leadership of the progressive left-wing camp (political parties and civil society organizations) that they vilified, but even in the parties and organizations of their own right-wing camp. To our astonishment, the Mizrahi informants did not express even the slightest sense of indignation. Once again, they perceived ethnic equality and representation as of lesser importance than the good of the state and the Jewish whole; hence, they did not consider their under-representation at a given moment in history to be an irredeemable injustice.

At the same time, Mizrahim from the right and the religious side of the map clearly identify and protest against exclusionary and discriminatory language when directed toward them. However, they formulate their response to issues of exclusion and representation only within a politics that upholds the Jewish whole rather than dissolving it in the name of universalism.

In the discussion of right-wing nationalism and populism, we see the explanatory power of rootedness. Right-wing Mizrahim recognize the power and status of the left-wing Ashkenazi elite; however their resentment is not primarily directed towards socioeconomic inequality, but rather towards the use that the elite makes of its advantages and its willingness to undermine the Jewish whole. It is the rootless approach of the liberal Ashkenazi elite, challenging the identity and existence of the Jewish state as the epitome of the Jewish whole, that they resent. Nevertheless, they maintained their optimistic view that the arc of social change points toward a future with equal ethnic representation.

Chapter 5 touches upon a “forbidden link” in the Jewish Israeli discourse: the political possibility for an Arab-Jewish identity. In line with critical Mizrahi scholars, I exposed my Mizrahi informants to the idea of decoupling religion and nationality in their identity as Mizrahi Jews. Mizrahi rootedness, in the face of this question, is revealed to fuse mythical Jewish time and Zionist time, creating an unbreakable tie between religiosity and nationalism. The vehement rejection of this hypothetical identity revealed, once again, the impotence of critical efforts to untie the Gordian knot of religion and nationality that is deeply embedded in the nuclear identity of Mizrahim.

In this chapter, I also examine the reaction of Palestinian Arabs to this question. These informants likewise reinforced the entrenched Arab-Jewish divide. From their rooted position, the internal Jewish ethnic division between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim seemed empty of political meaning, and they did not feel any kinship with Mizrahi Jews despite the cultural proximity that some Arab Palestinians recognize.

Chapter 6 is based on the informants’ rejection of the ideal of defying the social and political order in the name of universal reason or social change. We created vignettes based on fictitious individuals with diverse characteristics, backgrounds,

and life trajectories, to which the informants were asked to relate. They objected most strongly to those who represented *defiance*. Defiance has been central to the modern political imagination since the French Revolution, but the rooted Mizrahi subjects viewed social change as growing out of relationships in a given society rather than resulting from an externally imposed, universal moral imperative. Middle-class Mizrahi informants were divided into secular middle-class Mizrahim, whose rootedness is articulated primarily in Israeli civic terms, and traditionalist, religious middle-class Mizrahim, whose rootedness is articulated in religious-Zionist terms. Both groups tended to resent any form of defiance in the name of Mizrahiness. We further discussed the use of defiance within the boundaries of the Jewish whole.

In chapter 7 I zoom out by placing Mizrahi rootedness within a matrix of a broader typology alongside other forms of rootedness, among them the progressive rootless position of the liberal grammar. I examine rootedness in its various forms and its relationship to codes of collective identity and types of temporality, which are two of the building blocks of rootedness. I then return them to our initial conundrum—the relationship between power and meaning. I discuss my view of these systems of meaning in two well-known forms, power over and power everywhere, arguing that meaning is analytically distinct from power. In the last part of this concluding chapter, I discuss a number of empirical works exploring the meaning of rootedness and its potential to open new avenues for thinking and acting in the face of the great paradox when viewed as a global political crisis.

False Consciousness

True or False?

STEPPING OUT OF THE SURVEY

Excitement and Anxiety

On a swelteringly hot day in August 2009, my research team and I waited for our first group of informants. We were tense and anxious. Strangers to us and to each other, this group of Mizrahi men without a college education, the “self-defeating” protagonists in Israel’s version of the “great paradox,” were about to arrive at our sociology laboratory on the campus of Tel Aviv University to launch the second phase of our investigative project.

All of the participants had recently completed a telephone survey, and now they would serve as critics and interpreters of the survey findings that they themselves had helped to produce. As the crew checked the cameras and mics, I reviewed the session protocol with my research coordinator and the two focus group facilitators. My mind was racing, and I was ill at ease. We were about to slap the informants in the face, confronting them with the “bitter truth” about their inferior position in Israel’s social hierarchy.

How would they respond to this revelation? I imagined scenes of the men confronting painful moments of betrayal by the state to which they had been so loyal. I could see them overwhelmed with conflicting emotions, charged with deep feelings of insult and resentment. Would this truth crush their sense of self-worth? Would this be a moment of devastating disillusionment?

The participants were arriving from all over the country, each on his own. One participant, Sasson, had apparently gotten off the bus at the wrong stop and was lost. He called my research coordinator and asked if someone could pick him up.

I volunteered. I spotted him standing at a bus stop, a short, stocky, swarthy man in his sixties wearing a thin jacket and holding a used plastic shopping bag containing homemade sandwiches. I stopped my car, rolled down the window, and asked if he was heading to the university campus. Hesitantly, he said he was. Had he ever been to the campus before, I asked. “Yes,” he replied matter-of-factly, “I was here with my wife, at the [low cost] dental clinic.” His unpretentious response was heartening. At once, the abstract subject drawn from my statistics had morphed into the flesh-and-blood, solid and whole Sasson.

The results of the telephone survey we had just completed were also in our minds, heightening the tension. The findings clearly revealed the different arenas in which Mizrahim recognized their class inferiority. For example, Mizrahim were more aware than Ashkenazim of their under-representation among doctors, recipients of the Israel Prize (Israel’s highest civilian award for contribution to science and culture), and admissions to universities. Ashkenazim, however, were more likely identify their group’s over-representation among university faculty.

We can hypothesize that greater percentage of correct answers by Mizrahim or Ashkenazim comes from exposure in their daily lives to these phenomena: Mizrahim take note of their Ashkenazi doctors and the recipients at the Israel Prize ceremonies on television and are aware of their and their relatives’ and children’s difficulties getting into universities. Ashkenazim, who attend university in greater numbers, are more aware of the under-representation of Mizrahim among university faculty; in 2008 they were only 9 percent of faculty (Blachman, 2008). In the areas in which we can assume that Ashkenazim and Mizrahim are equally exposed to Mizrahi under-representation—for example, doctors’ visits and television broadcasts—it may be that Mizrahim are more sensitive to, and perceptive about, the under-representation.

However, we were forced to make a methodological choice: which questions that produced statistically significant differences between the two groups would serve as our focus? We chose to focus on the findings of a classic and provocative study of social stratification, which showed the inferiority of Mizrahi high school graduates in 1970 when compared both to Ashkenazim and, surprisingly, to Arabs. This provided us with an opportunity to examine the subjects’ intuitions with regard to these findings.

Other factors also informed our decision to focus on this question. First of all, the other questions dealt with comparisons between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, while this question included Palestinian citizens of Israel and would broaden the discussion on inequality from the internal Jewish context to a more universal civic space. Second, unlike other cases, in which the exposure of Mizrahim to inequality may differ according to factors such as age, background and area of residence, we did know for sure that most of the Mizrahim had experienced educational-vocational tracking. Indeed, as the following discussions demonstrate, a

significant portion of the focus groups had personal familiarity with the phenomenon. The younger participants did not have first-hand experience of the overt form of this ethno-class tracking system, as it has changed guises over the last three decades: the “low-status academic tracks that replaced the vocational tracks did not improve the life chances of low-achieving students from disadvantaged social groups” (Bar-Haim and Feniger 2021, p. 423). However, the younger participants, as we will see, were familiar with the earlier iteration of academic tracking through the experiences of their parents and other family members. Third, in this question, unlike the others, the participants were dealing with a classic study of stratification in critical sociology, which provided solid and unexpected findings that enabled us, in Bauman’s (1976, p. 102) words, to put the “emancipatory potential” of sociological knowledge to the test with our informants.

Our findings suggested that Mizrahim were better informed than Ashkenazim and Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel and knew that they (Mizrahim) had been in the lowest position in the structure of opportunity in education during in the 1970s. Perhaps these traces of Mizrahi group awareness could be a sign of a hidden political awareness that was straining to break free.

Pushing the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Ethnic Cleavage to the Fore

The survey question under discussion was based on the findings of sociologist Yossi Shavit, published in 1990 in the *American Sociological Review* in an article titled “Segregation, Tracking and the Educational Attainment of Minorities: Arabs and Oriental Jews in Israel.” The study found that “in recent [1970s] cohorts, Palestinian men who are citizens of Israel attend post-secondary schools at higher rates than Oriental Jews [Mizrahim]. This pattern emerged despite the socioeconomic disadvantages of Arabs, the small share of resources allocated to Arab education, and government efforts to advance the attainment of Oriental Jews” (p. 115). Shavit explained these trends in terms of ethno-class tracking applied in the Jewish education system, which channels Mizrahi Jews primarily into vocational rather than academic studies. By preventing Mizrahi Jews from accessing higher education, the tracking system was effectively maintaining the current Jewish ethno-class social status quo. Paradoxically, the Palestinian Arab education system, which operated outside of the Jewish nation-building project, had effectively escaped tracking. It thus enjoyed a relative autonomy that enabled it to channel its students toward academic learning.¹

Shavit’s findings were sociologically provocative and politically unsettling. They offered proof that the educational system, presumably as a result of the unintended consequences of the tracking system, was failing to achieve its ostensible mission and was an obstacle to the Zionist vision of the Jewish melting pot. Ironically, Palestinian citizens of Israel, because they were positioned outside the symbolic and institutional boundaries of the Jewish polity, had more educational opportunities (or less tracking) than the Mizrahim. Seen in the broader socio-political context, the findings pushed the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi ethnic cleavage to the fore

and threatened to shatter the mirage of Jewish ethnic integration. We were about to find out if these conclusions would have emotional and perhaps political repercussions among our Mizrahi subjects and, if so, what they were.

Shavit's study belongs to the type of critical research on social stratification that uses systematic statistical analysis to reveal a hidden power structure that determines the course of events on the surface, in what can be referred to as an act of "unmasking." This genre of research characterizes many studies of stratification, exploring gender, ethnic, class, racial and other biases in various institutional, political, and labor market contexts. To the research community, Shavit's findings seemed counterintuitive, surprising, and even provocative. But did they come as a surprise to the respective populations themselves? In other words, how would Palestinian citizens of Israel, Ashkenazim, and Mizrahim respond to the unmasking?

Astute Assessments

In our telephone survey, we had asked a random sample of the adult Israeli population the following multiple-choice question: "A study conducted 15 years ago found that within the cohort born in the 1950s, the group having the least chances to be accepted to a university was. . ." The participants could choose to fill in the blank with one of the following possibilities: women, Ashkenazim, Arabs, Mizrahim, or "don't know." We then analyzed and compared the responses according to subgroups and observed that there was a gap between Palestinians and Jews with regard to their understanding of the structure of educational opportunity, as displayed in figure 1.

Whereas all Jews clearly recognized Ashkenazim as the privileged group in Israeli society,² Palestinian citizens responded that Ashkenazi Jews had a relatively lower chance of access to higher education than Mizrahi Jews. The lack of awareness of internal Jewish ethnic distinctions demonstrated by the Palestinian participants is consistent with our other findings. As we had learned in response to a different question, more than one-third of the Palestinian respondents in the sample were unfamiliar with the categories "Mizrahim" and "Ashkenazim." This uncertainty is reflected in the large percentage of Palestinians who responded with "don't know" to the question about university acceptance. Arabs and Jews selected the answer "women" in similar percentages.

Among Jews overall, the responses, as one would expect, tended toward the usual suspects—Mizrahi Jews and Arabs, although Mizrahi Jews were viewed as even less likely to be accepted to university than Arabs. This finding is somewhat peculiar. Why would Jews believe that Mizrahim, ostensibly fully integrated members of the Jewish polity (Lamont et al., 2016), were more disadvantaged than Arabs, the group least identified with the Jewish state, the most excluded, and the most discriminated against? Figure 2 casts some light on this.

Figure 2 clearly shows that the source of the differences in the overall orientation of the Jewish responses (figure 1) is rooted in the different response rates

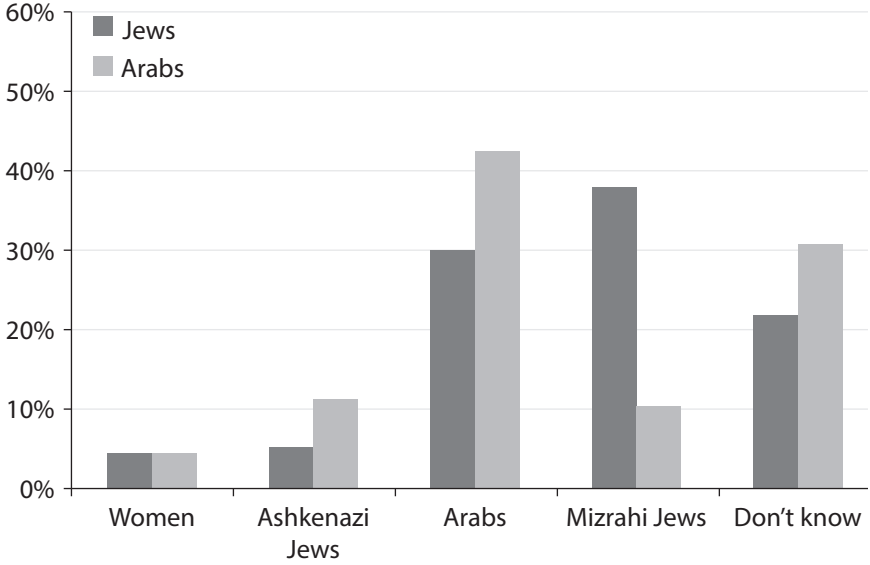


FIGURE 1. Percent distribution of responses by Arabs and Jews to the question, “Which group (women, Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews or Arabs) had the least chances to gain admission to a university in the 1970s?” N=1022.

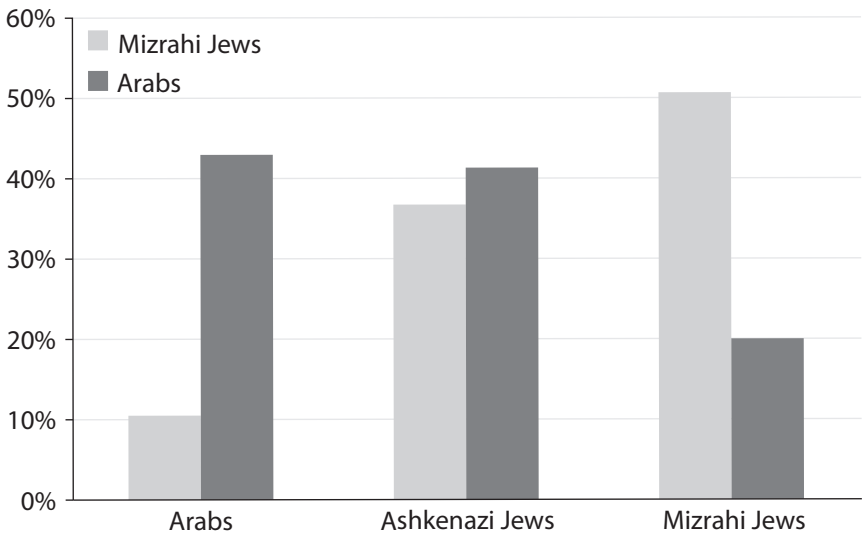


FIGURE 2. Percent distribution of responses among Arabs, Ashkenazi, and Mizrahi Jews to the question, “Which group (Mizrahi Jews or Arabs) had the least chances to gain admission to a university in the 1970s?” N=1022.

of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews. Once we disaggregated the responses, we discovered that Mizrahi Jews were significantly better informed than either Ashkenazi Jews or Palestinian citizens of Israel regarding their own (Mizrahi) chances to gain admission to an institution of higher learning. When compared to Ashkenazim or Palestinian citizens of Israel, being Mizrahi was found to be a superior predictor of Shavit's provocative findings, irrespective of religiosity, education, or age. (Differences between Mizrahim on the one hand and Ashkenazim and Arabs on the other were statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.) Put simply, the Mizrahi population was significantly more aware that their location had been *below that of Arab Israelis* in the structure of educational opportunity during the 1970s.

Between Awareness and Consciousness

On the face of it, the survey pointed to traces of the informants' political awareness. However, this raised several questions. Were they aware of what had actually happened? If by "what had happened," we mean a bare factual difference in chances to attend an institution of higher learning, then, according to the statistics, the answer is yes. When compared with other groups, Mizrahim were more cognizant of the effective structure of opportunity in the Israeli education system. We were about to find out what emotional, moral, and political meaning our participants would attach to this awareness.

To be sure, we had no guarantee that this random group, selected from among the participants in our sample, would actually arrive at Shavit's conclusions. Just because in our survey Mizrahim as a group had been relatively more capable of choosing the correct answer when compared to the other two groups did not mean that this particular grouping would do the same. Whatever conclusions they might reach, the purpose of the group discussion was to follow the systems of classification and justification they would use to make sense of our question and explain their answers, whether or not the discussion directly reflected the intriguing statistical finding.

THE ENCOUNTER

Mizrahi Men without a College Education

With all this in mind, we began our focus group encounter. Our first set of participants, six Mizrahi men who had no higher education and were strangers to one another, was made up of two distinct age groups: three were in their twenties and three in their sixties. The younger members of the group were: Eliran, 20, an instructor in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) technical high school; Ron, age 20, a soldier on active duty; and Yehezkel, 28, a Jewish religious artifacts salesman. The older men were Haim, 60, a factory worker; Gidi, 60+, a retired IDF veteran; and Sasson, 65+, a butcher, whom we met before.

At this point, these men knew only that they had all participated in the telephone survey; they did not know anything else about each other, about their

shared ethnic origin, or anything else they had in common. They knew very little about the purpose of the study. Two middle-aged Ashkenazi male facilitators conducted the session. The session began as Facilitator B introduced himself and Facilitator A thanked the participants for making the effort to come, explained how the session would be conducted, and told them that it would be recorded. One participant asked about the purpose of the study. Facilitator A answered that all he could say is that this is a study about social inequality and the distribution of social resources, that is, the issues at the heart of the telephone survey they had completed. Some participants nodded their heads in understanding and approval. The facilitator stressed that all comments and materials would be used exclusively for the purposes of the research, which was led by a university professor. In response to a request for clarification of those purposes, Facilitator B explained that they relate to equality and the structure of opportunity in Israel. He repeated that the participants' identities would remain confidential. Each participant briefly introduced himself.

The facilitators then put the first category in our research to the test. They introduced the word "Mizrahi" into a group composed entirely of Mizrahi men without a college education. Would they accept the term Mizrahim as a working category? Would they identify themselves and the others as belonging to the same ethnic group?³ In other words, would they adopt a basic level of group identity?

Each participant was asked to write down which group he thought had the least chance to be admitted to a university. This was followed by a fifteen-minute debate over the options, and the group was tasked with reaching a common answer. Sasson and Haim were the first to voice their views.

Sasson: I think it should be Arabs in first place. Even though I don't enjoy saying it, but I have no choice; Mizrahim are in second place.

Haim: Should we rank it [them]?

Facilitator B: Do so based on mutual agreement.

Sasson: Like it's two peoples.

Facilitator B: Two peoples?

Sasson: We're two peoples, us and the Arabs. Even though I'm against letting them get an education.

Before proceeding to our analysis of this portion of the discussion, we note that the two questions we raised above were decisively answered: the term "Mizrahim" raised no confusion or doubt about its meaning; at the same time, the participants made no reference to a shared Mizrahi identity.

Sasson's initial remarks, along with his disclaimer ("even though I don't enjoy saying it") may have reflected discomfort about voicing his views in a room located at Tel Aviv University, an institution publicly associated with liberal progressiveness, while taking part in a group discussion conducted by two college-educated Ashkenazi men. If his position truly indicates political cautiousness, a closer

reading of his argument may reveal Sasson's attempt to unveil the "true reason" for his attitude. He seemed to be suggesting an alternative organizing principle, rooted in national belonging rather than racism or universal citizenship. That is, what appeared to bother Sasson is the classificatory order reflected in the question's phrasing, one that positions Mizrahi Jews and Arabs on the same scale. According to Sasson's classification system, this is a category error; the two groups rooted in different wholes cannot belong to the same order of categorization. The very notion of Arabs and Mizrahi Jews as two equal groups of universal citizens, competing over the same social, symbolic, and economic resources, and living in one neutral state, was unsettling to him. For him, liberal democracy as the "model" for a proper moral and political order was impossible, given the deep national divide between the two groups. To put Sasson's comment in context, one should know that he, like many other Jewish Israelis, believes citizenship is not universal and the state is not neutral (see Lamont et al., 2016, chap. 4).

The group discussion continued:

Yehezkel: If it's women, Ashkenazim or Mizrahim [excluding Arabs], I would say Mizrahim, because they didn't have the means to get into the university. I look at my father . . .

Facilitator B: Yes, but listen, guys, it's not a question of means, but of who had a more difficult time being admitted.

Yehezkel: Chances . . . they had no chances. I think it's the women, because they were perceived at the time as having to stay home and raise their children. They were perceived as less skilled than men.

Haim: No, that's the 1980s already.

Sasson: This was much later.

Haim: It was before that time, this was already in my mother's time, not in the days when . . .

Sasson: You're still young—we're talking about those things from our [my own] experience.

Citing economic reasons, Yehezkel initially mentioned the Mizrahim as the group with the lowest chances of being admitted to a university. He then switched to women. The older participants rejected Yehezkel's choices, asserting their authority to disqualify his answers.

Gidi: I'll tell you what I think, guys. Look, those who were born in the 1950s—those with grey hair or bald [Gidi is referring to the older participants, including himself]—at least remember a little bit; they were here during the first years after Israel attained statehood . . . or in 1952, when the economic recession began. If you remember, they used to distribute food stamps, they used to ration food.

Sasson: That's right.

Gidi: They rationed food and everything; resources was limited, and everything was weighed and counted The country wasn't developed yet. We barely had anything, and if you remember in the mid-'50s we were already at war—after the [1948] War of Independence we had the Sinai Campaign [1956]. This means that in the 1950s, those who were born, I think, into a difficult period and the early revival of the country, with the difficulties of building a new state, difficulties of the recession [. . .], war, and only toward the late 1950s, I think [. . .], after we managed to catch our breath a little bit, then the country began to develop, I think, at a faster pace, we are [now] seeing the results . . .

Facilitator B: How did that affect [the question of] who can get admitted?

Gidi: Well, now these kids, who were born in the '50s, they only just started their lives then, right?

Haim: I'm sort of like that.

Gidi: They went to first or second grade, they finished elementary school, did the army after almost twenty years, that's already the mid-1970s. [. . .] The country was more developed by that time; you could make more progress . . .

Haim: That was after the Six Day War [1967].

Gidi: Whoever wanted, whoever had the means, whoever had parents who could help him with more tutoring, with support. I'm telling it like it was.

Facilitator B: Which group do you think it was?

Gidi: Now I'll tell you which group. Until now I only gave you some background. I think that the group was the Mizrahim. The Arabs were those with the lowest chances. Because they simply were, only after '67, only after the war, did they, like, start becoming assimilated in the country. If you remember. [. . .]

Gidi organized his account according to the state's narrative of Israel's rebirth and infancy, punctuated by the chronology of economic and political events and crises that affected its development. He portrayed the state's development within the framework of Zionist temporality as an organic process, devoid of competing groups or conflicting narratives. Instead, he offered a unified narrative that neutralizes the political connotations of inequitable distributive justice, social inequality, systematic discrimination, and even wrongdoing. He addressed only the objective constraints surrounding nation-building.

Toward the end of this exchange, Facilitator B pushed Gidi to directly address the question they were asked. Gidi first stated "Mizrahim," the factually correct answer, but then quickly and inexplicably shifted mid-sentence to Arabs. His

reference to Mizrahim could be read at this point perhaps as some sort of “Freudian slip,” surfacing from the depths of his subconscious. We cannot say. What stands out is that he quickly shifted his response to “Arabs.”

Eliran: The entire time of the 1950s was accompanied by murders of Jews by Arabs.

Gidi: Forget it, the ‘50s is who was born [refers to when they were born]. We’re talking about the ‘70s, when they started their university studies.

Eliran: Yes, but the education itself of the children was affected, among other things, by fears of Egyptian bombings, if I’m not mistaken, of course, the bombing of Rishon LeZion [a small city south of Tel Aviv], [and] there was fear of the Arab population also because of the fedayeen,⁴ and all the [IDF] reprisal requirements at the time. I think it’s the group of the Arabs—nobody gave them the time of day.

Again, discrimination against Arabs was framed in terms of the objective constraints that accompanied Israeli nation-building. In this way, Eliran justified his choice of Arabs as the group with the lowest position in the structure of educational opportunity.

Sasson then interjected his own impressions on the matter:

Sasson: [. . .] I’d say it’s women, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, with the Mizrahim being the last on that list [with Arabs removed from the list of possibilities based on his objection to their inclusion, as recounted above].

Eliran: Its Arabs, Mizrahim, and then women and Ashkenazim.

Sasson: Economically.

Facilitator B: Who is last in line? The question is, who has the lowest chances?

Gidi: The lowest I’d say would be the Arabs.

Sasson: I think so, too.

Haim: Because they didn’t develop awareness.

Yehezkel: But nobody gave them the time of day in those years; the Arabs were considered good for nothing. [. . .] You would drive in Jerusalem or in Gaza at the time, and they’d fear you then. Now there’s more of them at the universities, not because I’m racist or anything, God forbid, but in such a way that the country, the government’s policy, the peace agreements and all that, so they got in. We’re talking about today’s status. If you do it [Shavit’s study] today, between Jews only, then of course I think it’s Mizrahim. [. . .]

The group then voiced a sweeping agreement regarding the low position of Mizrahim when considering Jews exclusively. Overall, the participants appeared to agree that Arabs comprise the group least likely to be admitted to a university. The deep-seated animosity surrounding the role of Arabs in the history of the state seemed to provide the group with blanket justification for their choice. In his remarks, Yehezkel implied a link between left-wing politics and the growing number of Arab university students. In closing, he mentioned that today, the Mizrahim have the lowest chances for admission, but qualified his assessment as referring to Jews only.

Following this last comment, the discussion shifted to the present.

Facilitator B: I have a question. Suppose they did the same study today, let's say. [. . .] What would you say about now, today, not in the 1950s, not in the 1970s?

Haim: If it was today?

Facilitator B: Yes, who would have the least chances?

Sasson: The Mizrahim are already studying today.

Facilitator B: Then who would have the least chances?

Eliran: Women—in the university. I have three sisters and thank God, they all went to college,⁵ and . . . my mother went to the university and studied. My father didn't go to the university. I can tell you that women, in my opinion, don't have the lowest chances, but between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, yes [meaning there is still a gap between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim]

Facilitator B: Either Mizrahim or Ashkenazim are the least?

Gidi: I think that today they are equal; in my personal opinion, today they are equal.

Facilitator B: There's no difference?

Yehezkel: But there is influence because of money. There are always demonstrations about the rising tuition fees, to lower them. We still have the tuition problem. Many hold demonstrations about the fact that those who don't have money or support from home, those from weak families, don't have money to study.

Haim: You probably mean the Mizrahim? [. . .]
[. . .]

Facilitator A: Yes, we didn't hear Ron. What's your opinion?

Ron: I think that today there shouldn't be big gaps [. . .] because the universities, and the country in general, have an affirmative action policy for various sectors and weak layers in society.

Facilitator A: So, which is it then? Women, Ashkenazim, or Mizrahim—today?

Ron: Today?

Facilitator A: Today.

Ron: The Mizrahim.

Facilitator A: And why?

Sasson: Economic means.

Haim: I think it's a byproduct of economic means, which still keeps pulling the generation down.

At this point Facilitator B limited the options to women, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. The group began to center on Mizrahim as the group with the least chances. Their reasons remained economic and circumstantial. None of them expressed any thoughts about discrimination, injustice, or wrongdoing.

Facilitator A: Gidi wants to tell us something.

Gidi: I think it's not. I think that in my own opinion and based on my personal knowledge, I can talk about my children—OK? I can't talk about someone else . . .

Sasson: My children also, God bless.

Gidi: There you have it, yours and yours, too. So let's say, in my opinion, today there's pretty much equality, I can't say [exactly, but] there's pretty much equality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, because a kid who wants to go study nowadays will.

Sasson: You got that right.

Gidi: Will work nights, work [. . .] and go study.

Facilitator A: But who has better chances?

Gidi: Today, whoever wants to study . . . it's true—until you get there it's a little difficult. As you know, you have the entrance exams and all that, and it's true that the [private] colleges cost three times as much as the university here. I know because I also pay it from my pocket every year and I have, so I know. But whoever wants to study, and today there's equality, I believe today there's equality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim and women and Arabs. This means that an Arab who wants to study, if we go to the Technion in Haifa or here, I think they have a presence, a relative percentage, I think. I don't know how many [Arab] students are here, they have a pretty big percentage.

We should note that Gidi interpreted the notion of equality as equality of opportunity or formal accessibility, rather than structural outcomes, which do not necessarily reflect that assumed equality (McCall, 2013).

Facilitator A: OK, discussion's over. Let's go over your answers again.

Yehezkel: Today [who has the lowest chances]? I hesitate between Arabs and Mizrahim, but Mizrahim.

Facilitator A: It's Mizrahim you think are most discriminated against. [. . .] Eliran?

Eliran: I also think Mizrahim.

Facilitator A: Gidi?

Gidi: I think they're equal.

Facilitator A: They're all equal?

Gidi: I think so.

Facilitator A: Sasson?

Sasson: I'm with the Mizrahim, 'cause I know, I have experience in that.

Facilitator A: Mizrahim.

Ron: I also hesitate between Arabs and Mizrahim.

Facilitator A: If you had to choose?

Ron: Mizrahim.

Haim: I also think it's very close to that. The percentages look very similar.

Facilitator B: If I understand correctly what you're saying, it's that in the '70s it was Arabs, and now it's the Mizrahim. True? Is that more or less what you're saying?

Sasson: It's the Mizrahim almost all the time.

Facilitator B: Right.

Sasson: Arabs today, let's say, let's take just one example, municipal taxes; if I don't pay taxes to the municipality, they will cut off my water supply. If you live in [the Bedouin-Palestinian town of] Rahat, you don't pay for the water and you don't get your water supply cut off. [. . .] I see it on TV, on the radio, in newspapers; they don't cut off their water supply, because they're afraid. This is why they have money; they don't want to give back one cent to the state.

Facilitator A: You mean they have an advantage because we're afraid of them, so they can save money?

Sasson: Exactly, that's right.

With the exception of Gidi, all the participants suddenly agreed that Mizrahim were the group with the worst chances for being admitted to a university. The realization was abrupt, coming as if out of nowhere, a puzzling leap from a long-winded discussion to a shared conclusion that echoed the statistical findings of our survey.

Had we been witness to the sudden eruption of a collective recognition, signs of imminent consciousness raising? Sasson's earlier statement—"I have no choice"—might have signaled a reluctance to admit that Mizrahim are in an inferior position, even though, at that point, he ranked them above Palestinians. In the same vein, Gidi's apparent Freudian slip, in which he said "Mizrahim" instead of "Arabs," may point to a larger hidden truth. However, Gidi's early insight was not addressed until the session was about to end, when the other participants' opinion shifted, as if a process of consciousness raising had finally reached fruition, and we were about to witness a moment of "political awakening."

To our amazement, however, the group's understanding of the events did not generate any political energy. Their realization was not accompanied by any sense of injustice or victimhood, defiance of the Zionist state, or resentment of the hegemony of Ashkenazi elite. We saw no evidence of any personal discomfort. The stark incongruity between their social awareness, on the one hand, and their benign compliance with that awareness, on the other, was perplexing. The timing of this realization only added to the perplexity. Throughout the entire session, the group had maintained that the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi gap had narrowed. As noted, when the discussion focused on the 1970s, the group recognized the gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim but ranked the Arabs at the bottom of the structure of educational opportunity. Yet, when the discussion moved to the present, they contended that the gaps had disappeared, and then reached the collective conclusion that Mizrahim have been the most disadvantaged all along.

Furthermore, it was only after Facilitator B highlighted their statements about diminishing social inequality and their examples of Mizrahi progress that group suddenly, and counterintuitively, came to a consensus on Mizrahi marginalization in today's educational system.

INFERIORITY AND SENSE OF SELF

How can we explain the fact that the Mizrahi men without a college education in this group accepted their past and present inferior position in the social hierarchy with such equanimity? How can we understand the ostensibly paradoxical timing of their conclusion regarding ongoing discrimination?

The Zionist Narrative and Personal History

So far, I have touched on a number of possible ways to understand the "deep story" (Hochschild, 2016) and the alternative logic that organized the Mizrahi participants' interpretive position. At face value, it would seem that the Mizrahim were repeating a story well-known to every Israeli. Members of the group readily accepted the Zionist narrative about nation-building, the ingathering of the exiles, and the establishment of a Jewish and democratic state (that is first and foremost

Jewish although it also provides equal rights and opportunities to the non-Jewish minority that lives within it). All of the participants saw themselves as members of the Jewish majority.

This stance enabled them to understand their relatively inferior position within the structure of opportunities as the birth pangs of the emergence of the Israeli nation. They were optimistic and believed that ongoing change will accelerate and further narrow social and economic gaps. Although the subjects recognized that they occupied a lower position, this recognition did not create a foundation for a separate identity as a minority group demanding its rights from the majority. Powerfully and precisely, they presented the well-known Zionist narrative in a manner that would please all of Israel's governments, from the left and the right.

From the perspective of critical sociology, the conclusions reached by the group would rouse suspicion or be rejected completely. The subjects appeared to be merely spouting Zionist ideology, whether out of lack of choice or lack of consciousness. Interpretive suspicion would be heightened by the apparent emergence of a "deep story," in Hochschild's (2016) words, that follows the critical scripts, a set of positions taken in response to structural oppression.⁶ Any critical reader's interpretive pendulum would be swinging, in a Pavlovian movement, between meaning (the honest effort to understand) and suspicion (the effort to unmask the establishment story and expose the "true story" that lies beneath.) But the critical reader would find it difficult to avoid the impression that the respondents' story was a representation of something else, a "false consciousness" that was obscuring the "real story" about the discrimination, exclusion, and oppression that the Zionist establishment has inflicted on the Mizrahim.

It is precisely for these reasons that we must turn the interpretive suspicion on itself and ask: could it be that the stance of the Mizrahi subjects is a representation of themselves and not of something else? What would be the theoretical benefit if we were to read it as a wellspring rather than an offshoot, an authentic attitude rather than a merely reactive behavior, an independent stance rather than a symptom of a deep social malady known to critical researchers and hidden from the subjects themselves?

This is the moment when I took a radical turn and focused my research gaze on the critique of that banal public Zionist narrative that every critical researcher views as ridiculous. This is the moment to turn the suspicious gaze toward suspicion itself, and ask: What is it that allows us to listen to the story our respondents tell as if, a priori, we know that it is untrue, a product of their own false consciousness? What are the theoretical foundations on which we are basing our certainty regarding the truth value of our subjects' narratives and beliefs?

These questions bring us back to the liberal grammar and allow us to sketch the initial design with which to open up an interpretive space that breaks through its limitations. However, before I discuss this evolving space, I need to address the assumptions that form the basis of the suspicion and certainty of the current progressive-critical position.⁷

First of all, most critical researchers accept the assumptions of a contractarian ontology (Abbott, 2016), according to which inequality is an absolute and universal moral injustice because it entails biased opportunity structure-based group belonging. This is deeply embedded in the foundational civic belief in the contractual agreement between the autonomous “universal citizen,” who is equal and free to choose, and the neutral state. Second, the expectation among critical researchers (including, initially, myself, since I am a Mizrahi researcher), is that when individuals from excluded groups recognize inequality in the recent past, it will resonate with their present experiences of inequality and lead to an understanding of the ways that oppressive power structures are reproduced, marking the beginning of an “awakening” from their false consciousness. Third, the subjects’ recognition of their inferior position (as well as the inferior position of other excluded groups) in the social hierarchy will generate discomfort, frustration and perhaps even the initial signs of a new political consciousness⁸ oriented toward changing existing power structures and, in this particular case, doubts about the Zionist-Ashkenazi hegemony.

Reading through the Lenses of Rootedness

We now return to examine the primary findings. Unlike the autonomous subject, the experience of the rooted subject is significantly determined by social connections and a sense of collective belonging. Rooted Mizrahim view themselves as an integral part of the People of Israel, which is greater than any individual. The rooted Mizrahi person feels connected to the past and the future of the People of Israel, and their location in society and status cannot be examined without relating to the greater Jewish and national story, one narrated in Zionist time.

Therefore, in the civic context, Mizrahim do not perceive their relationship to the state in terms of the contractarian ontology described by Abbott (2016). Our Mizrahi participants did not experience themselves as neutral citizens living in a universalist state, but rather as citizens who belong to the Jewish whole and live in the Jewish polity, which represents the purpose and fate of the Jewish people. As noted, their descriptions of past events and their evaluation of the moral and political meaning of these events were based on a natural acceptance of the process of Jewish nation-building in which they are partners. Based on their deep attachment to the national Jewish entity, they examined the attempt to position Mizrahim and Arabs as oppressed minorities in a shared neutral civic space as a category error. Classifying them as “victims” of the state or of the common Zionist hegemon because of their position in the social hierarchy contradicts their basic identity.

The worldview that links Mizrahim with Palestinians and that often generates fantasies of a shared “awakening” among the two groups, which might even lead to an “Alliance of the Oppressed” against the Zionist-Ashkenazi hegemon, appears to lack any basis in reality. This is an example of how the notion of inequality stemming from individualistic ontology has downplayed or overlooked the meaning of group boundaries. We should approach the ways the participants

interpreted inequality in the educational opportunities, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, from the point of view of the rooted subject rather than from the ontological individualism of liberal grammar. Their personal stories are tied to the birth, growth, and development of the state. Inequality is not understood in terms of *homo aequalis*, as a particular injury to the autonomy of the individual, the absolute meaning of which is injustice.

To be sure, in the past, Mizrahim have protested against their economic situation and social exclusion, but these protests addressed concrete issues and did not coalesce into a Mizrahi political identity and consciousness. Herzog (1985) argued that only a Mizrahi political party, like Shas, that would emphasize Jewish identity and would ally the Mizrahim with the greater Jewish whole and reject ethnic separatism, could succeed. Some four decades later, her hypothesis has yet to be disproven.

In sum, inequality at a given point in time (in this case, the 1970s), was explained as a part of the broader story and the general price paid by the collective, even if the Mizrahim paid a higher price than the Ashkenazim elite who brought them here. The view of what constitutes “the good” was anchored in what is good for the whole. With regard to discrimination in education, their inferior position was often understood as part of their sacrifice to the greater story, the building of the nation, or attributed to a temporary injustice of specific circumstances. At no point in the discussion did the subjects present the state as “guilty”; any and all inequality is void of political significance.

From the position of the rooted individual we can understand the logic that underlines the differentiation that the subjects made between the economic and educational sphere, on the one hand, and the political and religious sphere (which constitutes the bulk of their identity) on the other. Examples of the relationship between their inferior status in the structure of opportunities in the past and the position of Palestinians in the same structure, or even of their inferiority to Palestinians in the given context, were perceived as circumstantial and as something that will change over time, so that they could accept it with equanimity. In other words, not only did the awareness of their inferior position in the structure not bring up any resentment or lead to any political consciousness—the comparison between them and the Palestinians in the fields of education and the economy lacked any political meaning and did not produce feelings of injustice or personal injury.

This view of inequality did not derive from the structure of stratification at a given moment. In their view, the description of the differences between the groups is not evidence of “injustice.” The organizing moral principle is equity, not equality (see Hochschild, 2016; McCall, 2013). Equity entails making resources (in this case, educational resources) available to all.

We should note that Gidi interpreted the notion of equality as equality of opportunity or formal accessibility rather than structural outcomes, which do not

necessarily reflect that assumed equality (see McCall, 2013). Gidi declared, “Today there’s equality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim and women and Arabs.” This was a statement of his satisfaction with the positive changes that have taken place over the years. Gidi’s statements were fully supported by the rest of the participants, and not one of them had any reservations about the inclusion of Palestinians among the groups that enjoy equality. Even Sasson, who had some reservations earlier, joined in with the rest of the participants. Making resources accessible to all citizens, including to Palestinian citizens, within the framework of a Jewish state seems fair to the subjects.

Structural Inferiority and the Sense of Self-Worth

The ostensibly perplexing jump in consciousness on the part of the members of the group now suddenly becomes clear. As we remember, the group of men reached the conclusion that Mizrahim are in an inferior position after they had reached an agreement regarding the reduction in inequality overall, and between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim in particular. This strange, unexpected move, seemingly an uncontrolled burst of political awareness that came from the depths of the group consciousness, invites a suspicious reading. But an alternative interpretation would suggest that only after they had secured their sense of self-worth and their position as deserving citizens who had paid their dues to the state (taxes, army service, and so forth) could they draw a moral line between themselves and the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who, they claimed, do not pay their dues. Only then, from a republican position of first-class citizens, could they assert their relative disadvantage.

From this stance, they could frame their inferior position in terms of fairness—or unfairness, to be more precise. Such framing does not jeopardize their sense of self-worth and may even strengthen it. Put differently, this reading enables us to distinguish between being disadvantaged when holding a position of equal citizenship and marginalization when coming from a position of inferiority. These two possible frameworks appear to bear opposite meaning for the Mizrahi sense of self-worth.

This explanation could be interpreted as a “reactive position” to inequality, similar to the manner in which Michele Lamont (2000, p. 3) demonstrates how working-class men “dissociate socioeconomic status from moral worth and thereby locate themselves above the upper middle class according to a standard to which they attach overarching importance.” By doing so, Lamont continues, they are able to maintain their dignity.⁹ This line of reasoning suggests that there was no underlying political awareness that suddenly erupted, echoing the intriguing statistical findings with which we had set out. I agree with Lamont’s line of argument: Mizrahim are not demonstrating a nascent political awareness. I do not, however, share the view that such behavior is merely a reaction to inequality. The members of the group resisted the implied connection between the inferior position

of the Mizrahim and the Palestinian citizens of Israel and any political meaning that would have had obvious political implications. Sasson rejected this at the very beginning of the discussion, yet the recognition of the inequality of the Mizrahim was put off until the moment at which they clarified their positions as deserving citizens of the Jewish state.

HOMO AEQUALIS AND THE COLLECTIVE WHOLE

In this chapter we've seen the meaning of temporality in the experience of the Mizrahi rooted subject. Unlike the autonomous individual, according to the logic of the *homo aequalis*, the moral and political meaning of inequality is not viewed as an affront to the individual's autonomy, but rather is derived from the historical context of the collective whole, within which the person is rooted—in this case, the Jewish whole situated in Zionist national time. They view history as a crucial dimension in understanding their position in the hierarchical structure. This was expressed throughout the discussion, especially in the ways the participants wove their personal narratives into the public narrative (Somers, 1994), as part of a process of sense-making of equal opportunity in education at different points in time. For them, the meaning of their relatively inferior position in the hierarchical structure is an integral part of their perception of their position in the story of nation-building, which Gidi described as a natural or organic process, stretching from Israel's early years to its current state of maturity. Thus, their attitude toward phenomena and events in the past, which the critical discourse views as oppressive, were viewed as childhood illnesses and growing pains during the state's early stages of development. The price that the Mizrahim paid along the way was viewed as a necessary evil or even as a part of the group's contribution to—and sacrifice in service of—the building of the Jewish nation.

In the next chapter, I will present the subjects' optimistic view of their role in this project of nation-building and their "naïveté," from the critical point of view, with regard to the significance of certain historical events, through direct confrontation with the critical interpretation of these same events. In other words, I will confront the subjects' interpretation with a more demanding interpretation. However, at the center of this investigation, I will position the subjects' optimistic historical narrative against the pessimism of critical historiography, and I will investigate whether there is any factual basis for their sense of change and the broad horizons they experience. Or perhaps this is an expression of false consciousness, albeit with a more colloquial meaning.

It's Only a Matter of Time

*When the "Subaltern" Embraces
the "History of the Victorious"*

TIME AND TEMPORALITY

The concept of time and temporality is at the center of this chapter. We will see that the dimension of time plays a vital role in the way participants weave personal and public narratives (Somers, 1994) into their telling of past experiences of inequality. We will ask, how does the subjects' sense of history affect their perception of inequality? Do they view inequality as stable, or, alternatively, do they believe it changes? What is the mechanism for social change and how do they experience change? Finally, we will examine whether the subjects' sense of social change over time has any basis in reality. That is, is it supported by independent empirical findings that point to changes in inequality over time?

Critical Approaches and the Meaning of Time

By examining the subjects' notions of time and history, we also re-examine the critical-progressive conception of temporality, which is saturated with pessimism and excessively suspicious of any optimistic reading of history. This gloomy attitude is well known from the sociology of domination and oppression and from dark anthropology and draws nourishment from the assumption that structures of oppression are sustained and reproduced across time.

In the Israeli context, Swirski and Bernstein's (1981) work offers a salient example of an approach that provides a coherent theoretical explanation of how an oppressive structure is replicated across time. Swirski, considered to be one of the founders of critical sociology in Israel, addresses this question in terms of his theory of dependency. He developed this approach in response to theories of modernization and the functional-structural paradigm that dominated Israeli sociology until the

end of the 1970s. In contrast to these earlier approaches, according to which the premodern group (Mizrahim) would join the modernization processes through the narrowing divisions of ethno-class structures in Israel, Swirski views modernization as the source of the problem, not as the solution. Stated briefly, he believes that modernization creates economic and class relationships of dependency between the nations of the third world and the first world, and, within Western nations, between the dominant group and those who are classified as “premodern.” Modern society must invest in the development of “premodern” groups if they are to become participants in society. In Swirski’s view, Mizrahim are a class, and the key to change is the development of a Mizrahi class consciousness that would disrupt the oppressive structures that maintain the dependent relationships across time.

While many of the critical approaches in Israel do not necessarily adopt Swirski’s class-based approach, most share his meta-theoretical assumptions regarding the meaning of time and the conditions necessary to effect social change and develop a Mizrahi political consciousness. In other words, critical discourse, including its post-colonial, multi-cultural and class versions, views inequality as an ongoing injustice that is replicated across time. The imagined change requires subversive activity against the system and the structural mechanisms that perpetuate the oppression, but before they can join the struggle against oppression, Mizrahi victims must be aware of their “true” story and internalize critical thinking.

Revealing Other Stories

This chapter opens with a confrontation between the subjects and the “true” story of the past. As the data unfolds, we see that on the basis of their lived experience, the subjects have come to see time as a positive factor in social change, in contrast to the pessimistic view of history. As we will see, their positive assessment is realistic and supported by independent empirical data.

At this point, however, it is important to make it clear that the purpose of this empirical investigation was not to determine which story is “true” and which is “false.” As Walter Benjamin (1940) reminds us, the past cannot be fully grasped by a single narrative. No narrative can freeze a moment in the flow of time forever, despite the claims of the historical materialists. Out of the infinite number of possible narratives, the most commonly recognized version of history is the progressive development of modernity. In fact, Benjamin claims that among the infinite number of possibilities, the most recognized is the “history of the victorious.” This story conceals other stories, such as those of the defeated, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

In the context of Benjamin’s observation, which epitomizes the current critical discourse, I want to raise a question. For some, this question may be practically heretical: Is it possible for the subaltern to embrace the history of the victorious? I am not referring here to an adoption of the “discourse of the victors” as an

unconscious, self-defeating act or simply as a variation of false consciousness. I want to suggest the possibility that this does not merely conceal the so-called real story about oppression, but reveals another, a story which can be heard only if we open the interpretive space to rooted subjects whose experience of time and history is linked to a greater whole. This is what I attempt to do in this chapter.

The chapter is based on three focus groups. We open with the group of Mizrahi women without a college education, whom I will introduce below. We then return to the Mizrahi men without a college education whom we met in the previous chapter. Finally, we move on to a group of college-educated Mizrahi men.

THE ENCOUNTER

Mizrahi Women without a College Education

This encounter began with a group of mostly middle-aged Mizrahi women without a college education. The group included Hannah, a mid-50s former secretary in an industrial plant, married with three adult children; Ahuva, a retired nurse in her early 70s with two adult children; Leah, a retired blue-collar worker in her late 50s; and Riki, a single 22-year-old, who is about to begin law school.¹ Riki's invitation to join the group was the result of a methodological error that ultimately proved to be most fortunate.

Similar to the men without a college education whom we met in the previous chapter, most of the women did not resent the state or Ashkenazi elite for past inequality. However, unlike the men, the group included a representative of critical discourse, Riki, who confronted the others with her scathing insights regarding the deliberate, institutionalized discrimination against Mizrahim and inequality as an unforgivable injustice.

This session started like the others. Facilitator A, a middle-aged Ashkenazi man with a clearly Ashkenazi name and appearance, opened with a round of introductions.

Facilitator A: I am [gives his name] and I am a professional group facilitator. I'm a consultant to organizations, and I also conduct some research myself. I live in [an upscale suburban area outside of Jerusalem]. I am married. I have a son and a daughter. I have a dog and a cat.

Hannah: Do they get along?

Facilitator A: The dog and the cat, yes. The kids, it depends. That's a whole other story. A boy and a girl, it's pretty noisy there. That's what I know to say about myself right now. Do you want to continue?

Hannah: Sure, why not. My name is Hannah. I live in Hadera [a small city on Israel's coastal plain]. I see that there's someone else from Hadera here, too. I'm married and I have three adult children.

I work as a secretary in a metal factory. That's it, more or less.
 Dogs and cats—that's not our thing.
 (The group members laugh)

The light-hearted introductions continued, but it is worth noting that Hannah had already singled out Facilitator A as belonging to the out-group in relation to the women in the group. In Mizrahi slang, the phrase “cats and dogs” symbolizes wealthy Ashkenazim who allegedly prefer pets to children.² Hannah's remark may therefore have been a hint at her sense of social distinction.

In this atmosphere, Ahuva felt sufficiently comfortable to single out Riki on the basis of the young woman's age and class: “And she [Riki] has a boyfriend in Ramat Aviv,” a typical upper-middle class, predominantly Ashkenazi neighborhood in north Tel Aviv.

Once again, the participants laughed, prompting Facilitator A to comment, “The rumors are flying.” Facilitator A referred the women back to the question regarding Shavit's research, about which they had been asked in the telephone survey. He asked them to come to an agreement about which group, among all children born in the 1950s, was most likely to move on from high school to college. As noted, the respondents were asked to choose their answer from among the following options: Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and women.

Facilitator A: I want to ask you to talk about the question among yourselves. I'll remain an observer throughout the discussion—it's your discussion. Try to reach some agreement. What I mean to say is that the discussion is designed to reach a mutual decision. In ten minutes, I'll ask you to tell me which group had the lowest chances. You can start now.

Leah: I think that it is all the women who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s, every family coming with ten children. [. . .] Women had a very hard time because every woman had a whole bunch of children, and she invested her entire being in her children.

Ahuva: But it's impossible to decide that it was only women or only [another group]. I'm telling you there are three groups: women, Arabs, and Mizrahim.

Leah: On the contrary, I believe that the Arabs . . . [Leah's remarks are cut off.]

Ahuva: Not in the 1950s.

Leah: I believe that they [the Arabs] were more likely to neglect the family; if they had one son, they would give everything so that he could enter the university.

[. . .]

Hannah: Well, I think. . . [She is cut off.]

Ahuva: I think it's Arabs.

Hannah: I think [. . .] it's simply people from economically weaker populations, not necessarily women, and not necessarily Ashkenazim, Arabs, or Mizrahim. I think that whoever came from any population that was more . . . that had a harder time paying or getting to the university, like she [Leah] said, those who had to make a living. I believe it is those people who made it to the university after high school or the army less than others did.

Up to this point, the women's responses were in complete harmony with the men we met in the previous chapter. And like the men, they calmly recognized their relatively inferior position as Mizrahim. Indeed, they made no connection between inequality and the political power structure. Hannah even emphasized this by contending that the economic factor affects Mizrahim, Arabs, and even Ashkenazim equally.

The group of educated Ashkenazi men expressed a similar view without any feelings of guilt (see appendix 1). Their position even accords with the position of the educated Palestinian men (see appendix 1). Until now, their apolitical position had not been sharply challenged from the direction of the critical discourse. Until, that is, Riki began to thicken the plot. She had obviously been exposed to progressive critiques and confronted the women in the group with her version of the bitter historical truth.

Riki: I think history points to a lot of discrimination during the 1960s and 1970s. [. . .] That's exactly the time my parents lived through, and there was really a great deal of discrimination between the Ashkenazim and the Mizrahim, and there was almost no chance for Mizrahim to be admitted to the university.

Hannah: Why? Because they were Mizrahim they were not admitted?

Riki: That's right, they weren't even given a chance to be admitted to the university. I can tell you about my own family, for example, who went to school. So, during those years, there was total discrimination. The Ashkenazim would study, they would go to academic tracks, more prestigious programs, and Mizrahim were sent to be laborers, to vocational studies, to become technicians or bookkeepers, auto mechanics, things like that. That's why I think [it was Mizrahim].

Hannah: The question is whether it was because they were Mizrahim.

Riki: Because they were Mizrahim, it's a fact! Like, I know this from my parents, I know it. That's why there were all those riots by the Black Panthers [a Mizrahi protest group] at the time. That was during the 1970s.

As this first round of discussion concluded, it seemed that the women's group confirmed the two central findings from the men's group. First, the Mizrahi women without a college education recognized their relatively inferior position, at least with regard to the Ashkenazim. Only Hannah disagreed. She tried to sidestep the identity issue by adding Ashkenazim to the list of options, but no one picked up on it. The competing groups were clearly Arabs and Mizrahi women; the participants were aware of women's intersectionality, that they were both Mizrahim and women. Second, the declaration regarding Mizrahi inferiority did not lead to any anger, criticism of the state, or personal discomfort. That is, until Riki pressed her point.

Forcefully, Riki continued to describe a history of injustice and deliberate discrimination. Hannah and Leah attempted to avoid this alternative and continued to stress economic factors as the only determinants of access to higher education. Passionately, Riki continued to promote the causal validity of institutional discrimination and described her personal but second-hand family experience in support of her critical arguments. Hannah continued to disparage her position.

In this atmosphere of growing tension, a new phase of the discussion began.

Leah: They [Mizrahim] didn't study; they didn't have . . .

Riki: That's not true, I know that . . . [she is cut off].

Ahuva: I want to tell you that I immigrated to Israel as part of the Youth Aliyah.³ [We] would deliberately get lower-quality teachers. You could see the differences in the schools. So [Mizrahim] couldn't get admitted [to the university], they didn't have good enough matriculation scores and no motivation.

Riki: No, it's not just because of that. I know this for a fact! I studied at the Boyer High School, which is one of the country's best high schools today. It already existed in the 1970s, and it was made up—we also learned about it in the school—it was made up of a population that was almost purely Ashkenazi. I have a friend whose mother studied at this school. She came from Tripoli and she told me that she and another girl were the only ones in their age group who were Mizrahi. They wouldn't admit Mizrahim to the school. They would reject them at the entrance exam stage.

Ahuva: Look at what's happening with the Ethiopians in Petah Tikva.

Riki: So, no one would say [that because they were] Mizrahim they wouldn't admit them. But it was a fact! [. . .] Otherwise, my mother's friends at the time, who were excellent students [would have been admitted]. My mother didn't even want to try. [. . .] She said, [she] wouldn't try something where they would fail [her]. But my mother's friends tried to get admitted to private

schools, and they wouldn't get admitted. They had excellent matriculation diplomas, but they weren't admitted to any high school. So I'm sure that they wouldn't have had any chance at the universities. Educational institutions refused to admit them at the time. At that time, educational institutions deliberately made that population fail.

The other participants continued to dismiss Riki's position.

Leah: That's not true. I disagree with you, Riki. . . . I'm saying that families at that time were very large. A mother couldn't provide an education to all her children so that they could reach the university. Anyone who managed to get to the university had to have had the best grades and be the right type to be accepted.

Hannah: So, in the end it's all about money.

Leah: But these [poor Mizrahi] families didn't have the possibility to give them . . . [their children] an education.

Ahuva: Lots of Mizrahim used to live in the periphery, such as faraway *moshavim*;⁴ how could they think about the university? What kinds of teachers went to teach there? What was the level?

Leah: On the other hand, the Ashkenazim then had only two children, "two kids and a dog" they used to say. So they could invest more in their children and give them more opportunities to go and study.

Riki: I think that it's a combination of both things.

Leah: But it's not because they didn't get admitted, it's because they didn't have the means.

The group rejected Riki's reasoning. Leah offered an economic explanation, while Ahuva offered a structural-geographic explanation. Ahuva's story was supported by personal experience, but Hannah's arguments were accepted. The overall tone remained apolitical, although one could detect some traces of political consciousness, especially in Ahuva's remark about the Ethiopians in the present, which echoed Riki's story about past discrimination against Mizrahim. This enabled Ahuva to distance this narrative from her own personal experience. But Riki would not give up, and she used every device in her critical arsenal to reinforce her argument.

Riki: So I think that it's also that they didn't get admitted, and there are facts that confirm it! The fact is that an entire population was embittered. So, I think that, first, it's also because of that. And second, it's also because they really did have an economic problem that prevented them from even thinking about it.

Ahuva: They didn't have tutoring; people didn't have the opportunity to earn a high school matriculation diploma; there's nothing more to say.

Leah: Take me for example. I finished elementary school, and all my brothers worked to put food on the table. When I was twelve, I would get up and go to work picking apples, and I made up my mind to save all the money, and then I went and registered for high school because I knew that my parents couldn't give this to me. I went and bought books and went to school, and I wasn't even registered. And my teacher, it was the principal [actually], asked me how come [I] had arrived without registering or anything. I said I have everything, I just didn't know you had to register. He let me in, and I studied. I made [this opportunity] myself.

Facilitator A: I want to ask whether you're approaching agreement? [. . .] Which group had the lowest chances?

Leah: No, the decision here is maybe not women; maybe more likely the Mizrahim had it harder.

Ahuva: Women are part of the Mizrahim, included. It's simply about narrowing it down to the women. Because look, if we're talking about the economic aspect, like you said, we're twelve children, my father was the only breadwinner, and we have brothers and sisters. One is a psychologist, I'm a nurse, one is a pilot,⁵ you wouldn't believe me, but it's true.

Hannah: Why shouldn't we believe you?

Ahuva: No, because they were smart-like, and when they were given the opportunity, they jumped ahead. But this business of money and awareness and where you lived [. . .] If you lived in Jerusalem, you certainly heard about schools and stuff, and it made you want to study. But if you lived in the sticks [like the] Mizrahi immigrant, you didn't really stand a chance.

Facilitator A: Who doesn't agree that the group with the least chances are the Mizrahim?

Hannah: Me.

Facilitator A: What do you think?

Hannah: I think that it's a matter of economic strength. [. . .] It just turned out that at that time, there were more Mizrahim who had it harder economically because those who were from Ashkenazi ethnic groups, most of them received reparations from Germany, so they had a bit more money. They were also in

Israel for a longer time, so, of course, they were better placed. And this created a certain situation, but I think it doesn't matter if somebody comes from the East or West or anything, it matters in that specific context, it's economic and it also depends on the person's ambition. I believe that a person who wants something can achieve almost—I wouldn't say everything—but almost everything. It depends on your willpower and how much you're ready to invest.

It was hard for me to avoid the impression that the three older women without a college education, especially Leah and Ahuva, were making conscious efforts to perpetuate and reinforce personal and familial “success stories.” I could not avoid reading these “idealization” strategies, in Erving Goffman's (1959) terms, as part of their attempt at impression management.

Leah told the story of who she is:⁶ an individual who chose to take her fate into her own hands despite economic constraints. Hers wasn't a story about the system's or the state's wrongdoing, nor about any evil done to her. Even more poignantly, when we shifted the temporality of the narrative from the little girl in the past to the adult in the present—a working-class, middle-aged woman sitting in a focus group of working-class women without a college education—the dissonance between her “success story” and her current situation was glaring.

Unlike the men we met in the previous chapter, these women were directly confronted by a determined critical voice. Yet like the men, not one of them expressed frustration or condemnation of the state, the Zionist ideology of the Jewish melting pot, or Ashkenazi hegemony. The participants did not try to explain why they were uneducated, nor did they recognize themselves as a group in either ethnic or class terms.

In fact, Leah used her personal story to counter Riki's story. While Riki talked about outstanding Mizrahi women students who were rejected by an elite school, Leah spoke about herself as a poor Mizrahi student who convinced a school principal to accept her despite the regulations. Riki's explanation clashed with Leah's personal narrative. It seemed that Leah accepted her “victimhood” as a natural result of her life circumstances, and she strictly avoided any recognition of the demeaning possibility that she had been a victim of institutional discrimination in the Jewish state, in the land where she sees herself as belonging (Mizrachi and Herzog, 2012).

At this point, Facilitator A tried to summarize the discussion.

Facilitator A: I think we've reached some agreement on this point. I want to see if there's also agreement on the next one. It seems that you agree that, in effect, those who had to confront the most difficulties, and were thus most disadvantaged, were the

Mizrahim because of the situation they found themselves in as penniless new immigrants.

Ahuva: Yes, that's right.

Facilitator A: And you want to add, and Ahuva wants to add . . .

But Riki interrupted and repeated her argument even more passionately.

Riki: Because they were discriminated against!

Facilitator A: Because there was discrimination.

Riki: They were faced with discrimination! It's a fact, a historical fact. It's not something we assume!

Leah: Those are two different things.

Riki: No, I say that it is both lack of ability and discrimination.

For the first time, Ahuva raised doubts about her own professed beliefs.

Ahuva: Look, I'm married to an Ashkenazi, from Romania, and I don't buy into the whole Ashkenazi thing; it bothers me. Because my kids know nothing about this business, but nevertheless I know that historically, Ben Gurion⁷ himself said that he was bringing in the Mizrahim to be laborers. [. . .] Are you familiar with this comment? That he brought them in to serve as . . .

Ahuva's doubts encouraged Riki to restate her argument even more forcefully.

Riki: But it's a historical fact! It's not just an opinion!

In Gieryn's (1999) terms, Riki was engaging in boundary work. According to Gieryn, boundary entails "the discursive attribution of selected qualities to scientists, scientific methods, and scientific claims for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative residual non-science" (p. 4-5). This enabled her to add a measure of authority, by "teaching" the others to separate "facts" from "opinions." And at that point, it seemed as if Ahuva had "learned" her lesson:

Ahuva: Yes, I say it's history, I didn't make it up.

Riki: Nor did I! I think that today, what you said regarding the possibility that every person can eventually make it, is true for today. It wasn't true for Israel of the 1970s, it really wasn't true.

Ahuva: So true!

Riki: It's inaccurate to say such a thing, because it's a historical fact that discrimination existed. It's not that it's somebody's opinion, it's not my opinion, it's a historical fact. There was discrimination and the reason that they didn't get admitted to the university also involved. . . . [cut off]

They reached a turning point when Ahuva began to move toward Riki's views (see her reference to manual laborers, above) but not before she "cleared" herself of any accusation of partisanship or hatred of Ashkenazim.

Facilitator A then reflected on the participants' process.

Facilitator A: What type of discrimination? That is, we've reached agreement here that we're not talking about something that differentiates between people in terms of ability, but that there are differences in the opportunities available to them. Now, I also get the impression that you are also saying that there was, in effect, systematic discrimination, that there was someone who did the discriminating.

Ahuva: I hope that it wasn't deliberate. Maybe history will teach us. I hope that it wasn't deliberate. I'm deluding myself a bit.

It was an unsettling moment. For the first time, Ahuva reflected on her emerging uncertainty and feelings of self-deception.

Facilitator A: So, I want to clarify [this point] because I hear from you that you identify [. . .]

Riki: I think that it was deliberate!

Facilitator A: What do you mean by "deliberate"?

Riki: That it was deliberate, like you said; it's not just a historical fact that the Ashkenazim were the group longer-established in Israel, that they arrived here long before the Mizrahim, and that their reception of the Mizrahim wasn't very welcoming.

Hannah: People from another place, with a different culture.

Hannah was trying to put out the flames of an emerging sense of injustice.

Riki: True, there were lots of reasons.

Hannah: That's natural.

But Riki refused to retreat.

Riki: I don't think there's any reason to justify it.

Ahuva: Who says that Mizrahi culture is inferior to Ashkenazi culture?

Hannah: The Mizrahim also didn't receive the Ashkenazim very nicely. They laughed at them.

Hannah tried to equalize the relationship between the two ethnic groups by raising the possibility of a role switch between the stigmatized and the stigmatizer. Riki did not allow it.

Riki: They [the Mizrahim] weren't in any situation to welcome them. They didn't get anything. The ones who got things were the Ashkenazim, because they controlled the establishment.

Hannah: True, true.

Riki: I saw a play about. . . . I forgot its name, at Tel Aviv's Cameri Theater, a play [. . .] that shows how the Ashkenazim were in control, both of the government and of the educational institutions.

Ahuva: Until 1977⁸ everything was on a partisan basis.

Riki: They're the ones who wanted [. . .]

Hannah: It was in their hands.

Riki: Exactly, they wanted the Ashkenazim to maintain [control], they also show that in the play.

Ahuva: And today it isn't [so]?!

Leah: Today as well.

Everyone began to talk at the same time; the conversation was bubbling with energy. While Riki zealously continued to push her argument, the other women also responded heatedly, as if protecting something close to their hearts. In what may seem to have been a revealing moment, Ahuva said, "I hope it wasn't deliberate." She then candidly shared her inner reasoning, driven by her wishful memories about "what really happened." Riki "authorized" her critical narrative with additional forceful boundary work (Gieryn, 1995). She thrust "history" at the rest of the group while seeking to draw a clear line between their "personal opinions" about "what happened" and her "authoritative" academic knowledge, based on "historical facts."

In this way, Riki managed to steer Ahuva in her own direction. "History" had now become the authoritative source of truth. This led Ahuva to state a new position—"Maybe history will teach us"—but her words were full of uncertainty.

Ahuva continued to talk about her growing concerns: "I hope that it wasn't deliberate," she commented. Her drawn-out submission to Riki's narrative appeared to be more of an inevitable surrender than a joyous embrace of liberation, yet Riki persisted. And then, a moment of confession arrived: "I'm deluding myself a bit," she admitted, which could be easily read as the beginning of the long process of consciousness raising.⁹ Yet her confession seemed to unsettle Hannah and Leah, who attempted to force the genie back into the bottle. Hannah's strategy was to neutralize what appeared to be the inevitable historical conclusion by returning to her cultural and evolutionary explanations—"different culture" and "natural process." Leah took a different tack, seeking to equalize Mizrahi-Ashkenazi relations by applying reverse discrimination.¹⁰

We now go back to the turning point in the discussion—the move from the past to the present. Following a pause, the facilitator continued.

Facilitator A: I really want to ask you about nowadays.

Riki: I think it's less so today.

Facilitator A: Let's talk about the present; your generation, Riki's generation. Is what we've said here, that discrimination is directed primarily against the Mizrahim, still true?

Riki: No.

Ahuva: Not today.

Riki: Definitely not.

Ahuva: Today, it's economic power and intelligence. The ability to study, I hope it's not true today.

Riki: It isn't today.

Leah: Because there are, I think, a lot of Arabs in the universities, more than Jews, I think there is [discrimination].

Riki: I think that there's no discrimination today [in general]. There certainly is in some places, but just as it's directed toward Mizrahim, it's also directed toward Ashkenazim. It's two-way discrimination. There will always be [some] discrimination. It's not something that can ever disappear.

Hannah: Maybe in another two generations.

Riki: Exactly, in a few generations, when everyone will be mixed [together] already, and someone's kid will be 1/16 Romanian. That's when it'll change.

As they moved from the past to the present, the unanimity of opinion was surprising. Even Riki's position shifted dramatically. In response to the question "Is it still true?" and to Ahuva's declaration "Not today," Riki's views gradually but decisively moved from "I think it's less so today" to "No" and then "Definitely not."

It is unclear if Riki's optimistic and acquiescent position with regard to the present condition of Mizrahim stems from an only partial exposure to critical discourse or from her life experiences as a young, successful Mizrahi woman. In any case, Riki's critical-progressive agenda would come to the fore again, with regard to other minority groups.

Facilitator A responded to her change in attitude.

Facilitator A: I want to check it out. What you have described is based on your parents' story, reading of the literature, personal memory. You say we were in a situation where the Ashkenazim actually controlled the state's institutions.

Ahuva: That's [still] true today.

Facilitator A: They had the power and they used their power against us and, by the way, you said something, Ahuva, that may have been overlooked, that it was directed above all against the Mizrahim, but of all the Mizrahim, it hurt women the most.

Ahuva: That's right, it's always us [the women. But] not me, in my particular case not me. I can hurt men; they can't hurt me. But what is true, and obvious, is that a woman is in the house, raising the children and all that, and gives up a little so that the husband can study, or something like that.

Facilitator A nurtured a sense of groupness by using the collective term "us," a rhetorical reference that none of the other participants had yet employed. However, the meaning of "us" did not stay within the boundaries of Mizrahi identity; it shifted to the broader notion of gender identity. Ahuva felt that it was incumbent upon her to quickly withdraw herself from both disadvantaged groups (Mizrahim and women).

Facilitator A: Is it really true that things have changed today in the sense that Ashkenazim don't control [everything] and [that they don't] use their power against the Mizrahim?

Leah: There is some change but it's not 100 percent.

Hannah: We could say that the Mizrahim are in control and have taken over government institutions and made it difficult for Ashkenazim. Now it's mixed. Today, you could say that because we intermarried, my kids are already half this and a quarter that—it's the same for her kids—then it can't be [like it was] anymore.

Leah: Today you also have the Mizrahim who were really Mizrahim when they immigrated, and their children grew up and became more Israeli and maybe a bit more Ashkenazi and got mixed.

Ahuva: They're Israelis for all intents and purposes.

Leah: I think that it's not felt that much.

Facilitator A: Is that the feeling, yes?

Riki: I think that [. . .] if you asked that question today, the population that suffers today are the minority groups. It's Arabs, Ethiopians, Russians, new immigrants.

Riki's references to other minority groups, those who are truly discriminated against in current circumstances, may reflect an adherence to liberal justice and the politics of universalism. Although Riki did not hesitate to criticize the state about its institutional discrimination against Mizrahim in the previous round, at this point she broadened her gaze to include other minority groups, placing Mizrahim in the position of a majority group. In both rounds, her political stance seemed to remain rooted in the liberal grammar of social equality and distributive justice.

Hannah: It's not just a question of minorities. It's what I said before about the old-timers and newcomers.

Riki: That's right.

Hannah: Every time there was a new wave of immigration, they were the weak ones.

Riki: That's right.

Hannah: So the Ashkenazim came first, then the Mizrahi ethnic groups arrived, from Yemen, Morocco, so they were the weak; after them came the Russians. But whoever came [first] is simply stronger.

The meaning of discrimination is viewed as an integral part of the story of the nation building. Before and after the establishment of the state, waves of immigrants, each with its own character and ethnic make-up, came to settle the land. From a critical point of view, the tale of immigration depoliticizes discrimination because it obscures the hegemony of one group, the Ashkenazim, who dominated and oppressed the others. Yet the experiences of each new wave have become a cherished part of Israeli folklore, viewed not with rancor or disdain, but with humor and appreciation. As Hannah observed, "whoever came [first] is simply stronger." From a critical point of view, this is a story of domination and hegemony. But in the eyes of our subjects, the story of immigration is actually one of equalization. This is their folk narration of Zionist time.

Riki insisted on revisiting race and ethnicity, but this time from the opposite perspective. As a well-educated, successful Mizrahi woman, she views oppression against Mizrahim as an issue in the past and observes others in her position as members of the majority. From her progressive perspective, she pointed to other minority groups—Arabs, Russians and Ethiopians—who are now suffering from discrimination and exclusion.

Leah: There's a difference between the Ethiopians and the Russians.

Ahuva: What government benefits do these get and what benefits do those get?

Leah: They're below them, the Ethiopians compared to the Russians.

Hannah: Because they came from someplace else.

Riki: But she's right.

Leah: They [the Russians] have a much higher culture, so they were admitted everywhere; it's not like that with the Ethiopians.

Facilitator A: What does that mean?

[. . .]

Hannah: OK. No, excuse me, [I mean] the second major wave of immigration from Russia [in the 1990s]. I remember people who were

doctors and highly educated sweeping the streets in all sorts of places. I mean, they were Ashkenazim and didn't shy away from working in any kind of job until they got settled. They deserve all of our respect!

In the process of sense-making, the participants inconsistently applied the various scripts available in their cultural tool kit (see Mizrahi et al., 2007; Swidler, 1986, 2003). Riki, who vehemently rejected the evolutionary melting pot script in the previous round, now embraced it. The previously mentioned institutional discrimination toward the Mizrahim in the early days of the state re-emerged in connection with the different treatment received by the Russians and the Ethiopians. However, the Russians' cultural capital appeared in some sense to justify their privileged position vis-à-vis the Ethiopians. Such a cultural distinction echoes with the logic used to justify the ethnic inequality (between Mizrahim and Ashkenazi) observed during Israel's early years. Hannah's attribution of deservingness to the Russians was reinforced by what she sees as their willingness to accept employment as manual laborers. Their lack of defiance against the state despite such injustices magnified the esteem in which Hannah held them.

This session evolved through two dramatic stages. The first stage was marked by the tension created by Riki's critical discourse, which focused on state discrimination during the first three decades in Israel's history. Riki's boundary work was successful, and she at least temporarily managed to sway the other group members. However, what might have been expected to be a lively drama of consciousness raising ended in "inevitable surrender" rather than an outburst of liberation.

Mizrahi Men without a College Education

We now shift back to the Mizrahi men without a college education whom we met in the previous chapter. The division between past and present we found among the group of Mizrahi working women without a college education re-emerged in this group. We will therefore turn to the next issue that was explored during the session: knowledge about factors determining students' success in school. To reiterate, this issue was raised following the discussion about the chances for members of the different groups to gain access to academic studies.

The motif of temporality first emerged here when Facilitator B provoked the group to face what he found to be a contradiction between their use of socioeconomic factors in the explanation of Mizrahi-Ashkenazi inequality and their embrace of a meritocratic approach (primarily motivation) when explaining student success. In other words, Facilitator B was wondering how group members could recognize structural inequality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim and simultaneously believe that the only factors determining student success were individual—motivation and intelligence—and which might lead to the conclusion that the

Mizrahim were inherently inferior. As will become clear, the implications of this conclusion for their sense of self-worth were, indeed, lurking in the background, and time continued to be the crucial factor in their process of sense-making.

Facilitator B: I have a question. [. . .] Something doesn't quite make sense to me. In the last question you said that the Mizrahim had the least chances to be admitted to a university—why? Because they didn't have the means? That's what you said. [. . .] Now we're asking what [. . .] determines success, and suddenly the determining factor is personal motivation.

[. . .]

Haim: But we've changed the times . . .

Facilitator B: So what do you say about it?

Haim: Back then, the 1970s, that is, the kids who were already headed for the university in the 1970s. [. . .] The economic situation was important then.

Facilitator B: And it isn't today?

Haim: It's less today; today things look different.

Facilitator B: Please explain what you mean by different. Why is it so today?

Haim: Back then, the gap was very wide; the first concern back then was food.

Facilitator B: The gap between what and what was wide?

Haim: People cared above all about having food in the house; no one cared about education. They worried that there would be food at home. Parents saw food and the kids saw that their parents saw food; that was what interested them. I grew up in the same period, so I remember it; it suits me fine.

Yehezkel: Kids from Ashkenazi homes, their parents pushed them to go to after-school enrichment classes.

Haim: There were more extracurricular activities [that Ashkenazim could afford to pay for privately]. At that time, Mizrahi families had lots of kids while the Ashkenazim, after the troubles of World War II, had one or two. In any case, there were no dogs. Back then, I grew up in their [Ashkenazi] backyards; I had friends [they were my friends], I studied with them. [. . .]

Sasson: They also raised dogs.

Sasson and Haim's references to pets continued to serve as a symbolic marker, distinguishing between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in terms of family size, class and culture.

Facilitator B: The gap was wider than today?

Haim: Certainly, yes. In the family's economic situation; in every household, there was a wide gap between Ashkenazim and Sephardim.

Facilitator B: Wider than today?

Haim: I'm talking about then. If we go forward to the present, to these years, the economic gap, even if it didn't narrow—it did narrow at least with respect to the Sephardim's¹¹ demands [in terms of standards of living], or those of each child. First of all, the number of kids in each household is pretty similar, on average. The Sephardim and the Ashkenazim are very similar on average, two or three, so that this gap has already narrowed. The economic situation [. . .] at least for the generation growing up today, that today is in its twenties, they're very equal. In terms of learning ability, I think that everyone is treated equally [i.e., they're equally capable]; they're all capable of doing it [going to college]. A little bit of encouragement from their parents—I see no problem with the parents being uneducated. I think I don't because I see, again, that the parents don't have to be university professors in order to push their kids to study. Every parent can do it. But on the other hand, today's kids want to compare themselves. First of all, they see the environment, they live the situation. It really isn't so much about Ashkenazim or Sephardim today, in this generation.

Facilitator A: What's important to the kids, then?

Haim: They're very similar, they want to copy one another and don't really look at each other [in terms of ethnic origin].

Facilitator A: They want to be socially equal.

Haim: They want to be equal, and [they're] quite equal. In the past, they would look [around] more. How did someone [an Ashkenazi woman] we worked with once say? They [her parents] told her: 'If you marry him, that *Frenk* [derogatory term for Mizrahi], you're not part of the family, and you won't set foot in our house.' She said: 'I married him and didn't set foot in the house.' There was a rift, no more family.

Haim's sociological observations can be summed up as follows. First, time has brought about the narrowing of economic gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. Second, the force of stigma has weakened. Third, as a result, mixed marriages are more common and demographic gaps have narrowed. Finally, the younger generations are more likely to share a common identity (as Israelis rather than Ashkenazim or Mizrahim) because they share similar educational

backgrounds, residential locations, and social environments. Haim had no problem discussing the gaps that existed in the past but did not think they were still relevant.

Haim then added the dimension of intergenerational shifts in Mizrahi lived experience to the overall social transformation mentioned above.

Haim: I think there's one more thing. The second and third generation, these youngsters, my children are already less [so]. They grew up with the same mentality, they were born in the same country, they breathed the same air in the same school. They're more integrated. I feel it every day.

His comment implied a rift between Haim's lived experience and that of his children, a function of both time and place of birth. Haim belongs to the first, foreign-born generation, and his children to the second, native-born generation. Haim views himself as having experienced the initial phase of inequality, but his children, as native-born Israelis, live in a different world.

Facilitator A asked if this difference bred any identity conflict or distance between the generations.

Facilitator A: But what you say makes you a foreigner. It's as if our kids have become Israelis. So, if I'm not an Israeli from birth, then there's distance between me and my kids. Isn't that what you actually mean?

Haim: There's no distance between me and my kids—my generation and the kids' generation. The children live [their own lives], they don't experience it [ethnic inequality]. I don't feel there's anything like that with my kids. I recognize it [that inequality] because I come from a different place. I go forward together with them. They started out in this situation. I have a past. From where they started out, they started out with others.

Haim experiences the flow of time as a cross-generational continuum. He feels part of the present through his children's experiences, and he bears no resentment toward the past.

Facilitator A: It's too good to be true.

Haim: Not that there isn't any [. . .]

Facilitator A: There's still discrimination.

Haim: It's fuzzier, more low key. It's not so extreme.

Haim's experience of injustice did not progress from past to present; rather, it lessened with the flow of life, diluting within the Israeli Jewish melting pot. He refused to look backward. His sense of progress continued to reverberate in the

comments made by the Mizrahi males with a college education who formed the next group that we will discuss.

Mizrahi Men with a College Education

While Haim, a Mizrahi man without a college education, described the changes from past to present by means of his children's experiences, Amos, a member of the Mizrahi middle class with a college education, in his 60s, described the same changes in terms of his own personal history as one of the few Mizrahim to attend university in the 1970s. A religiously observant father of six, Amos is a professional accountant and chair of an NGO dedicated to the rehabilitation of former prisoners. He immigrated to Israel from Morocco by way of France at 18 years of age.

Amos: I think that in the 1950s it's more . . . we're talking about those born in the 1950s, studying in the early 1970s. I tend more toward [survey response four] because back then, the Mizrahim, even if they had the same level of knowledge and were just as motivated to advance and so forth, they were discriminated against. [. . .] The 1970s was exactly the period when I went to university. [. . .] Perhaps this was the time when the surge of Mizrahi students began. Especially among the people I knew who, like me, came from abroad. It could be that I'm a little biased, but I wouldn't be too wrong if I said that I . . . [the way I see it is response no.] 4. [. . .]

Facilitator B: So how would the discrimination against the Mizrahim [. . .] work?

Amos: I believe that it was quite straightforward. You see the origin of [. . .] where the person was born. [. . .] If you're talking about someone with the same qualifications, as in the case of women [vs. men] and Ashkenazim [vs. Mizrahim], I think the person would have been discriminated against and someone else would be selected in those years. Everything's different today.

Facilitator B: Like they'd say, this is "Schwartz" and the other [name] does not sound so good?

Amos: [. . .] Had it been Ilouz [a Mizrahi/North African name] they'd have preferred Schwartz. There were also jokes there they would say, if you want to Hebraize your name, you have to do it twice so that there would be no paper trace of the previous name either. [Bureaucrats] check your previous name and if you also wrote it down they'd identify your ethnic origin. [. . .]

Amos: [. . .] First of all, like I explained [. . .] this issue has disappeared. [. . .] What I mean to say is that the drive, the desire

to study and integrate better, to go on to higher education, it exists today. Afterward, I think there are no more Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, that is if we're talking about the last fifteen years, I have no doubt that it is becoming totally blurred.

Facilitator A: Because of [inter]marriage?

Amos: No, not just marriage, it's also marriage, it's also intermarriage, that we don't know already—there are several generations where it's already the second or third generation of intermarriage. But I think, you no longer have what I always called discrimination. The discrimination that existed during all those years, after the establishment of the state, that historically everyone has admitted that discrimination did exist. I believe that [. . .] this kind of discrimination has stopped.

Facilitator A: But wait a minute. This recent change is the outcome of the fact that the Ashkenazim have put an end to systematic discrimination or of the fact that the Mizrahim . . .

Amos: Both—the two trends in the same direction. That is, two trends that push Mizrahi progress [forward]. One trend is that they want to start studying as well as the awareness among all sectors in the population that you have to study and, also [. . .] that the Ashkenazim, or you might say the establishment, want what the state authorities have already realized that you can also do something with the Mizrahim, you can promote [them]. Now we are left with the Arabs, perhaps.
[. . .]

Facilitator A: What is the reason that the Arabs are not joining

Amos: I think it is also getting less clear there, too.

Facilitator A: There too?

Amos: They are going out more and more. I have no doubt that the Arabs existed twenty years ago, but I never saw them on the streets. We didn't see them on the streets, we didn't see them in the malls, we didn't see them at the movies or the municipal cultural centers. Today, they are going out, they feel more secure, they know that we don't hate them and want to give them their full rights, and so forth. And they get support from all the elites and the left [. . .] and even the right-wingers give their approval to the Arabs. And so it's becoming less clear.

Amos views the changes in terms of both culture and historical institutional discrimination. The absolute divide between past and present came up once again, and injustice was relegated to the past. He described a sense of a natural melding of

various groups into one nation; westernization of the Mizrahim; and the cessation of institutional discrimination against minorities in general, including the Arabs.

Thus far, we have seen the salience of a very strong belief in progress, shared by all the Mizrahi groups. From a critical stance, this observation may reflect the naiveté of the politically unconscious Mizrahi victim, detached empirical reality. But does their indomitable optimism, at least with regard to the Mizrahim, have any basis in reality?

The passage of time appeared to be the participants' remedy for any sense of past injustice. The sarcastic comment made by Facilitator B reflects a skeptical view—it's "too good to be true"—and appeared aimed at amplifying the muted voices of the oppressed. And yet these voices remained unheard. Even more blatant was the participants' lack of defiance against any sense of injustice, even in the present, which was met with acceptance or even indifference. Nadav is the father of three children, lives in a *moshav* near Jerusalem, and works in Tel Aviv as a construction engineer.

Nadav: I agree with him. Today you see, at the bottom line, you see who graduates today. Mizrahim and Ashkenazim it's no longer . . .

Facilitator A then attempted to summarize the preceding arguments regarding the decline of institutional discrimination and the Mizrahi adoption of Ashkenazi views of education as a core value. Nadav continued.

Nadav: It wasn't something official but, you know, our jokes [in Israel] are [all] about Kurds, Moroccans—today it's Russians and Ethiopians, the Mizrahim of the 2000s. But I think that discrimination no longer exists at all, and I don't think there is any, and you also don't see it in numerical terms, in my opinion. Maybe I'm wrong, I'm no expert in statistics.

THE ROOTED MEANING OF TIME

Nadav's account sounded a bit glib, as if he hadn't thought about the topic very much, and his offhanded tone added to the impression that the question at hand was of little concern to him. He seemed to reduce the issue to "statistics," a reference to professional expertise.

Warranted Optimism

Nevertheless, Nadav's impressions of reality do line up with statistics presented by experts. According to a report issued by the Adva Center for Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel (Swirski et al., 2014), Israeli Mizrahim constituted the group with the greatest household upward mobility during the period between 1990 and 2010. The most prominent change observed was a doubling of

the number of Mizrahi households that entered the upper income deciles. This rate of change greatly exceeded that observed among immigrants from the former Soviet Union or Arabs, indicating a narrowing of the gap between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in absolute terms. For instance, Adva found that the presence of Mizrahim in the top income level among suppliers of services not requiring academic education rose dramatically between 1992 (20.8 percent) and 2010 (30.6 percent), whereas the presence of Ashkenazim in the same income group in the same sector declined between 1990 (48.1 percent) and 2010 (37.2 percent). During the period between 1992 and 2010, the rate of second-generation Mizrahim who hold academic degrees and belong to the upper classes rose from 51.0 percent to 67.1 percent, an increase of 31 percent. In contrast, a moderate decline was observed among second-generation Ashkenazim,¹² from 74 percent in 1992 to 70.2 percent in 2010.¹³

These data are striking. As noted, the Adva Center was founded and is still directed by Swirski, who is often considered the “father” of Israel’s critical sociology, attesting to the rigorous and unbiased methods of data collection. Nonetheless, these findings did not bring Swirski to any reconsideration of his general theoretical framework regarding temporality and social change.

The rate of change indicates a narrowing of the gap between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in absolute terms. Likewise, Yinon Cohen et al. (2021, p. 2) report that “ethnic gaps in rates of obtaining an academic degree are smaller among younger birth cohorts, suggesting that the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi gap may have narrowed over time” (see also Ayalon and Yogev, 2006; Feniger et al., 2015).

The strong belief in “progress” held by the Mizrahi men with a college education seems to echo Cohen and Leon’s (2008) study indicating a constant movement of Mizrahim from the working class into the middle class. They identify two dimensions of this process, the geographic and the educational, and contend that the binary division between Mizrahim, residing in lower-income neighborhoods or development towns, and Ashkenazim, residing in better-off kibbutzim and central cities, has faded away. Well-assimilated Mizrahim have moved into mixed, class-oriented new and established suburbs, cities, and neighborhoods, where they refrain from any distinct ethnic identification. Although they find that Mizrahim are still underrepresented in the universities, they find a leap in the overall percentage of Mizrahi academics thanks to the establishment of numerous colleges, whose degree-granting programs compete with those of the universities.¹⁴

The Rooted Mizrahi Subject and the Open Horizon

According to Cohen and Leon (2008), these positive trends reinforce the Mizrahi sense of a “status horizon” that many critical researchers overlook. The authors go on to state that the formation of the Mizrahi middle class plays a significant role in bridging social cleavages and promoting cohesion within Jewish Israeli society. In sum, unlike the pessimistic predictions made by the critical-progressive

approach, the Mizrahi sense of harmonious progress is not a form of denial and resonates with Adva's statistical findings.

Furthermore, in contrast to the critical view of Mizrahim as a discriminated minority, subject to an oppressive structure that is reproduced over time, the subjects do not view the structures of inequality as a stable, intergenerational reality, but rather as a temporary and changing situation. The positive change in their own personal and intergenerational experiences is inextricably connected to the development of the state and Israeli society, and they feel themselves to be part of the Israeli Jewish whole within which they are rooted. They are actively and fully connected to the state, and they experience their lives as an open horizon. As we have seen, their positive stance is not detached from reality, as confirmed by independent studies of social stratification.

In the next chapter, we will continue to challenge the Mizrahi subjects' optimistic position as well as their unconditional loyalty to the state and support for the political right. Furthermore, we will confront these rooted Mizrahi subjects with their inferior position even within the camp of the political right that they hold so dear. We will examine the meaning that they attach to the politics of recognition and representation in light of their underrepresentation in their own camp.

“It Doesn’t Matter Who the Majority Is”

Representation, Recognition, and Rootedness

We concluded the previous chapter on an optimistic note. The Mizrahim described improvement in their situation over time, and independent empirical data showed that their optimism was justified.

WHAT IS THE SALIENT QUESTION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Dimensions of Analysis

This data was largely based on measures of distributive justice that showed that the gaps between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in terms of income and education were diminishing and that the Mizrahi middle class was growing (U. Cohen et al., 2011; U. Cohen and Leon, 2008). However, distributive justice is just one of the overarching moral categories intrinsic to liberal thought; the politics of recognition is another (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).¹ To these two categories, Fraser (2008) has added a third dimension that is closely related to the other two but had been missing from analysis. She refers to this as the dimension of representation. Fraser argues that distributive justice and the politics of recognition are bounded in state categories and are therefore not adequate in and of themselves in the current post-Keynesian-Westphalian reality of global markets and flows of immigration. While distribution and recognition belong to the economic and cultural realms, respectively, the dimension of representation, she suggests, belongs to the political realm. From this new transnational political perspective, the salient question for social justice is not whether citizens receive their share

of distribution and recognition but rather who deserves to be included in the relevant political community.

Representation, Recognition, and Polity

In this chapter, I focus on issues of representation in the Mizrahi context. But in this case, representation does not precisely align with Fraser's observations and definitions. This is because there is no doubt that Mizrahim are members of the Jewish polity or that they fully belong to the Jewish political community. Rather, questions of representation within the echelons of political leadership are at stake here, from which issues of representation and recognition appear to be, as I will demonstrate, inextricable.² Since their membership in the political community is guaranteed, their underrepresentation within that community is closely related to what Michele Lamont (2018) refers to as the "recognition gap," which she defines as "disparities in worth and cultural membership between groups in a society" (p. 421–22). This is even more salient when the Mizrahi subjects are challenged to confront the reality of their underrepresentation and misrecognition in the central institutions of the right-wing camp, which they fervently support.³

In fact, as I noted in the introduction, critical approaches have suggested that Mizrahim reject the left and support the right because the left has failed to reach out to them and/or has acted hypocritically toward them. Underlying this analysis is the covert (and occasionally overt) assumption that "had the Mizrahim, like other groups rejecting the liberal discourse, been fully and fairly accepted as equal members within the liberal camp, they would have readily joined its ranks and identified with its messages" (Mizrachi, 2016b).

Loyalty in the Face of Underrepresentation

Yet empirical data show that Mizrahim are underrepresented in the right-wing political parties that they support. We confronted the Mizrahi informants with this presumably upsetting reality and once again put the emancipatory power of critical sociology to the test with our informants—time under conditions favorable for consciousness-raising.

When they saw the data, we wondered, would the Mizrahi subjects at least begin to question their loyalty to the "false" ethno-national ideology, as the critical-progressive discourse would predict? Does exposure to data showing underrepresentation on the right have the power to disrupt the bond between the rooted Mizrahi subject and the "Jewish whole" in which they are embedded? Would we see signs that they were taking on a distinct Mizrahi identity? Could awareness of marginalization in the right-wing camp lead to an affinity with other minorities—for example, Palestinians?

Or instead, would viewing underrepresentation through the lens of rootedness teach us something new? And would this once again enable us to identify the limits and the conditions of possibility of liberal-progressive notions of representation and recognition and the limits of its emancipatory power?

I will open this chapter by illustrating the ways misrepresentation and recognition are inseparable by reflecting on my own experience, from my childhood through the early years of my career as a scholar. This short “sketch for self-analysis”⁴ is intended to show the power of the critical-progressive discourse of recognition and representation to turn recognition of underrepresentation from the degrading, frustrating, and painful experience that it had been when I was young into an empowering experience and a valuable cultural and political resource for me and other Mizrahi academics and activists.

From this personal place, I will broaden the discussion into the political sphere, in which the critical Mizrahi discourse made its first appearance in civil society and academia during the 1990s. As part of the broader process that I described above, in which the progressive agenda was integrated into the liberal grammar of critical sociology, I will show how this form of the politics of representation and recognition has become the prevailing prism through which Mizrahi representation has been viewed in theory and research. Finally, before presenting the processes of the research and the data, I will briefly review forms of Mizrahi demands for recognition and representation that have been presented by both the progressive and right-wing camps.

A MOMENT OF SELF-REFLECTION

From a young age, and well before I had the words to express it, I felt a dissonance between my parents’ message that “the sky is the limit” and the real limits that separated me and those who were like me from the seemingly more “deserving.” Mizrahim were absent from everything we learned about culture and national history. The Zionist thinkers who were the founding fathers of modern Jewish history, the poets and novelists that we studied—almost all were Ashkenazim.

It was the same everywhere. Watching Israel’s single television station, I never saw children who looked like me. On current events shows, the news anchors, journalists, correspondents, academics, publicists, artists, scientists, and jurists on the screen were almost all Ashkenazim. None of the leading politicians looked anything like the people in my family.

As a child, I was mesmerized by stories of the Holocaust. Israel’s educational and socio-political systems inculcate the story “From Holocaust to Rebirth” as a foundational to the national narrative.⁵ They employ a variety of memorialization practices, including physical memorials, study sessions, meetings with survivors, museums, and movies (see Goodman and Mizrahi, 2008). I felt this viscerally. At times, I was even angry and frustrated that no one from my family had had any part in this horrific, yet crucial, part of Jewish history.

Issues of representation and recognition weren’t absent from my parents’ home, either. I remember watching the broadcast of the Israel Prize Awards on television.⁶ When my father would hear the names of the judges and the winners, he

would sarcastically say to my mother in his broken Arabic,⁷ "Doreen, come see how the Shiknaz⁸ give prizes to the Shiknaz."

I was even uncomfortable with my own name. From a young age, I was fully aware of the importance of ethnic signifiers in public space and processes of stigmatization and de-stigmatization (Lamont et al., 2016; Lamont and Mizrahi, 2012; Mizrahi and Herzog, 2012). My first name, Nissim, is almost always a Mizrahi name, and my family name, Mizrahi, leaves absolutely no doubt. My parents were sympathetic when I complained to them about the names they had given me. They tried to explain the family politics that had led to the choice of name (I am named for my grandfather), and my mother, drawing on well-known media personalities, would try to encourage me by telling me that there are many successful Nissims in the world.

But counting successful Nissims doesn't change the impact of signifiers. When I returned from my doctoral and postdoctoral training at the University of Michigan and Harvard, I was invited to teach a course in medical sociology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. To get my parking sticker, I had to go to the offices of campus security. The secretary asked for my name, then checked her computer printouts and informed me that my name "wasn't on the list of employees." After she checked some more, and then called the supervisor, the problem was solved. She had been looking for my name on the printouts of the janitorial and maintenance staff, not on the list of academic personnel.

My experiences were no different from those of many Mizrahim. Even as I was growing up, I would often wonder why my friends from our working-class neighborhood were not as troubled—if they were troubled at all—by these issues. They seemed to accept the limits that society imposed on them. This autobiographical and political sketch would suggest that it was perhaps the painful dissonance between the horizon of possibilities that my parents expressed and the bitter reality I faced that made me more sensitive.

THE BIRTH OF A NEW MIZRAHI IDENTITY

It was not until the heady 1990s that my early unarticulated emotions found the expression that turned the personal into the political for me, in the words of the well-worn slogan. This could only happen when I became part of a community of other young Mizrahi scholars who had "made it," climbed up the academic ladder, and acquired the powerful progressive language of multiculturalism and identity politics. It was also at this time that I encountered the work of artist Meir Gal, which captured the new Mizrahi zeitgeist. In presenting his work, pictured in figure 3, Gal (1997) wrote:

The book shown in the photograph is the official textbook of the history of the Jewish people in recent generations that was used by high school students (including myself)



FIGURE 3. *Nine Out of Four Hundred (The West and the Rest)* by Meir Gal, a visual rendering of the state’s discrimination against Mizrahi Jews.

in the 1970s. The nine pages I’m holding are the only pages in the book that discuss non-European Jewish history. Hence the title: *Nine Out of Four Hundred (The West and the Rest)*. My intention is to put an end to the speculative character of the argument whether or not Mizrahim have been discriminated [against] in Israel. Today the Ministry of Education continues to erase the history of its non-European Jews despite the fact that they comprise more than half of the Israeli population. This is only one example of how the State of Israel continues to minoritize its non-European majority.

Recognition and Empowerment

For critical Mizrahim like myself, this iconic photograph provided a visible, almost tangible, expression of our marginalized place in the great Zionist epic. Gal’s piercing gaze into those nine pages, as the rest of the pages of history fell loosely to the side, enabled us, too, to view the national narrative for the first time from the outside, unflinchingly and unapologetically. From our newly liberated position, it seemed to us that the story itself was the source of all evil.

For me, this act of removing myself signified the disconnect of my Mizrahi identity from the Jewish whole, as presented in the ethno-national narrative. In other words, recognition of the experience of misrepresentation became a constitutive force for the formation of a new identity. Capturing the prevailing zeitgeist in liberal-progressive circles, with its emphasis on recognition and the formation of modern identity, Charles Taylor (1994, p. 25) writes:

The demand for recognition [of individuals and groups] is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where this latter term designates something like a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

An Inspirational Network

Taylor’s description of the politics of recognition and the demands for representation of the “subaltern” and the “marginalized” resounded strongly in Israel in the 1990s. Indeed, the developing Mizrahi discourse was deeply connected to the birth of a new and subversive Mizrahi identity extracted from the general Zionist narrative. This new Mizrahiness allied itself with the larger, international story of other minorities’ struggles for recognition and representation in liberal democracies, especially in the United States. Removing themselves from the ethno-national story and joining the magnetic international network that epitomized the enlightened Western world provided critical Mizrahi activists and academics with a rare source for empowerment. As they repositioned themselves, Ashkenazi hegemony suddenly seemed local, provincial, and chauvinist. Adopting the framework of universal citizenship and a neutral state, the new Mizrahi critical-progressive discourse demanded appropriate representation and full equality for all Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel and all other marginalized groups as well (women, LGBTQ, Ethiopians, and others).

Indeed, within the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow, which by the 1990s had become the leading Mizrahi organization in Israel, a majority wanted to articulate the Mizrahi demand for recognition in civic-universalist, multicultural terms, free of the constraints of the Zionist-national discourse. In the introduction to their book *What is Multiculturalism? The Politics of Difference in Israel* (Yonah 2005), two of the founders of the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow, Yossi Yonah, professor of the philosophy of education at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, and Yehouda Shenav, professor of sociology at Tel Aviv University and a leading voice in the critical discourse in Israel, presented the key points of this position.

In our view, the agenda of the Mizrahi left is composed of three complementary topics. First, the effort to articulate a universalistically-oriented, assertive Mizrahi identity that rejects ethno-national and ethno-cultural particularism. In the framework of this effort, we highlight the tremendous political potential inherent in multicultural ideology, which allows for cultural diversity that is neither policed by national ideology nor bound to the logic of the Israeli [i.e., Jewish] ‘melting pot.’ Second,

activities to reduce social inequality and promote ongoing class struggle against the socio-ethnic interests of capital and the market mechanisms encouraged by the state. This activity is deeply connected to the first struggle, if only because we view cultural and economic oppression as allied with each other and feeding off of each other. [. . .] We view [this] as a necessary condition for the fulfillment of the civil, political and social rights of various groups as well as a necessary part of the rights that a democratic regime must accord to its citizens and residents. Third, the promotion of cultural identities and the class struggle are, ipso facto, allied with the struggle against the colonialist occupation in the territories; at the same time, the development of political frameworks in these areas will enable the Palestinian citizens of Israel to live as citizens with equal rights, including their collective rights as a national minority (p. 7–8).

As noted, in the 1990s the winds of “liberation” blew through academic circles within Israel, as they had throughout the world. These views have held sway there ever since. Over the past three decades, the problem of the representation of Mizrahim in critical sociology has been articulated primarily through the overarching logics of distributive justice and the politics of recognition.

The structural position of the Mizrahi subject as a victim stems directly from these two sets of logic. According to the first, the Mizrahi subject is the victim of the inequitable distribution of resources. According to the second, the Mizrahi subject suffers from underrepresentation, misrecognition, and identity erasure.

RECOGNITION AND REPRESENTATION: BEYOND POLITICAL BARRICADES

Thus far, the interplay among recognition, representation, and identity resonates perfectly with Taylor’s (1994) diagnosis. However, Taylor describes these processes in diachronic terms, as phenomena that characterize all of modern society. In contrast, I view them as particular phenomena that, while very powerful, are culturally specific and socially bound. While this model appears in its purist form in progressive circles, it is denied by some and partially embraced by others. Viewing the politics of recognition from below reveals a more complex picture than the one that Taylor paints.

It should come as no surprise that Mizrahi critical positions were welcomed by the Ashkenazi left-wing camp in both academia and civil society. Yet progressives were not the only ones demanding recognition. Over the years, voices from across the political spectrum, from the progressive left to the right and religious Orthodox, also made themselves heard. In fact, the first public demand for proper representation of Mizrahim in the national narrative and recognition of their contribution to the Zionist project occurred in 1981 when Dr. Vicki Shiran petitioned the High Court of Justice to forbid the screening of a television series, “The Pillar of Fire.”⁹ That series told the story of Zionism, but, Shiran argued, paid only

minuscule attention to the contribution of Eastern Jews to the Zionist project and the establishment of the state. The court rejected the petition, yet the case is still considered a milestone in the history of Mizrahi activism.

Another striking example is the public debate in 2006 about the lack of Mizrahim commemorated on Israeli currency. In an article published in the Hebrew news site *Ynet* (Faylar, 2013), Aryeh Deri, the leader of the Shas political party, was quoted as saying, "The exclusion of Mizrahim exists in the Supreme Court, higher education, the media, the Israel Prize, the current government, and now it's come to our currency. I will fight this discrimination with all the tools that I have at my disposal, for the good of the entire Mizrahi public. . . ." In the same article, economist Shlomo Maoz, a secularist who has strongly identified himself with the Likud, was quoted as saying, "This unwanted phenomenon persists even now, 65 years after the founding of the State. It is unfortunate that in the State of Israel, only certain ethnic groups appear on our currency. The printing of currency should be stopped. While it is true that the choices have been legally legitimate, they have been morally invalid."

From the other end of the political spectrum, legal scholar Dr. Yifat Biton, who is identified with the critical Mizrahi camp and who founded and led the *Tmura Center for the Prevention of Discrimination*, was also quoted in the same article. According to Biton:

The problem with the Mizrahi struggle for equality is that when it is spoken about in general terms, it is considered to be an 'ethnic genie' and we are warned not to allow it to be released from its bottle; but when we deal with specific examples of lack of representation and discrimination—such as public allocations to culture, or the percentages of students eligible for matriculation certificates, or the lack of streets named for Mizrahim, or the representation of Mizrahim in the Supreme Court or on currency bills—the response is, 'these are merely specific instances, and why are we making a big deal about them.'

Additional struggles have included a focus on underrepresentation in spheres such as television, accompanied by critical academic literature on the underrepresentation of Mizrahim in the media (Avraham, 2003); a series of petitions calling for the appointment of Mizrahi judges to the Supreme Court (Zarhin, 2012); efforts to change street names in order to commemorate outstanding Mizrahim; and position papers on the representation of Mizrahim in history textbooks following the 1997 exhibit by Gal referenced above.¹⁰

Nearly two decades later, in 2013, then-Minister of Education Naftali Bennett established the Biton Commission to Increase the Presence of the Legacy of Jews from Sefarad and the East in the Educational System, headed by poet Erez Biton.¹¹ It is important to emphasize that this initiative was taken by a minister from the right-wing nationalist end of the political spectrum. In establishing the committee,

the minister was agreeing with Mizrahi demands for a more balanced presentation of Mizrahim within the framework of the ethno-national narrative and not as part of a multicultural progressive-universalist program. The establishment of the commission and its conclusion were enthusiastically received by Mizrahim from the progressive left (see, for example, Y. Dahan, 2018) as well as from the right.¹² Yossi Dahan (2018), professor of law and philosophy and one of the founders of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, viewed the establishment of this commission as “an attempt to correct the injustice of the lack of recognition of Mizrahi Jews.” The commission concluded, as previous studies had already shown, that the educational program in Israeli schools was Euro-centric and paid the culture and history of the Mizrahim only negligible attention (p. 135).

Ars Poetica, a new coterie of Mizrahi poets that appeared in 2013, provided another aggressively defiant expression of the Mizrahi demand for inclusion and recognition. “The coterie’s name is a brilliant pun on the highbrow term *ars poetica* (the art of poetry), which is spelled with a guttural ‘eyin,’ associated with a Mizrahi accent, instead of an ‘aleph,’ thus reclaiming the pejorative “ars.” Derived from the Arabic word for “pimp,” the Hebrew usage of the word serves as a derogative for young, unruly Mizrahi men” (Gluzman, 2022, p. 496).

The group, founded by poet/performer Adi Keissar, revolutionized the traditional highbrow poetry reading, usually held in select bookstores or lecture halls in front of minuscule crowds. By contrast, *Ars Poetica* events were held in nightclubs and described as “*chaflot poetiot*” (poetic parties). This Mizrahi group of poets, which included Shlomi Hatuka, Roy Hasan Tehlia Hakimi, Israel Dadon, and Mati Shmuelof, enjoyed extensive public recognition, although it was also controversial. It disappeared from public consciousness toward the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century (Gluzman, 2022).

As I have shown, demands for representation and recognition have come in various forms and from both sides of the political divide. The demands from the right came from within the ethno-national framework, while claims from the left sought to extricate the Mizrahi identity from the confines of this national narrative, to recognize that the narrative itself is a source of oppression, and to seek liberation through the progressive, multicultural model and the discourse of identity politics. The Israeli public has been exposed to this discourse in both its progressive and ethno-national forms, but their responses have never been investigated.

The turn that I have taken in my research is emotionally laden for me. For many years, as a critical sociologist and activist, I was deeply invested in confronting disadvantaged Mizrahim in the field, in civil society, and even in my own family. I sought to “enlighten” them; I tried with all my might to emancipate and liberate them by channeling them toward the liberal-progressive notion of representation and recognition. Many years later, I finally turned to Mizrahi

subjects and put my earlier progressive form of the politics of representation and recognition to the test.

THE ENCOUNTER

As in the previous chapters, the first part of this process was based on statistical findings on the differences between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim with regard to their knowledge of the relative representation of Mizrahim in public and political institutions. Both groups demonstrated an awareness of certain common knowledge: for example, that there had never been a Mizrahi prime minister, that a majority of Supreme Court judges are Ashkenazim, and so forth. Mizrahim, as we saw in chapter 2, were slightly more aware than Ashkenazim that there are fewer Mizrahi doctors, but Ashkenazim knew better than Mizrahim that Ashkenazim make up the overwhelming majority of university faculty. With regard to the Israel Prize, the difference between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim was statistically significant: 40.6 percent of Mizrahim knew the correct answer, in contrast to only 28.4 percent of the Ashkenazim. Thus we see that, in general, Mizrahim are aware that they are underrepresented relative to Ashkenazim in numerous arenas.

From among the various arenas that we could have selected for the question on representation, we chose to focus on the political area. This is because, although right-leaning marginalized Mizrahim identified their underrepresentation in different spheres of life, and even protested against it, they identified the phenomenon primarily with the Ashkenazi establishment, which is largely regarded as left-wing. For many of them, the political right, and certainly the Likud party, represent their political home. Ethnic inequality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim is thought of as an internal Jewish issue, and, as we have seen, rooted Mizrahim do not tend to view themselves as an ethnic minority competing alongside Arabs and others for a place in a stratified universal-civil order. But how would the rooted Mizrahim relate to inferiority within the right? I chose to focus on data that would confront them with their inferior position on both the ideological left and right, which, in the critical Mizrahi discourse, has always been viewed as evidence for the development of a separate Mizrahi politics. The two political organizations I chose, Peace Now¹³ and the Yesha Council,¹⁴ are iconic in Israeli history. Although Peace Now’s agenda is no longer visible on the public stage, it is still widely identified with initiatives that are divisive in Israeli public opinion and it is the best known of the Israeli NGOs and peace and human-rights organizations.

We now turn to the finding that will be at the center of the focus group discussion. The respondents were asked two questions. First: “To the best of your knowledge, what is the proportion of Mizrahim to Ashkenazim among the Peace Now leadership?” Second: “To the best of your knowledge, what is the proportion of Mizrahim to Ashkenazim on the Yesha Council leadership?” These two groups,

TABLE 1 Proportion of Mizrahim to Ashkenazim among Peace Now and Yesha Council leadership, according to survey respondents

Answer	Ashkenazi Respondents	Mizrahi Respondents
	Peace Now	
Ashkenazi Majority 50%/50%	✓	✓
	Yesha Council	
Ashkenazi Majority 50%/50%	✓	✓

NOTE: See appendix 2 for more detailed survey results.

both founded solely by Ashkenazim, are considered to represent the polar ends of the Zionist political spectrum. To both questions, the possible answers were:

1. A significant Mizrahi majority
2. 50%/ 50%
3. A significant Ashkenazi majority
4. Don't know

We used the findings as the trigger, showing that the differences in the responses between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim to these two questions were statistically significant. As table 1 shows, Ashkenazim pointed to an Ashkenazi majority in both groups, while Mizrahim thought there was an Ashkenazi majority in the left-wing movement (Peace Now) and that the ethnic division on the right (the Yesha Council) would be balanced. This time, the Mizrahi optimism was unwarranted. This table, which provides a schematic illustration of their responses, was presented to the informants.

Mizrahi Women without a College Education

We will begin with the focus group of Mizrahi women without a college education; continue with the focus group of men without a college education; and finally move on to the group of men with a college education.

Riki, the younger women who was about to begin law school and whose participation in the group without a college education was a fortuitous mistake, opened the discussion:

Riki: I think that Peace Now members are mostly Ashkenazim.

Leah: Peace Now are extreme, because many of them are from kibbutzim and they are the majority there—Ashkenazim in Peace Now. I think it’s true.

Riki: I think it’s mostly Ashkenazim in both.

Ahuva: Ashkenazim, that’s right.

Riki: Yes, I also think it’s Ashkenazim, you’re right. They are the majority.

Leah: Also in Yesha Council?

Riki: Yes.

Hannah: I think just like the Mizrahim, that it’s mostly Ashkenazim and fifty-fifty.

Ahuva: You mean Yesha Council?

Hannah: Yes, there is a lot of variety. I mean, you have people from all ethnic origins in Yesha Council the way I see it.

Riki: True.

Ahuva: Wait a sec . . .

Hannah: This is no objective information.

Leah: He says “majority,” not fifty-fifty. I didn’t count them. We’re talking facts here. The majority are Ashkenazim, yes. In Yesha Council.

Riki: In Peace Now there is clearly an Ashkenazi majority.

Ahuva: Obviously.

Hannah: The focus group should also have been somehow ethnically based?

Facilitator A: We have focus groups of both Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.

Ahuva: Yes, sure they have.

Facilitator A: Why do you ask?

Hannah: Just curious.

Hannah’s question marked the first instance of group identification, which, as we will see, also occurred in the group of Mizrahi men with a college education, although in a slightly different manner. The call for a distinction between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim raised questions about the identity of their own group.

Facilitator A: [. . .] I’m asking you now, do you agree that in Peace Now the majority are Ashkenazim?

Riki: Yes.

Ahuva: Yes.

Facilitator A: Why? How does that happen?

Leah: I see in the media, all the people there, I don’t know any Mizrahi person in the representative groups. They’re all Ashkenazim.

Ahuva: A professor, who used to be Minister of Education [. . .] Yuli Tamir, we know [these people], we don’t really know any Mizrahi person in Peace Now.

Riki: But he’s asking you *why*.

Ahuva: I’ll tell you why. The Mizrahim have this trait, like a stigma, they love Eretz Israel.¹⁵

From Ahuva’s sarcasm, we can infer that she has created a moral hierarchy between Mizrahim, who are loyal to the State of Israel, and the left-wing Ashkenazim, who are disloyal and are willing to compromise the needs of the state.

Facilitator A: What makes Ashkenazim, those Ashkenazim who are Peace Now members, so willing to compromise?

Ahuva: They’re a bunch of bleeding hearts, they want to be nice, let them . . .

Facilitator A: But what is behind this idiocy?

Ahuva: I think they are just bubbleheads.

Facilitator A: But where does this come from?

Hannah: I don’t think they’re bubbleheads. I think it’s people believing that you can make peace that way.

Ahuva: No, belief will give them no peace because if we’ve already given over Gush Katif¹⁶ and there was no peace . . .

Facilitator A: We want to get into their heads.

Ahuva: Then count me out.

Riki: It’s becoming a political discussion.

Facilitator A: Ahuva, it’s not about who’s right. We’re trying to make sense.

Ahuva: I can’t do it—get into their head.

Ahuva’s refusal reinforces the moral distinction she has already drawn between the worthy Mizrahim and the left-wing Ashkenazim, who are bad subjects unworthy of her understanding. This is a reversal of the progressive position, which, for example, is unwilling to understand the white male “oppressor” in rural America.

Leah: All the groups in the Ashkenazi immigrations who worked for the country and built the country and took care . . .

Ahuva: What do you mean built the country? What are you talking about?

Leah: It wasn’t the Moroccans or the Sephardic Jews . . .

Hannah: They [the Ashkenazim] had been here before, there’s no getting away from it.

Ahuva: You don’t say?

Leah: I think it’s the Ashkenazim who played the major role.

Ahuva: I’m sorry, you’re mistaken. You got it all wrong.

Facilitator A: I’ll let Leah finish what she was saying.

Leah: No. The 1950s were . . .

Ahuva: They [Moroccans] were in Shomera and Avivim¹⁷—these people built the country and protected it. What are you talking about? I take offense at what you’re saying, that the Ashkenazim built this country! Wrong! Took over the country? Yes. But they didn’t build this country.

Hannah: All the first immigration waves . . .

Leah: All the Palmachniks¹⁸ and all the kibbutzim, all those who were in the kibbutzim.

Ahuva: Were there no Moroccans in the 1950s?

Hannah: Sure, but before statehood, when they immigrated . . .

Ahuva was denying the facts, while the others accepted that the Ashkenazim played an earlier part in the Zionist story. This denial attests to the importance she attached to her position that the Mizrahim have played an equal role in the republican ethos of the state. This seems to serve as a means for her to cope with the exclusion of Mizrahim from the Zionist ethos and the ensuing discrimination.

Facilitator A: Wait a sec. There is disagreement here. I’d like to frame it. Who really established the state? There’s disagreement about it.

Ahuva: Everyone together.

Facilitator A: Ahuva says, everyone together.

Ahuva: Yes.

Facilitator A: But the Ashkenazim managed to take over the state apparatus?

Ahuva: Why do you keep calling them Ashkenazim? Those who were in the country were the first. Let’s put it this way—the First Immigration are those who came from Russia and all that? What do you mean?

Leah: From Europe.

Ahuva: Because there was a certain situation, they didn’t come here because they loved the country. There was the Holocaust, have you forgotten?

Ahuva passionately defended the equal, or perhaps even superior, role of Mizrahim in the building of the nation—even at the cost of contradicting herself. Initially she said that the Ashkenazim were not here first; now she acknowledged that they were. Yet she continued to rebuff any attempts by other participants to undermine her version of the narrative. Their role in the national epic is the ultimate measure of the worth of the Mizrahim. For this reason, and for the first time, she also questioned the distinctions between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.

She confused the historical chronology. In addition, although her argument regarding the external factors that influenced the decisions by Ashkenazim to come to Israel was factually correct, it was used in this instance to diminish their virtue.

Hannah: We haven’t forgotten anything.

Ahuva: It’s the Holocaust that forced them to come here [. . .]

Riki: No matter why. They built it, they were here before. They established the state.

Ahuva: They didn’t. There was no choice. [. . .]

Leah: [The Ashkenazim were here] before all the Mizrahim.

Ahuva: There were Sephardic Jews, there were Mizrahi people.

Leah: Very few, yes, but the majority were Ashkenazim.

Ahuva: You’re wrong. That’s where you got it wrong, in Jerusalem the majority were Sephardic.

Hannah: In Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias—¹⁹
[. . .]

Facilitator A: I want us to understand where Ahuva’s coming from. You are all entitled to express your views. I want to understand Ahuva’s view. It’s Ahuva’s turn to speak. Ahuva says the Ashkenazim weren’t the majority [among the Jews in pre-statehood Israel], so what happened?

Ahuva: They were more power-hungry, perhaps more intelligent, let’s say that the first Jews were really of this origin, but these were large families who lived here. Families, even from Uzbek origin, we know about Safra,²⁰ and we know a lot of things about them—these weren’t power-hungry people. This creates the impression as though the Ashkenazim established the state.

Facilitator A: What do you mean power-hungry?

Ahuva: Their ability.

Facilitator A: What ability?

Ahuva: Their education, maybe also financial.

Facilitator A: They had more resources, which gave them an advantage?

Ahuva: Resources, yes. Advantage, yes.

Facilitator A: If I have more resources, I become more power-hungry?

Ahuva: Certainly.

Facilitator A: Yes?

Ahuva: Yes, you’re in a society, I don’t mean power in the sense of physical strength. In the sense of media power, in the sense that in a certain society, you rank higher. Don’t you think?

Ahuva was ready to acknowledge the advantages that the Ashkenazim have with regard to resources, capabilities, education, and drive. This acknowledgment appears to be yet another attempt to disparage their morality, as part of her attempt to defend the place of Mizrahim in the national narrative.

Facilitator A: I don’t know, I’m trying to understand. Another perspective is represented by Hannah and Leah. And Riki, I believe you have a slightly different take on how the story began, right?

Leah: Yes. I think that like all the groups of the Palmach and Nili²¹ and all those groups—these were all immigrants from Europe, Holocaust survivors. They fought very hard for this country.

Riki: It’s a fact. They were here before. They built the country. The Mizrahi immigration waves came later.

Leah: It was hard for them, they were afraid to lose the country and they would fight.

Riki: Afterward there were Mizrahi immigrations and they helped build the country.

Leah: That’s right.

Riki: It’s not like they came and the state was already fully established.

At this point, the others also found it important to include the Mizrahim in the story of the establishment of the state, but they were willing to acknowledge that they were not part of the early history and to “give the Ashkenazim their due.”

Facilitator A: Now I’m interested in hearing what effect did growing up in an Arab country or living next to other Arabs, not from this country, and then coming here—what effect did coming from an Arab country have?

Leah: Of course, you feel like it’s your home and you don’t want the Arabs to be with you.

Ahuva: I don’t feel. . . . We have a history, it’s our country, God promised it to us, the Bible. [. . .] It’s either I have faith or I don’t [that’s what matters]. If I believe, I’ll fight for it to the day I die. If I don’t . . . [. . .] Every Saturday, Peace Now goes and demonstrates in Bil’in²² and all that, and go . . .

Facilitator A: Because they don’t have faith? I go back to what you said before. You’re saying that Mizrahim have faith.

Ahuva: I can’t get into their heads.

Ahuva dramatically raised her sense of belonging to the Jewish whole, presenting it as a position of faith.

Facilitator A: Let’s move on to the next group. Yesha Council. Who is more represented there, Ashkenazim or Mizrahim or fifty-fifty?

Riki: Fifty-fifty.

Ahuva: I think it’s fifty-fifty.

Facilitator A: Why fifty-fifty?

Ahuva: Because they [Mizrahim] went to the settlements [in the West Bank]. First of all, don’t forget to add the word “religious.” Why?

Facilitator A: Yeah, why?

Ahuva: They believe that the land is holy and that we are its rightful owners, they have greater faith.

Facilitator A: In other words, if I’m Mizrahi this means I have faith and this makes me more attached to the land?

Ahuva: Exactly . . .

Facilitator A: So I’m more willing to fight for it?

Ahuva: Yes.

Riki: But that’s not true, there are also highly religious Ashkenazim.

Ahuva: Fifty-fifty, I didn’t tell you there weren’t any.

Riki: The Ashkenazi religion is more extreme.

Facilitator A: You mean that the decisive factor is my religious identity. If I’m a Mizrahi religious Jew, then I would also be on Yesha Council. If I’m an Ashkenazi religious Jew, I would also . . .

Ahuva: Be there.

Riki: Can also be on the Yesha Council.

Ahuva: Most of them are Mizrahim.

Facilitator A: If I’m a Mizrahi secular Jew—is there such a thing? Or isn’t there?

Ahuva: Secular Mizrahi?

Facilitator A: Yes.

Ahuva: That’s me, I’m a secular Mizrahi. I have the faith.

Facilitator A: You mean it’s not about religion, but faith.

Ahuva: Faith is not religion.

Hannah: “Traditional,” let’s put it this way.

Ahuva created a link between being traditional and being right-wing. She correctly argued that there are fewer secular Mizrahim, entirely removed from tradition, as compared to Ashkenazim.²³

Facilitator A: I have a surprise for you now. The figures will come as a surprise to you.

Ahuva: Surprise us. I told you we don’t have the figures.

[. . .]

Facilitator A: According to the statistics, what we find is an Ashkenazi majority in the Yesha Council.

Ahuva: Definitely? Not fifty-fifty?

Facilitator A: No.

Ahuva: Why did I tell you at first that there was, and you told me . . . [. . .]
You made me lose my faith.
[. . .]

Facilitator A: Why do the Mizrahim we've asked think, like here—here it's really the same—why do they think that in Yesha Council, it's fifty-fifty? [. . .]

Ahuva: I thought the majority are Ashkenazim, but I was afraid, I answered the way I . . .

Facilitator A: Really? You were afraid? [. . .] Why did you think there was an Ashkenazi majority in Yesha Council?

Ahuva: I didn't believe there wouldn't be Mizrahim as well. You mean to tell me that in the settlements . . .

Facilitator A: I'm talking about Yesha Council . . .

Hannah: About the formal institution.

Facilitator A: About the formal institution, not about the settlers.

Ahuva: Sorry, so you didn't explain this. I thought about the people living there.

Facilitator A: No, I'm asking about institutions

Ahuva: Sure, we know who Emuna Elon²⁴ and her husband are. [Her tone is disparaging].

Once again, Ahuva was correct: the percentage of Mizrahim among the settlers is much higher than their negligible representation in the leadership, making the lack of representation even worse.²⁵

Facilitator A: Why is it so, Ahuva? We're no longer in the 1940s–50s?

Ahuva: Good for them, I don't mind. [. . .] If they are honest and if they safeguard [Eretz Israel], that's just fine.

The apparent tension was resolved easily. Ahuva simply gave priority to the people of Israel as a whole over the particular representation of the Mizrahim in institutional bodies.

Facilitator A: But why are they in power? What happened? [. . .]

Leah: I'm saying, if we're talking about the religious Jews in Judea and Samaria, I'm looking at the Mizrahim, there are many Mizrahim in the synagogues and all that, there's lots of them, so the Mizrahim are represented.

Facilitator A: In the settlements.

Leah: In the settlements, yes, but also in the government.

Facilitator A: Yesha Council is actually like a [regional] council.

Leah: Yes, also in the big ones.

Facilitator A: Why in the local government . . .

Leah: But it’s not only Ashkenazim. Some of them are also Mizrahim.

Ahuva: But you have the statistics. He says no, he says most of them are Ashkenazim.

Hannah: In the end it’s probably the ambition and the motivation that also give the strength.

Ahuva: Maybe it’s heredity, maybe it’s hereditary, perhaps it’s genetic [laughs] . . .

Hannah and Ahuva attempted to make sense of the evident misrepresentation, responding with sarcasm and indifferent humor.

Mizrahi Men without a College Education

We will now turn to the reactions in the group of Mizrahi men without a college education to these same points.

Facilitator B: What do you make of the findings? [. . .]

Haim: Let me answer please. What did Yehezkel say, how did he describe the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews? The Sephardic are like heavier, they have honor for tradition. Now, in Peace Now you don’t have traditionals.

Facilitator B: Is that a fact?

Sasson: There aren’t any at all.

Haim: If anybody is even slightly traditional, it’s not Peace Now. If he’s only just a bit traditional, it’s not Peace Now anymore. A born Sephardic Jew, like Yehezkel says, his kids have already read [the scriptures] before kindergarten, the respect [for tradition] is deeply rooted in their home.

Haim refers to the issue of representation as an essential difference between the rooted Mizrahi identity and the Ashkenazi identity, which are distinguished from each other by traditionalism. The Mizrahi identity is associated with the notion of honor, Haim said, using the Hebrew word *kavod*, most often translated as “honor” although it shares a root with the word “heavy” and “liver,” thought to be the heaviest internal organ in the human body. He made an association between honor, a hierarchy of virtues in a particular community, and the bounded identity of the rooted Mizrahi subject, linking honor and Mizrahi/Sephardi traditionalism. As I have shown in previous work (Mizrachi, 2016b), honor is a particular form of

hierarchical human respect and is to be contrasted with the universal concept of dignity. We will further discuss the linkage between honor and the rooted Mizrahi identity below.

Facilitator B: Why do you think regarding Yesha Council that the Mizrahim say they think the leadership is evenly divided?

Haim: I think it’s pretty even, I don’t know if it’s 50 percent, but the leadership is mixed. I don’t know how close it is to 50 percent.

Facilitator B: Ashkenazim, why did they say it is an Ashkenazi majority?

Haim: Did the Ashkenazim say an Ashkenazi majority?

Facilitator B: Yes.

Haim: Because maybe you see them more in the media, or maybe they stick out more, or maybe they were in more leading positions because they are the typical religious Zionist Jews, and they are usually more like Bnei Akiva [the leading religious Zionist youth movement], which I’m a bit affiliated with. I’m Sephardic, I pray in a Sephardic synagogue. But I usually hear from them, and their leadership is more Ashkenazi. It’s not fifty-fifty, it’s more Ashkenazi.

Sasson: There can’t be Sephardim in Peace Now.

Facilitator B: Are you sure?

Sasson: Absolutely. [. . .]

Facilitator B: And how would you explain the fact that Ashkenazim thought that there are more Ashkenazim in Yesha Council?

Sasson: That’s beside the point.

Facilitator B: Beside the point?

Sasson: Yes, it doesn’t matter who has the majority there, Ashkenazim or Sephardim. These are the people of the Greater Land of Israel. That’s all. I’m not concerned with that, I’m concerned with Peace Now. I happen to know some of their members—these people are anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish, anti-State of Israel, anti-everything.

Here, Sasson’s statement echoes Ahuva’s. The question of representation or underrepresentation of Mizrahim is secondary to the question of who promotes what is best for the Jewish people.

Facilitator B: What do you all say? Let’s hear more people.

Yehezkel: Peace Now [. . .] All their ideology is to give the Arabs what they want. We are occupiers, we have no special attachment to this country, to the land under our feet, so long as there’s peace, and everything is nice and dandy. [. . .] The thing is that the

Mizrahim are more traditional, I think there are no Mizrahim there. [. . .] They are less connected to Jewish traditions. [. . .]

Facilitator B: Let’s hear the others. Eliran, we haven’t heard you today.

Eliran: Yes, I think the Mizrahim are, in my opinion, more realistic, more experienced in every aspect, and know that Peace Now is illegitimate for most Mizrahim—I don’t think there’s a single Mizrahi there. Peace Now is simply against everything that has to do with the State of Israel [. . .] in its culture. It’s like we’re an occupying nation. Take the IDF for instance. There are many people demonstrating every day in the central recruitment base against the draft and in favor of disobeying orders and things that make me very, very angry. I used to be in the Scouts, I love this country very much, I’m Mizrahi, my parents raised me to love this country. I come from a traditional home, my late grandfather was a rabbi, I consider myself part of this family. Peace Now, in my opinion, the way I see it, is a movement which represents some kind of delirious sector in Israeli society.

Facilitator B: What does this sector say?

Eliran: The entire Zionist project, everything we have paid for in blood, money and hard work—take everything, we don’t need that. You can shut the country down, throw away the keys, we don’t need that. Let’s give it back to the Arabs. “Peace”, they call it.

Facilitator B: I have a question for you. What you’re saying is interesting—before you said that those who built this country were the same Ashkenazim. I want to understand your line of thought. You said that these people, who had nothing to do with Jewish tradition, who were secular, these guys came and fought, right? Ariel Sharon, you spoke about the evacuation [of Gush Katif]—Sharon [who was responsible for it] fought for this country.

Haim: He’s not Peace Now.

Facilitator B: No, but you talked about those who wanted to give it to them, to make peace with them. [. . .]

Sasson: Sorry for intruding, I will tell you in two words. Everyone who touches Eretz Israel gets punished.²⁶ Period. I used to admire [former Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin, but the moment he considered giving some of the country back to the Arabs, he was assassinated.

Facilitator B: Why did he do that?

Sasson: It was a punishment.

Facilitator B: No, why did he do it?

Sasson: First, his naiveté and the one who incited him was his friend Shimon Peres. Now the other one was Ariel Sharon. Case in point: disengagement [from Gaza] and expulsion of Jews—he got what was coming to him. Olmert—same thing. He tried to do something [evacuate some settlements in the West Bank], and got kicked out of office and put on trial [for corruption]. [. . .]

And Now, the Moment of Confrontation

Facilitator B: Sasson, I want to go back a little. The Ashkenazim were right. [. . .] The majority in the leaderships of both Yesha Council and Peace Now is Ashkenazi. Where are the Mizrahim?

This statement by Facilitator B resonates not only with the statistical findings, but also with the position expressed by the educated Ashkenazi men, who recognized Ashkenazi superiority in both political camps, accepted it as natural, and were also aware of the growing balance in representation over time.

Sasson: The question is whether they were elected or maybe it doesn’t mean much just like he said. [. . .]

Haim: [. . .] There’s no problem in Peace Now.

Facilitator B: No. Forget about it, I’m asking you a question. You’re saying that the Mizrahim are more sentimental, they care more about the land, they’re more attached to it, they know what these Arabs are like. You’re saying all that. I’m asking you, why [are there no Mizrahim in the Yesha Council leadership]?

Herzl: No, in leadership position you need to be less sentimental. Whoever is less so can reach the top, he has a better chance, obviously. [. . .] Leadership requires intelligence and composure. That’s what it requires. What can we do?

Herzl’s statement seems to be very self-defeating and even essentialist, attributing superior intelligence and leadership qualities to the Ashkenazim. Some critical readers may object to his statements, which could be understandably framed as the “internalization of oppression,” especially in view of the fact that Ashkenazi educated men expressed a clear sense of Ashkenazi entitlement that would explain their position in the political leadership of both camps.

As challenging as this may be, at this point, I bracket these comments so that they will not overshadow my line of inquiry. Without evaluating the “truth value” of his argument, it is important to note that Herzl remained indifferent to the degrading meaning of his own statements as he relates to the importance of the “Jewish whole.”

Sasson: Mizrahim have no composure? What you’re saying is wrong. I disagree with you. [. . .]

Eliran: Perhaps the Mizrahim are too tired for all these contemplations.

Facilitator B: Tired of what? Let’s hear Eliran.

Eliran: Maybe it’s simply that the Mizrahim are tired of all that happened to them. They are tired of all these adventurous exploits, they just want to be left alone and they want peace, but not like Peace Now.

Facilitator B: No, but it sounds like you’re saying that maybe the Mizrahim can no longer handle the big stuff, meaning “let’s concern ourselves with what’s happening at home, with the family—let me mind my own business because I’m tired of the big stuff”—is that what you’re saying?

Gidi: It’s like giving up.

Eliran: I said it half-jokingly. But in principle you can’t say that a leader has to be this or that. A leader can be in any color, in any shape, there’s no single recipe for leadership. An Ashkenazi majority in Peace Now and the Yesha Council—I think there’s no real explanation for that.

Facilitator B: No explanation? It’s a coincidence?

Eliran: No explanation. [. . .]

Haim: I think that even if the majority in Yesha Council are still Ashkenazim, their position is deteriorating. The Sephardim are slowly—I remember the Yesha Council when they started out more or less, at that time they were really Ashkenazim.

Facilitator B: Only Ashkenazim?

Haim: As far as I can recall, you could hardly find any Sephardim there, certainly not in Yesha Council—at least the representatives that I saw. [. . .]

Facilitator A: And why is this change taking place?

Haim: I believe, because I know it from one side of my family who are religious Zionists, they have become more than just religious Zionists, they’ve studied in Orthodox high schools and colleges affiliated with the Yesha Council—in their establishments—and today they have reached positions that are not quite leadership positions, but they will get there.

Yehezkel: Besides, in the Yesha Council you have normal democratic elections where you elect based on regional councils. There are more Ashkenazi people there. [. . .] In Gush Katif, for example, there

used to be many Yemenites, so they elected their representative. In Elkana and Efrat [in the West Bank] you have immigrants from America and the United States.

Once again, the optimism of the rooted subject proves to be warranted. Yehezkel's acknowledgment of misrepresentation in the present is understood as part of a perception of advancement of Mizrahim over time in process of state-building. And indeed, in retrospect his optimism was well-founded, since Mizrahi representation in the Yesha Council has become more balanced over time.²⁷

The calm acceptance of underrepresentation within their own camp and optimism with regard to the future summon up a broad repertoire of critical readings. An initial, instinctive response would be "internalization of oppression," which refers to Mizrahi self-negation vis-à-vis the dominant Ashkenazim, the result of "false consciousness" in one or another of its versions. I know this response well from the critical Mizrahi stance in both academia and civil society. The optimistic view is seen as a naïve position that fails to recognize the persistence of power structures that have remained in place despite cosmetic changes. The critical Mizrahi tendency is to be suspicious even about the positive trends in representation that the subjects accurately identify.

However, the equanimity with which the subjects accepted underrepresentation in their own political camp contrasts sharply with their resentment of the left-wing Ashkenazi elite, and this sheds additional light on the meaning of representation from a rooted point of view, as Sasson commented.

Sasson: It doesn't matter who has the majority there, Ashkenazim or Sephardim. These are the people of the Greater Land of Israel. That's all. I'm not concerned with that, I'm concerned with Peace Now. I happen to know some of their members—these people are anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish, anti-State of Israel, anti-everything.

His resentment towards the left-wing elites did not stem from a sense of injustice due to the socioeconomic exclusion of Mizrahim, and the organizing principle was not ethnicity per se (Ashkenazi elites, whether on the right or on the left), but rather against left-wing Ashkenazim. That is, his resentment stemmed from the idea that the left undermines the Jewish whole. Here, we see the explicatory power of the principle of rootedness and its contribution to the discussion on the relationship between right-wing nationalism and populism. To these Mizrahim, the left-wing Ashkenazi elite represented vertical power, but the resentment was focused on their disruption of the collective boundary along the national-horizontal dimension, between "us" as a bounded community epitomizing the Jewish whole and the external enemy. The left-wing Ashkenazi elite is rootless, cosmopolitan, and promotes the politics of universalism, and is therefore willing to undermine the Jewish whole. They are seen as disloyal to the Jewish people,

traitors who seek to undermine the identity and existence of the Jewish state. In other words, from a rooted position, we can shed light on what Brubaker (2020) views as the ambiguous empirical and analytical connection between the two dimensions—“the national-horizontal dimension,” i.e., the people (“us”) against the enemy (“them”), and the internal vertical dimension between “the people” and the “elites.”

However, observation of the ostensibly surprising attitude of these Mizrahi subjects toward representation and recognition enables us to reexamine the social boundaries of the liberal politics of recognition through the prism of the rooted ontology. If the politics of recognition in its current prevailing mode in the West is modern in nature, as Charles Taylor (1994) suggests, it may invite some modern essentialist claims. In other words, if we read the subjects’ “denial” of the politics of representation and recognition and unwillingness to identify underrepresentation as an injustice, it will lead us back to essentialist and stigmatizing explanations like those presented in the first wave of modernization theories. From this viewpoint, the response of the Mizrahim to underrepresentation in their own political camp may reflect a premodern position, one that has yet to internalize the politics of recognition and representation that are firmly implanted in the progressive-liberal vision and are an integral part of modernity (Taylor, 1994). Although Taylor is not usually regarded as a modernization theorist, we will see that for him the politics of recognition mark the transition from pre-modernity to modernity. The emergence of the politics of recognition is an expression of a deep change in the sources of the identity of the self and the collective. As I will argue below, this change is not all-encompassing, and both forms of recognition and identity can coincide. This simultaneous appearance is key to understanding the conflict between rooted and autonomous subjects.

THE CLASH BETWEEN DIFFERENT NETWORKS OF MEANING

Charles Taylor (1994) portrays the emergence of the politics of recognition and the related politics of representation in diachronic terms. For Taylor, the new politics of recognition takes place with the transition from premodern societies to modernity. In fact, the politics of recognition that Taylor describes as a unified historical transition appears to exist as a bounded social phenomenon that prevails in its “purest” form in progressive circles, while coexisting with other forms of identity that are deeply rooted in non-liberal worldviews. Hence, my investigation focuses on the conditions of possibility of the politics of recognition in a deeply divided society. Furthermore, the social negotiations regarding the politics of recognition and representation do not take place between premodern and modern communities, but rather in what S. N. Eisenstadt (2002) describes as multiple modernities. In our context, the objection to the politics of recognition in its pure form comes

not only from the rooted Mizrahi subject, but also from other segments of the population, for example, the national religious bloc, devout Muslim communities, and ultra-Orthodox Jews, none of whom are premodern and all of whom are deeply involved in and embrace modernity across many spheres of life. I suggest that this is because modern groups may belong to distinct and even contrasting networks of meaning. In our context, we address two such networks, the progressive-critical and the rooted.²⁸

Between Social Networks and Essentialism

Social networks of meaning envelop and surround us. They consist of the relevant people and figures in our life, alongside whom we live and with whom our moral experience as individuals takes shape. Within this social weave, our sense of morality is shaped and our feelings are molded. This is not about any well-reasoned ethical stance, but rather, as Arthur Kleinman (2006) argues, our immediate, basic, and intuitive ability to distinguish between "right" and "wrong" and between "good" and "bad." It is also here that our sense of otherness and our moral and cognitive intuition with regard to the social order, both as it exists and as it should exist, develop. Elsewhere, I have referred to this as a "world of meaning" (Mizrachi, 2017), which is not embedded in the subject at all (in this case, neither in the rooted nor in the progressive subject) and, in principle, nothing prevents an individual from changing their world of meaning.

To be sure, these stances do not derive from the essential traits of its members, as becomes obvious in our story of the deep divides among Mizrahim (progressive and rooted) who supposedly belong to the same ethnic origin. My use here of the term "social networks of meaning" is broad and still requires further development and research. However, it is important to emphasize that my choice in using this term enables me to differentiate between two moral communities (in this case, the progressive and the rooted Mizrahi), without making any essentialist assumptions about the members in either group. Furthermore, this term enables us to understand the dynamic character of these networks and that movement between the networks is possible, as my own life trajectory shows.

Yet, it is important to emphasize that people do not easily travel across network boundaries, because these networks are tied to relatively stable structures and practices. Switching networks often involves a dramatic change of the world of meaning and even of core identity and sense of self. We must not forget that social networks of meaning are also the source of the individual's cultural tool kits and repertoires (Swidler, 1986, 2001) that enable them to cope with changing social realities, to form effective lines of action, and to bring meaning to their lives. One can, for example, become "born again" or abandon religion, but in either case, the crossing between the two networks is far from easy. Indeed, the linkage between worlds of meaning and social networks is so strong that choosing to deviate from a

network’s accepted cultural repertoire can be traumatic and often involves leaving home and moving away.²⁹

Liberal Isomorphism and Identity Politics

It is thus not surprising that the emergence of the new critical Mizrahi movement in the 1990s became possible only as young Mizrahim began to enter powerful academic centers in the United States. In previous works, I have described these new patterns of thinking and acting as “liberal isomorphism” (Lamont et al., 2016; Mizrahi, 2014; see also Mizrahi, 2012). “Iso” means “equal, identical”; “morpho” means “structure.” I have adapted the sociological meaning of this concept from Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983), who refer to the link between a group’s mirroring of forms and practices and its acquisition of social legitimacy. In my adaptation, I focus on mimetic patterns of thinking and acting adopted by Western social movements in the last third of the twentieth century, particularly within the Mizrahi discourse in Israel.

These movements sprang up in response to the first wave of liberalism. Flourishing in North America, first-wave liberalism had been predicated on the assumption that equal opportunity would be realized in a political context of neutral citizens (without regard to color, gender, or otherwise disparaged identity). In contrast to this liberal blindness to differences, liberal isomorphism is based on the surprising assumption that true equality can be achieved only through recognition of difference.³⁰

This new form of identity politics was born out of changes in Western modernism’s understanding of the nature of individual. Group identity was no longer perceived as derivative of the premodern individual’s position in relation to prevailing social and institutional orders, but rather as an inherent part of the individual that stems from internal, authentic sources whose discovery is tied to introspection. Modernism’s demand for recognition of each individual’s and each group’s distinct authentic identity (Taylor, 1994) is a foundational concept of the new identity politics.

This identity-focused perspective channels isomorphism across five dimensions. First is a demand for group recognition based on a previously stigmatized or discredited identity (e.g., women, gays, people of color, people with disabilities, and so forth). Second is the use of previously stigmatized identity as the cornerstone for authentic group and individual identity. Third is a stress on the right to equal participation as different, in contrast to inclusion despite difference. The fourth common move is debunking hegemonic society’s presumed neutrality by exposing its parochial roots (which privilege the white, male, straight, able-bodied and so forth) as the spearhead for social change. The final shared dimension is acceptance of the universal right to recognition and equality for all minority groups.

Throughout the 1990s, Mizrahi activists and academics in Israel had good reason to adopt the logic of liberal discourse. In accordance with the argument made by DiMaggio and Powell in the context of organizational sociology, the application of successful and accepted imitative patterns of action is a source of widespread legitimation for "new actors" (e.g., organizations and movements) in the social environment where they operate.³¹ Mizrahi alignment with global ethnic space and adoption of modes of protest recognized by the international liberal academic elite served as a powerful political resource. From this position, Mizrahi intellectuals and activists could formulate their arguments in universalist terms that drew their validity from theories of justice and norms commonly accepted in the progressive West. And, of course, this is the same world that the local progressive Ashkenazi elite strives to emulate. Even more significantly, by means of this universal position, Mizrahi critical intellectuals were able to expose the ruling Ashkenazi elite's provincial roots. By using progressive moral grammar, the new Mizrahi discourse extended beyond the boundaries of civil and academic society and held sway in some leftist radical liberal circles in social and electronic media and in the public discourse.³² Within the framework of the neutral state and universal citizenship, they could imagine and hope for a union between Palestinians and Mizrahim based in the shared struggle of minority groups against state tyranny and Ashkenazi hegemony.

The "Local Mizrahi" and the "Universal Ashkenazi"

However, while this process, which presents Mizrahi identity as an analytic category (that is, as a "group"), gained significant success in activist and academic realms and left-wing critical circles, it simultaneously distanced its supporters from the broader experiences of "Mizrahiness" and especially from the experience of the rooted Mizrahi subject. Liberal isomorphism demands breaking the Mizrahi individual and/or group free from the Jewish whole in which their core identity is embedded. It positions them as a minority group together with other minority groups, including Palestinian citizens of Israel and even Palestinians from the West Bank. It acknowledges that their right to representation and recognition is similar to that of these other groups, and it offers the possibility to create an alliance with them. This may shed some light on why the isomorphic space poses such a severe threat to the rooted Mizrahi core identity.

The divide between these two networks of meaning cuts even deeper. While isomorphism requires directing a great deal of social energy inward in order to refine and purify the critical position and prove its membership in the avant-garde of the liberal camp, its purified progressive position distances it even further from the organic target population it seeks to represent.³³ In other words, joining the liberal isomorphic camp often entails a "closing of the ranks" and alienation from

those members of the “minority group” who feel alienated and even threatened by this very camp.³⁴

ROOTED MEANINGS

We now return to the rooted Mizrahi subjects. It is only by locating the critical stance within its own social networks of meaning and acknowledging its own parochialism that we can recognize the informants’ response as a valid ontology that is an alternative to the ontology of the autonomous individual.

Because the progressive position is not aware of its own parochialism, its adherents harbor the expectation that Mizrahim, when confronted with the reality of their underrepresentation in the right-wing camp, will accept the politics of recognition and representation. But as I have shown, even when the rooted Mizrahi informants identify their underrepresentation in right-wing organizations, the progressive notion of identity politics has no ability to disconnect them from the broad Jewish whole or to enter into the liberal isomorphic space and embrace its forms of thinking and behaving.

Their resentment toward left-wing Ashkenazi elites does not stem from the underrepresentation of Mizrahim—as Sasson vigorously argued, “that’s not important”—but rather from the elites’ alienation from the Jewish whole and their activities that appear to hurt and threaten the well-being and Jewish identity of the state. The secular-left Ashkenazi elite is seen as rootless and culturally deracinated, and the politics of universalism that they promote threatens the nuclear identity of the subjects, which is deeply embedded in the Jewish whole. This insight can shed light on the analytical and theoretical relationship between the two dimensions in the ongoing debate on populism and right-wing nationalism.

In the next chapter, we will confront the Mizrahi subjects with yet another weapon from the critical arsenal. This time, we will turn to another cultural dimension of their experience, that is, their “Arabness.” We will introduce the subjects to the subversive concept of the Arab-Jew. As we will see, this threatens to complicate or even to unravel the religious-national Gordian knot of their identity.

The Arab Jew

The Ontological Narrative under Attack

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.

—WALTER BENJAMIN

A DIFFERENT KIND OF QUESTION

Is it possible to consider Jews who were born and raised in Arab countries “Arab Jews”?

The previous chapters were based on questions that assessed the respondents’ knowledge of topics related to representation and inequality. A comparison between the participants’ impressions and empirical data served as a starting point for discussions.

This chapter deals with a question that differs from the previous ones in two important ways. First, the question does not ask about something that is merely factual, nor is it even clear what the relevant facts would be: what components are essential to determining an individual’s Arab or Jewish identity? Second, there is, likewise, no agreed-upon facts on the basis of which it would be possible to determine the “truth value” of the subjects’ answers.

The concept of the “Arab Jew” has had a tremendous impact on the critical discourse on the representation of the Mizrahi subject. This thesis of the Arab Jew presents a sharp challenge to the identity of the rooted Mizrahi subject, but it has not been examined either from the point of view of the Mizrahi subject who is at the heart of the great paradox or from the point of view of the complementary Arab subject. That is what we do here, by asking the rooted Mizrahi subjects to look at the Arab side of their identity, tugging at the Gordian knot of religion and nationality at the center of their identity.

I begin this chapter with a brief review of the appearance of the concept in the academy and public discourse in Israel in the 1990s and discuss some of the research on this question. I then move on to a presentation of surprising statistical

findings, which brings us to the discussions in the focus groups composed of Jews and Arabs from the lower and middle classes (Jewish men and women, Arab men). I conclude with a summary of our insights and a presentation of additional findings that describe the conditions of possibility for Mizrahim and Arabs living together with deep differences. This will shed new light on the meaning of peaceful and respectful coexistence, beyond the liberal imagination, for religiously rooted subjects from both sides of the divide.

FROM OBJECTIVE POSSIBILITY
TO POLITICAL POSSIBILITY:
AN EXERCISE IN POLITICAL IMAGINATION

Ostensibly, the question of the Arab Jew should be an empirical question. There is no a priori reason to believe that the concept does not at least partially capture the lived experience and perhaps even the identity of Mizrahim throughout the long history that preceded their arrival to the Jewish state.¹ Methodologically, the term *Arab Jew* seems to perfectly meet Weber's standards of "objective possibility." According to Weber, "a thing is 'objectively possible' if it 'makes sense' to conceive it as empirically existing entity. It is a question of conformation with the logical conditions. The question whether a phenomenon which is in this sense 'objectively possible' will actually be found with any significant degree of possibility or approximation, is a logically distinct question."²

A Radical Deconstructive Tool

And yet, from the moment the question of the Arab Jew was raised, the ensuing discussion was never merely about theory or methodology. When it first burst into the discourse at the end of the 1980s (Shohat, 1988), supporters and detractors alike identified the concept as a radical deconstructive tool aimed at dismantling each and every stone in the foundation of the Zionist project of collective identity and the historiography dominant in Israeli academia. As Yehouda Shenhav (2006, p. 8) has noted, "Recognition of the Arab Jews as a collectivity (and not only as individuals) would require rearticulating Israeli society's basic assumptions and its reorganization." Critical investigation, which has consistently aimed to destabilize and even entirely break up the coherence of the Zionist narrative, enlisted the term *Arab Jew* as a definitive tool in their campaign of exposing the manipulative and deceptive nature of Zionism, which subsumed the Mizrahim into Jewish nationalism and distanced them from the purportedly dangerous and polluted Arabness of the enemy.

But while this subversive argument had an electrifying impact on critical academics and activists, it enraged others in academia and life. In response to his provocative article "Bond of Silence" (1996), which questioned the dichotomy

between Arab and Jew in an effort to bridge the Arab-Mizrahi divide, Shenhav was accused of fomenting “hatred” and “rage” and creating antagonism between the communities, and he was personally attacked as “crass,” “extremist,” and “sick.” The intensity of the response, Shenhav believes, was indicative of the extent to which this political possibility posed a threat to the Zionist ethos. “The outburst of reactions”, he noted, “proved to me how strongly naming these dynamics violated a social taboo” (p. 8).

A “Theft of History”?

Pioneering academic Ella Shohat was the first to bring the concept of the Arab Jew into the critical academic discourse. According to Shohat, Zionism was a colonial act, and the story it tells hides the story of colonized Mizrahim (or Arab Jews) and Arabs. In Shohat’s words, hiding this story was nothing less than “the theft of history” (1988, p. 7). The Zionist “cover story” manipulatively incorporated the Mizrahim into the dramatic and epic, the “Ingathering of the Exiles,” which is a story of Jewish continuity (22). In contrast, the colonial story is one of discontinuity and rupture, the disconnecting of the Mizrahim from themselves, their Arabness, and their organic lives in Arab space. To fit the Zionist narrative, and “for their own good,” the Mizrahim had to be cleansed of any sign of Arabness and refashioned into the secular, modern “new Jew” that Zionism had invented. The organizing principle of this separation and purification, Shohat argues, was based on the broad orientalist distinction between East and West: “Distinguishing the ‘evil’ East (the Moslem Arab) from the ‘good’ East (the Jewish Arab), Israel has taken upon itself to “cleanse” the Sephardim (Mizrahi Jews) of their Arabness and redeem them from their ‘primal sin’ of belonging to the Orient” (p. 7–8). This “theft of history” enabled Zionism to create a solid wall between Arabs and Jews in the minds of the colonized Mizrahim and to keep their identity within the Jewish realm.

In a similar vein, Shenhav describes how the process of “religionization” inflicted on Mizrahim by the Zionist establishment was meant to enhance their religiosity as a means to enlist them successfully in the Zionist project. Yet, while the religionization mechanism successfully deepened the Arab-Jew dichotomy, it did not bring them fully into the Zionist collective. A “residue” of their Arab ethnicity and culture remained, marking them with an orientalist stigma. As Shenhav (2006) observes, religionization brought them into the collective Jewish fold, while simultaneously designating them as “others,” so that they would not be “exactly like us.”

According to Shenhav (2006), the Zionist identity comprises three fundamental categories—nationalism, religion, and ethnicity. All three categories are needed for maintenance of a coherent Zionist identity, and they are not mutually exclusive. The relationship between any two of these categories, including the categories

of Jew (religion) and Arab (ethnicity), is not binary. In fact, on this point, Shenhav is critical of Shohat's binary approach to the Arab-Jewish category, which, he contends, "paradoxically is buying into the Zionist party lines" (Shenhav and Hever, 2012, p. 108).

The Bond between Identity and Narrative

Despite their differences, however, these two prominent Mizrahi critical scholars, Shohat and Shenhav, have both sought to deconstruct the Zionist narrative. They hope to smash the seemingly inextricable bond between identity and narrative that Mizrahim in Israel uphold and turn the Arab Jews from an objective possibility into a political possibility.

Here, I find Margaret Somers's (1994) formulation of the bond between narrative and identity to be particularly illuminating. The notion of the Arab Jew as a political possibility is aimed at the heart of what Somers refers to as the *ontological narrative*. Asserting the purported Arabness of the Jew poses a challenge to fundamental questions of nuclear sense of self, such as "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" Drawing on Charles Taylor's work, Somers contends that the ontological narrative is a precondition for our moral orientation and political loyalty (p. 618). Creating a bond between Arabness and Jewishness disrupts the basic Zionist creed about what is "good" and what is the "common good," posing such fundamental questions as "To what do we belong?" and "Who is 'us' and who is 'them'?"

Once the ontological narrative has been shaken, the *public narrative* is also disrupted. Somers means those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations that are larger than the individual, including intersubjective networks and institutions. These range from the family to the workplace (including organizational myths), church, government, and nation. By challenging the public narrative, the concept of the Arab Jew presents the Zionist nation-building project in a completely different light, challenging the "Ingathering of the Exiles," and the epic story "From Holocaust to Redemption."

The critical Mizrahi discourse attempts to subvert the *conceptual narrative*, to again use Somers's terms, of hegemonic sociology and the social sciences. Conceptual narratives are "the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers. Because neither social action nor institution-building is solely produced through ontological and public narratives, our concepts and explanations must include the factors we call social forces" (1994, p. 620). In this case, the critical discourse sought to undermine the conceptual world of the social sciences through which "non-critical" or "establishment Israeli researchers" construct history and social reality, radically deconstructing the very idea of "Jewish history" along with notions of "progress" and modernity. Critical researchers contend that the concept of "Jewish history" as a unifying grand narrative, an epic "chronicle

of the Jews” through periods of hardship until their redemption, has flattened the richness and diverse lived experiences of Jews throughout history in different places and contexts (Levy, 2011).

Furthermore, this narrative has left very little space for comparative studies on the relationship between Jews and other minorities, especially in Muslim areas (Levy, 2011, p. 107). Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (1994) points to the centrality of the concept of the “Negation of the Diaspora,”³ by which Zionist historians have enlisted the Mizrahim into the Zionist project (Piterberg, 1996). “Jewish history,” Raz-Krakotzkin argues, is organized into a progressive redemptive narrative, according to which Zionism, adopting the historical model of nationalism, seeks a national solution through the “negation of the Diaspora” (Raz-Krakotzkin, 2013). As a critical historian, Raz-Krakotzkin challenges the equation of progress with the redemption of the Jews from their lives in the Diaspora. He proposes a fascinating historical reading of how the national narrative, written within Zionist time, appropriated the idea of redemption, which is rooted in mythical time.

From an economic-class perspective, Swirski (1981) challenges the very concept of progress. A cornerstone of early modernization theories and the organizing principle for the relationship between the first and third worlds, the idea of progress, he argues, assumes stages of development along a linear and universal course, with Western culture serving as the locomotive that pulls the entire process along. The Mizrahim (Arab Jews) and the Arabs were both positioned along this broad developmental schema by students of modernization theory. In Swirski’s view modernization creates relationships between the first and third worlds characterized by dependency and exploitation. For their part, post-colonial scholars emphasize the suppression of Mizrahi identity and culture on the basis of modernization theories (Khazzoom, 2003; Shenhav, 2006; Shenhav and Hever, 2012; Shohat, 1988).

Somers’s concept of *metanarrativity* as the master narrative within which ontological, public and conceptual narratives are anchored helps us frame the entire discussion. The critical discourse on Arab Jews has been part of an overarching critique that presents an ontological, interpretive and political alternative to Jewish identity as envisioned by the Zionist narrative. It disrupts the Zionist narrative’s ontological, inter-subjective, and conceptual foundations, and the axioms that serve the research field in the process of knowledge production, which ultimately contributes to shaping individual and public consciousness.

As the idea of the Arab Jew thus offers an alternative identity to the dominant Zionist one, many critical researchers and activists on the radical left have ardently embraced it. In academia its influence has extended beyond the field of critical sociology into historiography, and the idea continues to be of interest

to historians and researchers of Islamic culture. Tzur (2010a), a historian of Jews in Islamic countries, offers a nuanced description of the involvement of the Jews in Muslim environments through an examination of such categories as shared language, cultural and musical consumption; material consumption; and integration in commercial life. In contrast to the full integration of Jews during the classical period, however, he demonstrates the negative changes in the patterns of participation in high culture by the end of the eighteenth century (2010a, p. 46).

Other works in this field have contributed to an understanding of the complex interface between Jews and Arabs in the Muslim environment over the generations, or examined the complexity of subcategories of Jews who today are lumped together as a monolithic category of “Mizrahim.” Jacobson and Naor (2016) have explored the diverse categories of Jewish groups who lived in Muslim regions at different times, attempting to trace the conditions that allowed these ostensibly stable categories to persist into the present (Hochberg, 2007). Hillel Cohen (2015, 2023) has traced the conditions of possibility for the formation of a Jewish Arab identity in Palestine during the early twentieth century, which failed to come to fruition because of the formation of both Jewish and Palestinian modern nationalities.⁴ Gil Anidjar’s (2002) historical and genealogical account suggests that the emergence of both nationalities appears to have grown out of a dialectical development within European political and theological thought.

Disciplinary, Historical, and Political Divisions

As we see from this brief review, there is no consensus answer to the crude and somewhat naïve question whether there was or continues to be an Arab Jew. Sophisticated critical researchers do not claim that the “true” Mizrahi identity is Arab. For Shenhav (2006), for example, there is subversive power in the very concept of the Arab Jew as a political possibility, independent of its actual existence. It is an exercise in political imagination.

It is worth noting that there is a disciplinary gap between the critical researchers, on the one hand, and historians and cultural researchers, on the other, with regard to this issue. As Lital Levy (2011) notes, the Mizrahi critical discourse has only flimsy empirical support, while the historians’ approach is richer but at times merely descriptive. Accustomed to thick description, some historians have doubts about the empirical basis for many of the critical assertions, arguing that most of the critical researchers have little knowledge of the Arabic language and cultures.⁵ Even for historians sympathetic to the critical discourse, the disciplinary gap can be significant. For example, Yaron Tzur (2010b, p. 54) appreciates the contribution that the critical school has made to Middle Eastern studies, but notes that, as a historian, he cannot accept as credible assertions based on a single theoretical-genealogical analysis.

In addition to the disciplinary divisions, political disagreements among scholars of the history and culture of Islam add to the tension over the possibility of an Arab Jewish identity. A recent special edition of *Jam'aa* Magazine addressed the question whether an Arab Jewish identity and culture still exists and whether it is relevant today.⁶ Snir (2020), a senior scholar of Arab language and literature, argues that Jewish Arab culture existed over time and in contexts where Jews were immersed in the Arabic language and culture; however, today it is dying or already dead. His four opponents argued that Arab Jewish identity and culture are fluid and should not be limited to time and place. This culture, they maintain, is alive and kicking, with many diverse and ever-changing manifestations and despite attempts to “bury” it.

Clearly this is not merely a theoretical and methodological dispute about evidence and interpretation, but rather a debate between scholars who belong to different political camps. The one camp consists of those who take a critical approach and seek to promote the Arab Jew thesis, welcoming any supporting evidence, while their opponents doubt the validity of their arguments. Each side remains suspicious of the other side’s political motives. It is, in fact, difficult to disconnect the heated academic debate over the existence of the Arab Jew from the question’s broader political significance.

TURNING TO THE MISSING MIZRAHI SUBJECT

In this chapter, we will turn our attention to the very people ostensibly described by the term “Arab Jew,” who have been missing from the debate until now: Mizrahim and Arabs. For the first time in our focus groups, Mizrahim responded to a concept that has served as an interpretive and political challenge to Zionism and nurtured a particularly enticing story in the critical discourse. For critical researchers, this story is meant to shed light on the ostensibly paradoxical political behavior of the Mizrahim. Their support for the right and their hawkish positions toward Arabs, the story contends, does not reflect their “true consciousness,” but rather their repressed Arab identity. The position of the Arabs with regard to the Arab-Jewish dichotomy today, which has received even less attention in the critical discourse, will complete our discussion below.

Ella Shohat (2003) provides a striking example of present-but-missing Mizrahi subject in the critical discourse when she talks about her grandmother. She explains that it was only in Israel that her grandmother adopted the rhetoric of “us” (the Jews) and “them” (the Arabs) and only in Israel that the term “Arab Jew” had become an oxymoron in her grandmother’s mind. It would appear that Shohat did not think it was important to learn what her grandmother thought about that dichotomy or how she experienced it, so her consciousness and lived experience remain an empty signifier in her own story. The story resonates with Orlando

Patterson's note on "liberal paternalism," and it reminds us of the interpretive risk lurking in every critical observation when the fine line between emancipation and paternalism is blurred. When acting from a position of certainty and motivated reason, even as sensible and skilled a scholar as Shohat, unable to detect nuances and unexpected revelations of power relations, will end up silencing her own beloved subject.

I am very familiar with this interpretive trap from situations in which I had adopted a position of paternalistic advocacy toward many beloved family members. At the time it appeared to me as the only reasonable response to these discordant voices from the people nearest to me, whom I sought to liberate. Ironically for us as activists and Mizrahi researchers, this silence was a way to free them from themselves. In other words, the act of liberation of the Mizrahi subject paradoxically entailed emptying that subject of his or her own subjectivity. The actual Mizrahi's unwillingness to embrace the role assigned to him by the critical scenario was discomfiting; we were often loath to risk our precious story by confronting it with contradictory voices and counterevidence.

We were only able to read the Mizrahi subject through the liberal grammar according to which exercising autonomy and free will are considered the only authentic human choice and the only sign of agency, as indicated by the following assertion that Shohat makes (2003, p. 55):

In the case of Arab Jews the question of will, desire, and agency remains highly ambivalent and ambiguous. The very proliferation of terms suggests that it is not only a matter of legal definition of citizenship that is at stake, but also the issue of mental maps of belonging within the context of rival nationalisms. Did Arab Jews want to stay? Did they want to leave? Did they exercise free will? Did they actually make a decision? Once in Israel, did they want to go back? Were they able to do so? And did they regret the impossibility of returning? Different answers to these questions imply distinct assumptions about questions of agency, memory, and space (my emphasis).

Shohat is cautious with regard to the limited use of the assumptions of citizenship, since she takes these from a different political space. However, a review of her conceptual narrative reveals that it is deeply ingrained in the liberal grammar that provides the "real" definition of agency as the exercise of free will. She reads the significance of the historical event of immigrating to Israel through the liberal grammar, a clear example of the failure to conduct what Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) refers to as the fusion of historical horizons. Shohat writes from her own historical horizon in the present, which imposes itself on the historical horizon of the past phenomena she is considering. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that even in the most wonderfully harmonious accounts of Jewish life among Arabs in past centuries, this was not taking place in a democratic liberal

framework within which two communities of equal universal citizens shared a neutral society.

Shohat could have fused these historical horizons and achieved a richer reading of rooted Mizrahi subjects if she had deliberately assumed a position of self-parochialization, to use Saba Mahmood's (2005) term. This would have enabled her to see that the individualistic practice of free will was not necessarily part of the lived experiences or sense of agency for these people. For them, meaning and agency was not based on the individual who exercises free will, but rather the complete Jewish or Muslim whole to which they belonged.

To be sure, opening an interpretive space for the fusion of historical horizons does not mean that a critical reading has no basis in reality. In fact, a critical reading might very well represent the experiences of some members of that generation of immigrants. There can be no doubt that, for example, some intellectuals and cultural figures from Iraq might have connected harmoniously and coherently with the critical Mizrahi narrative.

As a cultural researcher, Shohat focuses on a critical analysis of conceptual genealogy, as in her most recent paper on the Judeo-Arab language (2015), which maps identity through the study of language. In contrast, my investigation focuses on the sociological and political possibility of the term "Arab Jew" in the present. I will attempt to examine the meaning of the dichotomous identity with the limited tools at my disposal. As noted above, it is clear that the picture would not be complete without the point of view of Palestinian subjects, who must also confront the disruption represented by the dichotomy of Arab/Jew that has taken hold of the consciousness of both sides. At the same time, it is important to note that the Arab subject serves here as a shadow case, whose own reading of the possibility of an Arab Jewish identity contributes an essential but complementary dimension.

The initial results of the research presented a surprise: the image of the Arab Jew seemed to appear before us as an actual possibility in the here and now. The statistical results seemed to indicate that both Arabs and Jews recognize the Arab Jewish identity as a possibility, and perhaps even a political possibility. We are about to unmute the voices of the subjects who helped to produce these results.

THE ENCOUNTER

Surprising and Puzzling Findings

As in the previous chapters, we began this part of the discussion with a presentation of the statistical findings from the survey. We had asked, "Is it possible to define Jews who speak Arabic as their native language and who were born and raised in Arab countries as Arabs?"

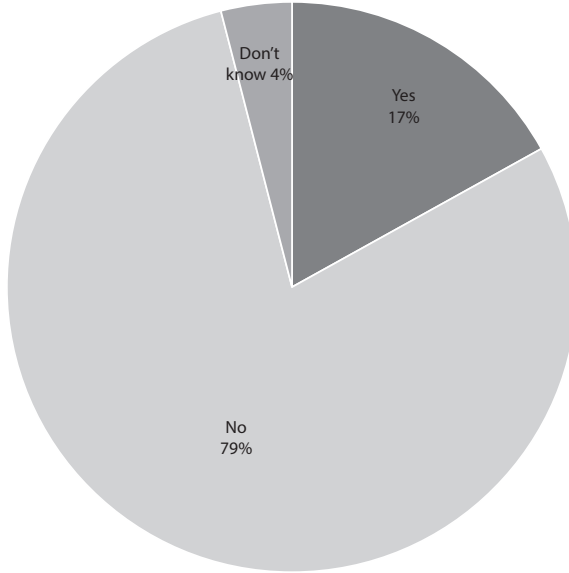


FIGURE 4. Percent distribution of Jewish respondents' answers to the question, "Can you define Jews who speak Arabic as a mother tongue and were born and raised in Arab countries as Arabs?"

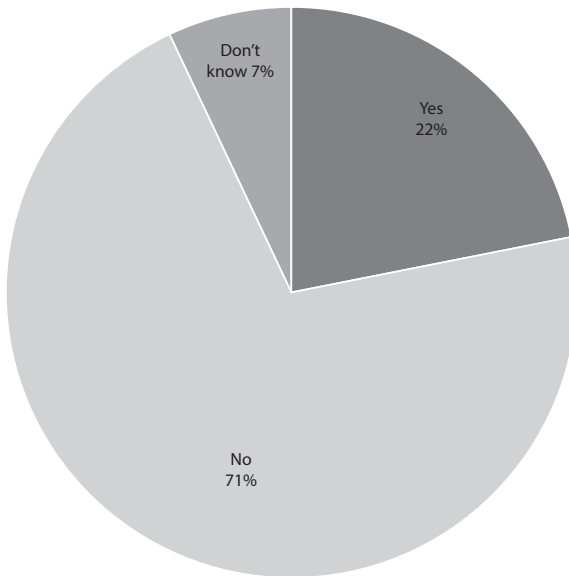


FIGURE 5. Percent distribution of Arab respondents' answers to the question, "Can you define Jews who speak Arabic as a mother tongue and were born and raised in Arab countries as Arabs?"

The charts presented in figures 4 and 5 describe the distribution in the groups' responses to the question. This was a striking statistical result. I had not expected that a fairly significant proportion of both Jews and Arabs would accept the apparently subversive possibility of an Arab Jew. Indeed, the initial reading of this finding might reinforce our perception that there is a deep, if hidden, connection between Mizrahim and Arabs. If we add the percent of "don't know" responses, we arrive at one-fifth of Jewish participants (21 percent) who did not reject this possibility. If we go even further, we might imagine that this points to a latent political consciousness waiting to burst forth and forge a Mizrahi-Arab alliance. We can identify a similar state of consciousness among the Palestinian citizens of Israel, since nearly one-third of the Arab participants (29 percent) did reject this possibility. Yet again, I was tempted to ask: were we about to witness the burst of liberation that heralds the fulfillment of the post-colonial fantasy?

However, a second glance at the data complicates the story. We did not find any statistically significant difference between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews who answered "yes" to this question. So, we were left with only speculative hypotheses. It could be that the data do not signal a distinct Mizrahi consciousness, but rather the success of the Jewish melting-pot ideology for both Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. While these findings do not indicate a hidden Mizrahi consciousness waiting to erupt, they also do not attest to an Ashkenazi ethnic demarcation, or an expression of Ashkenazi orientalism. Hence, the meaning of this finding remains unclear.

With regard to the Arabs' responses, it would appear that they have internalized the national divide at least as deeply as the Jews. Most of the Arab respondents were not familiar with the designation of "Mizrahi Jews." For many of them, the fact that nearly half of the Jewish population speaks Arabic as a mother tongue and came to Israel from Arab countries was not important enough to identify the Mizrahim as "Arab Jews." Nor did it lead them to distinguish between the Mizrahim and the Ashkenazim, who, according to the predominant Palestinian national narrative, came to Palestine from Europe as part of the colonial project.

Methodologically, in order to ensure that all Arab respondents fully understood the question, we reformulated it in the final survey questionnaire. I should remind the reader of an initial significant finding that we will address later. In the pilot question formulation, we asked whether Mizrahi Jews could be considered "Arab Jews." In the survey version, we further specified what we meant, so that even people who were unfamiliar with the term "Mizrahi" could understand the question. This subsequent question was worded: "Is it possible to define Jews who speak Arabic as their native language and who were born and raised in Arab countries as Arabs?"

The statistical findings pointed to a sizable proportion of Arabs and Jews who appeared ready to view “Arab Jew” as a possible identity. How would the Mizrahi and the Arab subjects respond to this provocative finding that they helped create? We will discuss here four groups: Mizrahi women without a college education; Mizrahi men with a college education; Palestinian men without a college education; and Palestinian men with a college education. We will begin with the group of Mizrahi women without a college education, whom we met in the previous chapters. Once again, Riki played the role of the natural representative of the critical discourse, challenging the other women with her critical readings and dismantling their system of classification.

Mizrahi Women without a College Education

Facilitator A: I now want to raise the next issue, one of the things that surprised us in the survey. There was one survey question—Is it possible to define Jews speaking Arabic as their mother tongue, who were born and raised in Arab countries, as “Arabs”?

Ahuva interrupted the facilitator’s introduction, shouting:

Ahuva: The Moroccans [Jews] are Arabs? No way! They also speak Arabic, true, but they’re not Arabs.

This was the moment: the radical notion of the “Arab Jew” had entered the discussion. The facilitator continued.

Facilitator A: What’s so surprising? Twenty percent of the Jews, one out of five, answered “yes.” This means that 80 percent have responded like you just said: “no way”.

Ahuva: Absolutely not!

Facilitator A: But there were those 20 percent, the participants who didn’t show up probably . . .

Riki: I think yes.

Facilitator A: You think yes?

Riki: Yes, I had an argument about it with my dad.

Facilitator A: Please explain.

Ahuva: Riki, you’re driving me crazy!

Riki: No, listen, my father is Algerian, and I had an argument about this with him and with my mom; [I told them that] Kurdistan is a territory controlled by Arabs. [The argument was about] how we define an Arab Israeli today. What does this term mean? It’s someone who came from Arab countries. Kurdistan is like an Arab country.

Riki was disrupting the ontological narrative that protects the identification nucleus of the group, and she was aware of the intensity of the opposition. She tried to calm the storm by shrinking the social distance between herself and the rest of the group by referring to a similar argument she had with her parents. She attempted to mitigate the damage by framing the argument as a legitimate debate within the organic community of the family. By doing so, she set the stage for completing her move, which entailed decoupling nationality from religion in order to reassemble the Jewish and Arab identities.

Riki: They're Arabs . . .

Leah: An Arab is not a Jew, and a Jew is not an Arab. [. . .]

Riki: That's completely irrelevant—you have Muslim Arabs and you have Christian Arabs. [. . .]

Hanna: But if you say "Arab Jew," that's simply a contradiction in terms.

Riki: Why?

Ahuva: That's really twisted.

Riki: What is an Arab?

Ahuva: A Jew is a Jew forever.

Riki: Wait a sec, I'll tell you what I told my mom. My mother was shocked when I said such a thing. I told her, "Mom, you have negative associations with the word 'Arab.'"

Hanna: Muslim.

Riki: Our enemy—that's your definition. What is an Arab? An Arab is a person born in an Arab country. What is an Israeli?

Ahuva: Not "born." Who gave birth to him?

Riki: What is an Israeli?

Leah: No, it's also his faith.

Riki: It has nothing to do with faith. Muslim is faith. I want to ask you a question, what is an Israeli? How would you define an Israeli person?

Ahuva: As a Jew, if he's a Jew—he's a Jew!

Riki: You have Israeli Arabs. That's also a twisted definition. I thought about that too. What is an Israeli?

Leah: One who was born in Israel.

Riki: Fine; he has Israeli citizenship.

Leah: You have an Israeli Jew and an Israeli Arab.

Riki: True, and it's a twisted definition. Because what is an Arab? That's our definition, according to people. It's not an accurate definition.

The other participants, especially Ahuva, battled to rebuff what seemed to them to be the dangerous threat coming from Riki. “A Jew is a Jew is Jew!” Ahuva shouted at her.

Ahuva: Darling, we are Jews, followers of the religion of Moses and Israel.

Riki: True.

Ahuva: But they follow Muhammad.

Riki: They’re Muslim. What does this have to do with anything? I didn’t say they weren’t. I didn’t tell my mom she was a Muslim. I told her she was a Jew, [and] an Arab.

Hanna: Do you agree with the definition “Israeli Arab”?

Ahuva: He’s an Israeli Arab.

Hanna: Wait a sec, do you agree with this definition?

Ahuva: Yes, but he is first and foremost an Arab.

Hanna: OK, you agree with the definition “Arab Israeli”?

Ahuva: “Arab Jew”—no. Never! We’re unique, we’re a unique nation.

Riki: But this definition scares you.

Ahuva: Too bad.

Riki: But it’s not negative.

Ahuva: It is. Very much so.

Riki: Why?

Leah: You can’t say that a Jew is an Arab.

Ahuva: Because you have to convert to become a Jew.

Riki: You’re a Jew, that’s irrelevant. Irrelevant. Arabs are not necessarily Muslim, you also have Christian Arabs.

Riki’s efforts to deconstruct and then assemble national and religious identities were met with fierce and highly emotional resistance. The group, especially Ahuva, aggressively objected to any attempt on her part to return the hyphen that connects the “Arab” to the “Jew.”

Their response echoed Ella Shohat’s grandmother’s dichotomy between “us” and “them.” The threat Riki posed to Ahuva was clear. When Riki accused her of being afraid, she did not deny it. And Ahuva may have become even more fearful as Hanna, in an attempt to make sense of Riki’s shocking message, gradually changed sides.

Hanna: You can say “Egyptian Jew,” for example . . .

Ahuva: Honey, the Jews are the chosen people.

Riki: How is this relevant? It’s irrelevant.

Ahuva: I would say that he's first of all a Jew but as it happens, he was born in Egypt. [. . .]

Hanna: Just for example, you have someone [. . .] who's Iraqi . . .

Ahuva: But in my mind I associate it first of all with his Jewishness.

Hanna: It's emotional.

Riki: You're associating the definition of Arabs with negativity.

Ahuva: No, no . . .

Riki: That's why you're not willing to be defined as an Arab country.

Leah: No, may the Arabs be healthy and may the Jews be healthy. The Arabs—[she is cut off].

Riki: Arabs and Jews are not contradictory.

Leah: . . . The Arabs' religion stands on its own right.

Riki: That's no contradiction.

Leah: Jews are a different religion.

Riki: You have a Muslim Arab and a Christian Arab—no contradiction there.

Leah: There's no such thing as an Arab Jew.

Riki: There is—people who've emigrated from Arab countries are Arabs, right?

Ahuva: You're shocking me!!!

Riki: Listen, I have a friend whose father is Syrian—Syria is not Arab?

Ahuva: He was *born* in Syria.

Riki: He's a Jew, nobody said he's not, but he's Arab.

Leah: No, no. He's not Arab.

Ahuva: Arab is not Jewish, you can't mix them.

Riki: There's no contradiction, it's not black and white.

Hanna: You're in the state (of Israel)—religion is related to the state.

Riki: That's right.

Ahuva: And it should be.

Leah: There are nationalities: you have Jewish, Arab and Christian nationalities.

Summoning all her might, Ahuva tried to make it clear to all that Jewishness as an identity takes precedence over country of origin, which is coincidental and determined by circumstances. Unlike the nationalism of the Jews of the Diaspora, which is secondary to their nuclear identity, Ahuva viewed the connection between nation and religion identified by Leah as natural and true, an organic part of the Jewish whole.

Riki continued this argument, looking for cracks in Ahuva's defenses.

Riki: OK, I have a question. Is there such a thing as a French Jew?

Ahuva: Yes, a Jewish Frenchman, not a French Jew.

Riki: Is there such a thing as a Russian Jew?

Leah: Yes, you also have Russian Jews.

Riki: So there is such a thing as a Syrian Jew?

Ahuva: Syrian Jew?

Leah: No.

Ahuva: A Jew first, and a Syrian second.

Hanna: Syrian Jew, yes.

Riki: Syrian Jew, is there such a thing?

Ahuva: There is.

Riki: Right, so Syrians—it's Arab countries?

Ahuva: Yes.

Riki: So you [do] have such a thing as an Arab Jew.

...

Ahuva: I don't mind being Moroccan or English, I don't mind that. But you're confusing things here.

Leah: You're confusing between nationality and the country he was born in.

Riki: Nationality *is* the country he was born in. You are a citizen of that country. This is your nationality.

...

Ahuva: There's religion and nationality. This country is only ours. We are the only ones who see it that way.

Ahuva: And [that's] how it should be.

Leah sharpened the distinction between “nationality” and “country of origin.” Riki's response was precise: nationality is determined by country of origin. In other words, for Riki, a person's “citizenship” is part of their nuclear identity, along with their religion. Leah, speaking for the others, identified Jewishness (the religion) as related to peoplehood,⁷ much broader than “citizenship.” That is, belonging to a nation is greater and supersedes citizenship in a specific country.

The facilitator attempted to focus on the group emotions:

Facilitator A: I want to explore something that is more emotional. Let's leave this argument for a while.

Ahuva: No, I'm not ashamed of it.

Hanna: You don't need to be ashamed. Why should you be?

Ahuva: No, this is a first for me . . . she's ruining a lot for me.

Facilitator A: What does it ruin? This is what I would like to explore.

Ahuva: I mean she is young, she's going to be a lawyer, and *she's* going to tell *me* that those born in Arab countries are Arabs!

Facilitator A: Ahuva, what does it ruin? Because I really have this feeling now that she's destroying something beautiful. [. . .] I want to understand this. I really care about how Ahuva feels.

Ahuva: I'm sorry, but this survey had a *purpose and it was far from innocent*. Why? Because they were led to give such answers.

Ahuva made a connection between Riki's positions and her social status. Riki is an outsider: she is young and will be a lawyer. I refer to this as a moral distinction. Ahuva has marked Riki as someone who belongs to a different social network, from which her political and moral positions stem. This strategy allowed her to rebuff Riki's positions without attacking her personally or offending her.

To Ahuva, Riki wasn't merely making an intellectual argument; this was a test of loyalty. Her suspicious attitude toward the purposes of the research stemmed from this same position. Riki was quick to try to ease her suspicions, and the conversation continued.

Riki: No one led toward anything.

Ahuva: Saying that someone born in an Arab country is an Arab Jew, and you were born in England so you are an English Jew. So what are you, American first or Jewish first?

Riki: Nobody said "first." It's both together.

Hanna: Or maybe even Jewish first.

Riki: Jewish first, you were born a Jew. You're a Jew first.

Ahuva: First of all, that's the most important thing.

Riki: You're a Jew first. I have no problem with that. You're a Jew first.

Facilitator A: So, there's one thing we all agree on. Jew first?

Ahuva: First of all, Jewish.

Riki: Yes, first of all Jewish.

Facilitator A: We can move on now.

Riki: Religion and faith come first.

At this stage, we could see the first signs of agreement: Jewish identity supersedes national (civil) identity. Would this agreement serve as a foundation for broader agreement? Ahuva continued to emphasize that civil nationality is merely a coincidence of negligible importance when compared to a wider and deeper identity—even if she was still finding it difficult to define its nature.

Ahuva: And the person's country doesn't matter. Suppose I wasn't a Jew and was born in Morocco, then why did I immigrate here? Because I don't want Morocco. It's this country that I want.

Riki: No problem, nobody argues with that. I agree with you. I just think that anyone born in an Arab country is by definition an Arab. It doesn't matter, it [the word "Arab"] just sounds like a curse [she sounds despairing].

Facilitator A: Wait a minute, Riki . . .

Riki: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt anybody's feelings, I really didn't.

Facilitator A: Wait a minute, Riki, I see that Ahuva is offended. What are you offended by?

Ahuva: To group me with the Arabs? With those who want to exterminate me?

Riki: But not all Arabs want to exterminate you.

Ahuva: You don't say?

Facilitator A: Wait a sec. Leah, is that what offends you? Are you also offended by that?

Hanna: Offended? No. I just want us to get to the point where she'll be a little willing to open the . . .

Facilitator A: What bothers you?

Leah: It bothers me that she groups the Jews and Arabs together.

Facilitator A: What's bothersome about it?

Leah: It bothers me because I was born and raised as a Jew, and I'll keep on being a Jew. They can't tell me that I am 20 percent Arab. I'm not. So what if I was born in Morocco?

It seems that Leah misunderstood the statistic. The facilitator corrected her:

Facilitator A: You mean it's a minority opinion? These things can't go together?

Leah: No. Absolutely not.

The discussion had become highly emotional. Ahuva spoke out of pain and vulnerability. Riki was frustrated but sensitive to Ahuva's pain. Hanna tried to help by encouraging the facilitator.

Facilitator A: I want Hanna's help. I feel that you've withdrawn a bit. What do you say?

Hanna: I want to say that for us, this word or adjective—Arab—is emotionally charged. For us it's the enemy, the Arabs are associated with hate, and we're not willing to accept the fact that they're saying [this about us], it's like a curse.

Ahuva: No, I've never heard that there's even such a thought.

Hanna: But this is just theoretical. Even when they asked me, I'm certain I said 'no.' I was one of those who said 'no', but after hearing Riki . . .

Ahuva: I said "no" two or three times!

Hanna: The truth is I think she's right. Because it's like saying German Jew, Russian Jew, Yemenite Jew.

Ahuva: All right, you can say Moroccan Jew, but don't ever say Arab Jew.

Hanna: You can also say European Jew.

Ahuva: You can.

Hanna: A Jew from America, you can say that.

Leah: You can, but not Arab Jew or Jewish Arab.

Hanna: Why? Because "Arab" does something to us emotionally, so that we . . .

Riki: Something bad, that's right.

Ahuva: Because "Arab" means a different religion.

Riki: It's not a different religion, it's not! "Muslim" is a different religion. [. . .]

Ahuva: There are no Jews among the Arabs.

Riki: All right, what does this have to do with it?!

Ahuva: And there are no Arabs among the Jews. [. . .] Why do you want to burden us with this term "Arab"?

Riki: It's not that I want to, I just think that it's . . .

Hanna: A Jew from Arab countries, it's like the Arab countries are a block of states. You have Jews from Europe, you have Jews from Africa, you have Jews from America.

Leah: American Jew, African Jew. But not Arab Jew.

Leah and Ahuva strongly opposed the attempt to equate the American and European geopolitical space with that of the Middle East. It appeared that Hanna was closer to Riki's social world. She is a friendly younger woman who does not "look Mizrahi" and speaks without an identifiable Mizrahi accent. Her habitus was quite middle class.

The facilitator made another attempt to break through Ahuva and Leah's wall of opposition.

Facilitator A: Wait a moment, Ahuva, I would like to check something.

Ahuva: By all means.

Facilitator A: I'll tell you what I understand. I see that there's a view here that 20 percent of the respondents . . .

Ahuva: They must have been from Peace Now.

(Laughter all round)

Facilitator A: God forbid! (in jest)

Ahuva: They [the Left] can be with them [the Arabs], we're not.

It is important to recall, once again, that there was no statistically significant difference between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim with regard to this question. The facilitator was identified as a left-wing, Ashkenazi man, and his self-deprecating humor revealed that he was completely comfortable in the group, despite his cultural and political identity.

The atmosphere in the group of non-college-educated Ashkenazi women was much less pleasant when this topic was discussed. The participants responded similarly to the danger of a blurring of the boundaries of Jewish identity. One participant was particularly dissatisfied with the behavior of the facilitator, a Jewish Israeli who was grew up in Germany and who identified himself as a German. She was not satisfied with protesting during the discussion; she later wrote a letter of complaint to the coordinator of the research project. With regard to the Arab-Mizrahi, the participants in the parallel Ashkenazi group also objected to the attempt to challenge the boundary the divides Mizrahim and Arabs (see appendix 1).

However, unlike the Ashkenazi protester, Ahuva showed affection for the facilitator during the discussion and in the informal interactions between sessions.

The session continued:

Facilitator A: Their frame of mind is probably very similar to what Riki's saying here, and Hanna also tends to agree—but I see that with you two it's very difficult.

Ahuva: Extremely [. . .]

Facilitator A: I'd like to find out what exactly is so difficult to accept here. What I understand is that you can think about the word "Arab" as something that describes a territory.

Ahuva: A territory?

Facilitator A: A territory.

Ahuva: No.

Facilitator A: Just a sec, just a sec . . .

Ahuva: A type.

Facilitator A: Perhaps this is the bone of contention.

Riki: That's the problem.

Facilitator A: Here's the conflict: Riki is saying, let's say, that there are Arab countries that include Algeria, Morocco, Tunis[ia], Egypt, and so on and so forth.

Ahuva: Right, accepted.

Facilitator A: In this sense I can say, if I'm thinking of "Arab" as a term that designates a territory, I would perhaps also want to add culture, language, tradition, heritage, history.

Ahuva: Yes.

Facilitator A: Then I can actually say that when I say "Moroccan Jew" [. . .] I can also add the word "Arab" to the word "Moroccan" in the sense that Morocco is an Arab country, just like Tunis[ia] is an Arab country, Kurdistan is an Arab country. That is, I think these words are interchangeable.

Ahuva: Why do you need to add?

Riki: I'll tell you why.

Hanna: Let *him* respond.

Facilitator A: One sec, one sec. I understand, that's the way Riki sees it, and Hanna can probably agree with that.

Hanna: I agree with that, yes.

Facilitator A: I believe that your difficulty accepting it is because in your experience, in what you learn here in Israel, "Arab" does not designate a territory, but something else—it's a type, like you said.

Ahuva: Yes.

Facilitator A: What does this mean—"type"? An Arab as a type, what does this mean?

Ahuva: I'll give you an example. It disturbs me greatly to think that we could belong together—they are so bloodthirsty, everybody knows that. . . . They murder their own daughters for family honor.

Riki: Who's "they"?

Ahuva: The Arabs. The Arab is an Arab.

Riki: Not everybody is like that.

Ahuva: What do you mean "not everybody"?

Riki: Not everybody.

Ahuva: Then where does it happen?

Facilitator A: Just a moment, Riki, we're trying to understand her point of view.

Ahuva: It does happen, in the Arab sector, for example.

Riki: But fathers kill their daughters in the Jewish sector, too.

Ahuva: Because of family honor?

Riki: Because he just freaked out because he had a fight with her mother.

Ahuva: This one is insane, forget about him.

Riki: This one is insane, so Arabs are also insane? They're not insane, they're just like that, and Jews are insane if they're like that.

Facilitator A: Wait a minute, Riki, let's hear Ahuva out. [. . .] It's not about right and wrong. We're trying to understand a worldview.

Ahuva: I'll tell you the truth: I never would have thought there would be such a question. Because I think it is deliberately biased, it's not right. [. . .]

A progressive ear could not help but hear Ahuva's last comment as a clear expression of racism or crude, overarching orientalism. In the past, when I would hear similar comments from traditional working-class Mizrahim, whether in my family or in public, they made me uncomfortable, since I wasn't used to hearing these discordant sounds in my academic and social circles. These attitudes frustrated me, especially when I knew the people who were expressing them, and I knew that they had warm and respectful relationships with Arabs in various areas of their lives (see Bronshtein, 2015; Mizrachi, 2016b). We will return to this issue at the end of this chapter.

An alternative reading of Ahuva's statements would not see it as stemming from crude racism that perceives Arabs as lesser humans, but rather as an attempt to differentiate between the primordial, elusive "Jewish" entity, which is not completely encompassed by religion or civil nationality, and the primordial "Arab" entity. She did this by drawing a border between these two entities, using broad cultural stereotypes that disparage Arabs.

To a certain extent the facilitator channeled her in this direction—that is, toward a place where she could not find any meaningful distinguishing characteristic of "Arabness" other than a broad collection of stigmatizing generalizations. In the final section, I will return to Ahuva's statements and situate them in a broader framework. In the interim, and in the immediate context of the interaction, it seems that Ahuva fell into this trap, and Riki's response was quick. Ahuva continued her attempts to clarify her position.

Ahuva: For instance, why do we not call them—they're Israeli Arabs, that is, they're not Muslims, but Arabs.

In response to Ahuva's comment, Riki continued to deconstruct, although this time from a surprising angle:

Riki: I would like to tell you something. This is where it starts. This is where I started to ask myself that question. Because why do we say "Israeli Arabs"? There's an entire population here that's called Israeli Arabs, who have nothing to do—perhaps their parents are Israeli Arabs, it's like they'd call me a Kurd—I'm not. My mother—not even my mother, but her mother. That means my grandmother. So, I'm Israeli, but an Israeli Arab person that is from my generation, let's say, he's called an Israeli Arab but has nothing to do with Arab countries. Absolutely nothing. He's

a Muslim Israeli. Hence the question about “Arab Jews;” also from the fact that in our society most people tend to think that “Arab” is, like, derogatory.

Hanna: That’s the point.

Leah: I’ll tell you what: we can’t tell who’s Muslim and who’s Christian, so we group them all as Arabs.

Riki: But why? You have many Christians that nobody calls Arabs.

Leah: We can’t tell whether he’s a Christian or a Muslim.

Riki: But it doesn’t matter. I don’t want to be able to [tell the difference], it’s like defining a Jew—[she is interrupted]

Facilitator A: Riki, how did you come to adopt such an unusual perspective?

Ahuva: She drives me nuts. [. . .] I’ve never seen . . .

At this point, Leah pulled out the ultimate test:

Leah: Would you marry an Arab today?

Riki: No. If an Arab is Muslim, then I can’t marry him and you don’t have Jewish Arabs. So, I can’t marry [him]. I have the utmost respect for the Jewish religion. I’m a Jew.

Leah: So, he’ll tell you what matters—“I’m an Arab.” You’re also a Jew.

Ahuva: . . . [respect for] your right to be a Jew.

Riki: I’m a Jew. I’m proud of that. I respect that. It doesn’t matter.

Facilitator A: What we know so far is that at least for Leah and Ahuva, the term “Arab” designates something that threatens a Jew. In other words, if I become an Arab, then I’m giving up on what’s dear to me in my faith, in my religion, in my belonging to this country as a Jew. Am I right? Is that what it means? [. . .]

Ahuva: One hundred percent. I don’t even want to hear about being associated with the Arabs. You can group me with the Moroccans, I don’t care. Not the Arabs.

Facilitator A: OK, we have made all the positions clear.

Leah: I want you to understand, I’m not a religious woman.

Ahuva: This has nothing to do with it, no way.

Leah: And I’m not ultra-Orthodox, I’m traditional. But there’s the Jew in me, I’m Jewish.

The others continued the test. Leah presented religion as an obstacle despite the fact that she’s not observant. The women used this question in an attempt to capture the root of her claim that “Arabness” and “Jewishness” cannot

be reduced to either religion or nationalism. Riki, a secular young Jewish woman who strongly believes in universal citizenship and a neutral state, still could not conceive of a marriage to an Arab citizen of her own state. As we will see below, this is not merely a one-directional Jewish stance or an expression of the racism of a hegemonic ethnic group. Crossing the Arab-Jewish boundary in the familial sphere is also considered taboo in Arab society, especially among Muslims.⁸

In sum, Ahuva's and Leah's position can be easily read as pure racism or broad and vulgar orientalism. A somewhat more compassionate reading would view them as victims of colonialism who are afraid to "contaminate" their Jewish identity, the most valuable civil resource in the Jewish state, with Arabness, since Arabness, from a modernist-Orientalist, Zionist-Ashkenazi view, is associated with the enemy and a backward culture (Shenhav, 2006). We cannot exclude this possibility. The alternative reading I suggest does not necessarily preclude Shenhav's observation that for Mizrahim, their Jewishness in the Jewish state is a most precious resource and being identified with the Arabs is therefore a threat. However, as I have argued all along, relating to the tie that the Mizrahim make between Jewish nationality and religion as solely a reactive response misses their independent stance as whole subjects—that is, as rooted Mizrahi subjects, whose core identity is rooted in the greater whole of Jewish peoplehood.⁹

Once again, the profound linkage to Jewish peoplehood appears to be greater than nationality, which is merely a coincidence of birth that has no bearing on core identity. It is even greater than religion, which is seen as an attribute, one among others in the neutral political body of the state. Most importantly, this type of peoplehood—i.e., the Zionist-national and the mythic religious—fuses the two historical narratives and temporalities. From their position as rooted subjects, Ahuva and Leah struggled to defend the Jewish whole from Riki's attempt to deconstruct it. In their view, the deep-seated animosity between these two "wholes" only exacerbated the threat that Riki's deconstruction posed to their core identities. For them, the Arab threat to the very existence of the Jewish state is a threat to the Jewish whole in which their identity is embedded, and they therefore saw it as a true, direct existential threat.

However, even Riki's processes of deconstruction go only as far as the family. We discovered this through the ultimate test of loyalty that Ahuva and Leah demanded of her: would she marry an Arab? The very question itself brought up the deeper religious dimension. At that point, Riki's subversive process came to an end. Without hesitating, she answered that she would not. The familial sphere was revealed to possess an impermeable boundary. This border perhaps attests to the strength of the kinship affiliation between the familial sphere and the imaginary notion of "peoplehood."

As the chapter proceeds, we will observe how these boundaries made their appearance among the Mizrahi men with a college education and Arab men with

and without a college education. We now turn to the focus group comprised of college-educated Mizrahi men.

Mizrahi Men with a College Education

The college-educated Mizrahi participants were presented with the same formulation of the survey question, together with the survey's results (pie charts), and asked to interpret the charts.

This group was made up of Amos, an accountant in his 50s who lives in Jerusalem; Nadav, a construction engineer in his 30s who lives in a *moshav* outside of Jerusalem; and Gadi, a computer technician in his early 50s who also lives in Jerusalem. Gidi is another participant who belongs to the group of men without college education.

Facilitator B presented the survey results from the question about Arab Jews.

Amos: [. . .] I'm saying that it's impossible to say that a Jew is an Arab despite the fact that he was raised in an Arab country [. . .]

Facilitator B: Why not?

Amos: Because "Arab" means the Arab nation. We're talking about the Arab nation. And for a Jew, it's the Jewish nation, which has been educated differently, unrelated to the Arabs. Although you do have [it's true that] their [i.e., Mizrahi Jews'] mother tongue is Arabic. [. . .]

Amos began the discussion by making a distinction between Arabness as a culture and as a nationality.

Facilitator B: What do you say, Nadav?

Nadav: You're talking about those people who haven't immigrated to Israel? If they haven't, then I'd say they . . .
[Everyone was talking at the same time]

Facilitator B: Let's pursue this line of thought.

Nadav: I don't know, if you ask, I don't know, you go to Algiers or Morocco, someone who's a Jew there and you ask whether he's an Arab or a Jew, then I would think he would be more Jewish than Arab, but he will still belong to the Arab nation.

Facilitator B: Will he, if he lives there?

Nadav: [If he] serves in the army? Like you have the Bedouins and Druze here? He will, but he's not a Jew, he's a Druze,¹⁰ try to see it from the other side. He belongs to the Israeli nation—same thing, just the opposite, that's the way I see it.

Facilitator B: You mean to say that if I participate in all spheres of life [in the Arab country], this makes me an Arab. Let's say, if I live in an Arab country and vote, and I'm a citizen and I fulfill my

obligations as a citizen, then this means I'm an Arab? Is that the basis of your argument?

Nadav: His nationality is Arab, yes. I'm looking at this from the other way around.

We note the difference between the position of Facilitator B, who spoke in terms of liberal citizenship, and Nadav's republican perspective, which makes a connection between his identity and his loyalty to the state and thus permits Jews to be Arab, and Druze and Bedouins to belong to the Israeli nation.

Amos: You also have Arabs who are Israeli.

Nadav: This is why I said that if you take a Druze who lives here now, who could have served with me and you in the army, he still wouldn't be considered a Jew. He would be a Druze, but an Israeli.

Amos: True. [. . .]

It would appear that there was agreement between Amos and Nadav with regard to military service as the ultimate test of loyalty in the republican discourse. However, as we found in the above-described group of women, here we also found the "organic" critical-progressive Mizrahi ready to make a connection between Arabness and Mizrahi-Jewish identity.

Gadi: I see things differently. It all comes back to me now. I don't see . . .

[They are all talking at the same time]

Gadi: I don't see it the way Amos does. When I look at it, I call it "Arab" within quotation marks. [. . .] with my parents, today it's not so much so. Let's say that thirty years ago, they were different from their surroundings. [. . .] They'd listen to Arabic songs, [Egyptian singers such as] Um Kultum and Farid al-Atrash and all that. So, we can call them Arabs within quotation marks, I don't mind the word.

Facilitator A: . . . culture.

Gadi: Yes, they came here with this culture. Their foods are different from Western foods. I don't consider it a derogatory term and I don't mind it. It makes me laugh a little because I've never considered that terminology, "Arabs." It sounds funny to me but yes, if you ask me, yes. I don't mind calling my parents Arabs, and I'm a son of Arabs despite being a Jew and the son of a Jew.

Facilitator A: But you wouldn't be offended?

Gadi: I don't mind that terminology, Arab within quotation marks, I really don't.

Facilitator B: Why don't you mind? I want to explore that. You don't mind, you hear [from others] that it bothers them very much—even Amos and David¹¹ said, “no way.”

Gadi: You know what, maybe [. . .] I'm just guessing here—maybe it's because they're both wearing skull caps [i.e., they are religious] and it bothers them because an Arab has another religion. I don't know, maybe that's why, I don't know. [. . .]

Amos: This has nothing to do with wearing skull caps, if you ask me. It's just a matter of . . . it's not just a matter of mentality. True, my grandfather lived in a remote village in southern Morocco—it's true that he was . . . maybe there was no difference in the way he was dressed.

Facilitator B: And the way he talked.

Amos: Compared to the neighbor who was a Muslim Arab. But no. He spoke Arabic, but he also spoke Hebrew. He had customs that 99.9 percent of the Jews who grew up in those places had. They were all religious or at least very traditional. [. . .] I remember what they used to tell me about my grandma's sister, who was abducted by an Arab sheikh in this village, abducted and raped and converted to Islam, and then all her brothers and sisters mourned for her [as if she was dead]. I mean it's obvious that from what I understand, the way I grew up, in the reality I grew up in, I see there is a tremendous difference between an Arab and a Jew, despite the fact that [a Jewish person is] living there. It's not the same as a French Jew, because you can have an American Jew and an English Jew and a French Jew. He identifies with the place he lives in; he chooses and is chosen. There's no difference in that regard, the only difference is that he's a Jew and the other is not—that's all.

Amos immediately tried to undo the connection that Gadi had established between Arab and Jew. He pulled out the stereotypes at his disposal and presented the historical picture of the deep chasm between Jews and Arabs in Morocco, which of course did not fully represent the complex reality that has been documented by historians. Then, as he concluded, Amos attempted to distinguish between civic belonging—that is, citizens who belong to different religions but live in the same liberal democratic state (England, France, the United States) and are therefore defined as British/French/American citizens—and what he was trying to define as tribal-primordial citizenship, or peoplehood, which cannot be reduced to civic nationality or solely to religious belonging. For Nadav, Gadi's position was bizarre and disconnected from the Mizrahi common denominator that he had found in the group.

Nadav: I want to ask Gadi a question which is sort of [. . .] sarcastic, big time. [. . .] Why does this guy [referring to Gadi, in third person] look to me like [. . .] he's landed from a different planet? He also has a Mizrahi background; you have set up this Mizrahi lobby here; it was probably deliberate. But Gadi looks to me like some kind of an alien.

Facilitator B: He said he's Ashkenazified.

And then, once again, the ultimate test:

Nadav: Would you mind it if your son or daughter married an Arab? Would you mind?

Gadi: I wouldn't want that. I wouldn't, but I don't know why. Prejudice.

As in Riki's case, what began here as a simple process of breaking down and reconstructing the Jewish and Arab identities concluded abruptly when the discussion reached the family sphere. Gadi rejected the possibility of intermarriage, without presenting any reasoned argument ("But I don't know why.") Then he added, "prejudice," a form of self-criticism that revealed that he was aware of the significance of his "submissive" and "tribal" attitude as viewed from the progressive-universalist position that serves as his reference point for political and moral decisions. He did not use any religious or nationalist argument to justify limiting the ability his children—autonomous equal individuals—to choose an Arab as their partners, and it seemed that he could not explain his response—not even to himself. There is a reason why both Riki and Gadi took the process of deconstruction only so far. Intermarriage is an almost impermeable border, beyond which they will not go, a boundary supported by demographic data on inter-religious marriage, which is almost non-existent in Israel.¹²

Arab Men without a College Education

From here, we move on to the Arab groups, since the possibility of a "Jewish Arab" identity obviously requires Arab participation. The ontological question "Who am I?" (Somers, 1994) includes the questions "Who am I not?" "Who are we?" and "Who are They?" (Jenkins, 2014). The question of where others—in this case, Arabs—set the boundary is also part of the definition of the "we" of Mizrahi Jews. This may have different meanings and implications in different contexts. For example, in a context in which Jews lived as a minority in an Islamic state, the meaning of "Arabness" would have been influenced by the inverse positions and relations of dominance, access to administrative positions, and the definition of "elite culture" that stems from the relationship of elites to Islam (see Tzur, 2010a).

In the current context, we have already been surprised twice. The first time was when we discovered that approximately 40 percent of the Palestinian citizens of Israel do not recognize Mizrahi Jews (those who came in the first wave from

Arab countries and spoke Arabic as their native language) and do not distinguish between them and other Jews. We were surprised again when a not-insignificant percentage of Palestinian citizens of Israel responded positively to the question whether Jews who were born in Arab countries and speak Arabic could be considered Arabs. Here, too, the statistical data left us wondering and full of curiosity as we began the Arab focus groups.

As noted above, the Arab focus groups were composed solely of men (one for those with and one for those without college education). Unfortunately, we were unable to recruit a focus group of Arab women from among those who participated in the survey.

The focus groups were facilitated by two Palestinians, a man in his 40s (Facilitator C) and a woman in her late 30s (Facilitator D), both of whom are academically trained and experienced group facilitators.

We begin here with the group of Arab men with no college education. The participants were Tariq, a 50-year-old merchant; Mustafa, a 64-year-old who previously owned a small business and is now living on disability benefits; and Fahmi, a 54-year-old who works in the janitorial department of a school.

As we began, the group members were asked to respond to the findings in the survey regarding the question “Is it possible to define Jews who speak Arabic as their native language and who were born and raised in Arab countries, as Arabs?”

Tariq: They [the Jews] don’t want to . . . it’s like a Jew whose daughter is marrying an Arab, and until forty years ago when we married and afterward they came here, and they returned them to the Jews, for example, those girls who got married and had children and called them Mohammed and Mahmoud, and the Jews came and took them and returned them to the Jews.

Facilitator C: But why?

Facilitator D: [Unclear]

Tariq: Yes, it’s true . . . It’s hard for them if you remind him that he was once an Arab.

Facilitator D: Why?

Tariq: Because he doesn’t want this, he’s in Israel.

Facilitator D: But why?

Tariq: When we come out and say that we are Palestinian Arabs . . .

Facilitator D: Yes.

Tariq: And for him, it’s the same thing. He defines himself as an Iraqi Jew.

Facilitator D: But why . . .

Tariq: No, he’s the one who says this . . . that he’s an Iraqi Jew.

Facilitator C: In your opinion, is he saying this so far . . .

Tariq: Yes, he is saying it . . . he defines himself as an Iraqi Jew.

In his effort to make sense of the question, Tariq alternated between placing responsibility for viewing nationalism as a defining principle on the Jews and the Arabs.

Facilitator C: Why shouldn't he say he's an Arab? Why doesn't he respond that he's an Arab?

Tariq: No way that he would say that he's an Arab, because he isn't an Arab.

Facilitator C: Why?

Facilitator D: But why?

Tariq: Because he is a Jew!

Mustafa: He's Jewish.

Mustafa lays down an ontological distinction: A Jew is a Jew.

Tariq: His source is Jewish. . . . His source is Jewish.

Facilitator C: His religion is Judaism.

Tariq: That's true.

Facilitator C: But why [not clear] Arab?

Tariq: Religion. . . . Religion. . . . Arab is a nationality.

Tariq complicated the picture by differentiating between religion and nationality.

Facilitator D: [unintelligible . . .] Jew or Arab . . . what is he . . . [unintelligible]

Tariq: He's a Jewish Jew. . . . Listen, when he's in the Jewish state, and don't forget that it's a strong state, too.

Facilitator D: Yes.

Tariq: And it's a state that controls the whole world, he's proud when people say that he's a Jew who lives in the Jewish Israeli state like, I'm a Jewish Jerusalemite.

Tariq remained on the Jewish terrain, explaining the importance of a strong Jewish polity in the construction of the Jewish identity of "Arab Jews" and identifying the state as a source of pride for the Jews. He showed full awareness of the fusion between religion and nationality among Mizrahim.

Facilitator C: That's the . . .

Tariq: But if he [unintelligible] or your origin . . . he'd tell you his origin . . . like me, for example, my origin is Iraq . . . I'm an Iraqi.

...

Tariq: Even if [unintelligible] to a place in Iraq? He wouldn't be an Arab, he would be an Iraqi Jew. . . . He would be Jewish.

Tariq distinguished between civic nationality, based on country of origin, and a broader national-religious identity. Like the Jewish subjects, he found it difficult to define this.

Facilitator C: The question that was asked wasn't for nothing and it is: Can a Jew who came from an Arab country—

Facilitator D: (cutting Facilitator C off) What do you think about that?

Fahmi: No, no.

Facilitator C: That they define him as an Arab?

Fahmi: No.

Facilitator D: Why?

Fahmi: Because . . .

Facilitator C: Mustafa?

Mustafa: No.

Fahmi: We define him as a Jew only. . . . He came here from an Arab country, that means that—

Mustafa: Listen to me—

Fahmi: He is a Jew there, and he's a Jew here . . . that's what I know.

Fahmi joined Mustafa and reinforced the ontological position: a Jew is a Jew, irrespective of where he is.

Facilitator C: Tariq, what's your answer to his question?

Tariq: I say something else, I say that he's a Jew who came from Iraq, Iran or Tunisia or Libya. . . . It's written on his ID card that he was born in Tunisia.

Fahmi: What does that matter?

Tariq: OK . . .

Facilitator C: Yes?

Tariq: That is, it doesn't matter if he's a Arab, Tunisian or Iranian. . . . It's written on his ID card . . .

Once again, Tariq holds on to the bureaucratic categories of the state as an expression of identity.

Facilitator C: It doesn't matter what's written . . . how do you think he can be defined? Can he be defined as an Arab Jew?

Fahmi: No.

Tariq continued, insistently.

Tariq: As a Jew, yes, if he knows the Arabic language really well, then yes. But not as an Arab . . . because . . .

Facilitator C: Why, in your opinion . . .

Tariq: But not as an Arab. Why should he be defined as an Arab?

Facilitator C: Why shouldn't he be defined as an Arab?

Facilitator D: What is the difficulty for you here, Tariq. That what?

Tariq: Arab means that he knows how to speak Arabic, but his nationality isn't Arab. . . . He's a Jew.

Facilitator C: How would you explain that some of them define themselves as Arab Jews?

Tariq: Arab Jews? That's a problem.

Fahmi: That's a mistake . . . in my opinion . . .

Tariq's classification implied that the "Arab Jew" is an objective possibility but would be politically problematic. For Fahmi the roots of the dichotomy (Arab/Jew) lie deeper; for him, these are two distinct entities, and confounding or conflating them would constitute a category error.

Facilitator C: But the way I understand the three of you, even if we are also refusing to define them as Arab Jews, we are not refusing that there are Western or Iraqi Jews . . . or . . .

Fahmi: I call him a Tunisian Jew or an Iraqi Jew, I don't call him an Arab Jew . . .

Facilitator D: What is the difficulty? What makes it hard for us to define him as an Arab Jew, with the conflict that you are talking about . . .

Fahmi: Because there are two nationalities here, Arab and Jewish.

Facilitator D: [Unclear]

Fahmi: If a person defines him as a Jew and an Arab, that is, if he has two nationalities. . . . Jew and Arab isn't possible . . .

Fahmi moved on to nationality as the source of the Arab-Jew division. At this point Facilitator D attempted to examine the emotional roots of their resistance.

Facilitator D: That is, we are afraid that he will be too close to me, or that . . .

Fahmi: No, no . . .

Facilitator D: That . . .

Fahmi: It's not like that, it's not like that . . .

Tariq: But they can't define themselves as Arabs . . .

Facilitator C: Why?

[. . .]

Mustafa: There's no connection, but . . .

Fahmi: No one can be an Arab and a Jew at the same time . . .

Facilitator C: But why?

Fahmi: He's either an Arab or a Jew.

Fahmi's stubborn reiteration may have been a sign of his distress.

Mustafa: [Can't be heard]

Fahmi: There's no connection . . .

Facilitator B: Because there's a conflict, we can't define them?

Mustafa: No, no, no.

Tariq: Absolutely.

Fahmi: No, no, no.

Mustafa: All this isn't connected to the conflict.

Facilitator B: What do you think, Mustafa?

Mustafa: No connection to the disagreement.

Facilitator C: In the definition of an Arab Jew?

Mustafa: No connection.

Fahmi: Yes.

Fahmi and Mostafa insisted on a primordial difference between "Arab" and "Jew" that was unrelated to and deeper than the political conflict, a tectonic difference that cannot be bridged. Tariq, on the other hand, consistently expressed a contextual perspective on the issue and viewed these categories as the product of nationality and politics.

Arab Men with a College Education

We now move on to the group of Arab college-educated men. The group was composed of Samir, a 31-year-old social worker; Zuheir, a 51-year-old construction engineer; Ziad, a 47-year-old who holds an MA in geography and urban planning and owns his own company; and Ibrahim, a 38-year-old physicist.

After a preliminary discussion about the precise meaning of the statistical responses to this question, Ibrahim began the conversation by making a conceptual distinction between Judaism as nationality and Judaism as a religion.

Ibrahim: First of all, we'll first turn to the answers given by Jews to this question. We should first of all make it clear that in Israel, "Jewish" refers to a nation and to a religion at the same time. Arab countries.

Ziad: But Judaism isn't a nationality.

Ibrahim: In Israel it is.

Ziad: Judaism is a religion.

Ibrahim: No, Judaism here is a nationality and a religion.
[silence]

Ibrahim: What is the nationality of the Jews? Jewish. Because Judaism is a nationality and a religion.

Ziad: No, there are different opinions on the subject.

The discussion among the college-educated participants was more abstract and began with a systematic clarification of the meaning of the terms. Ziad's comment revealed that he was aware that there is a variety of perspective on this issue.

Facilitator C: Explain a bit about a Christian. . . . That is, Facilitator D is registered as an Arab and they [the state authorities] registered me as an Arab. They registered Ziad as an Arab, they registered Mohammed as an Arab, and you also as an Arab, okay?

Facilitator C pointed to the role of the state bureaucracy in lumping together Christians and Muslims as "Arabs."

Facilitator D: What you're saying is that religion doesn't distinguish him [i.e., Arabs]. That is, Arabs . . .
[. . .]

Ibrahim: Now, if we say that the Jews, by religion, who were born in an Arab country, I would classify them as Arab Jews. Their nationality is Arabic and their religion is Judaism.

Zuheir: Yes.

Ibrahim: I want to explain that.

Facilitator D: That is, you're saying that the definition is possible.

Ibrahim: The definition is correct.

Facilitator D: For Ibrahim . . .

Ibrahim: Yes, I think that this is the correct definition because they are considered "Jewish Arabs."

Ibrahim made a logical conclusion, which led him to recognize "Arab Jews" as an objective possibility.

Facilitator D: Why? Can you explain that to me?

Ibrahim: Their religion is Judaism . . .
[. . .]

Facilitator D: Yes. [But] why did only one in four answer that way?

Ibrahim: Every Jew born in an Arab country refuses to accept this definition. He wants to forget that he's an Arab. Who does he call an Arab? The person he hates.

[General laughter]

Ibrahim: The one who hates them, that is, 20 percent of the Jews, you can call them "Arab Jews." Isn't that correct?

[General laughter]

Facilitator D: You mean those who answered . . .

Ibrahim: They hate the Jews [unclear, everyone talking at the same time]. . .
[. . .]

Ibrahim: He tells you "I'm Arab? Heaven forbid, no!"

Ibrahim recognized the feasibility of an Arab Jewish identity and held Mizrahi Jews responsible for resisting it. Ziad, however, viewed their position as harmoniously consistent with what he considered to be the desirable Arab position.

Ziad: That's good from an Arab point of view.

Ibrahim: Now the Arabs . . .

Ziad: Seventy-five percent of those who love them . . .

Ibrahim: Do you call them Arabs? Do you include these Jews among Arabs? Heaven forbid . . .

Ziad: Now (to the) 25 percent . . .

Ibrahim: Twenty-five percent understood the situation . . .

Ibrahim: But those that like them said they were Arabs . . .

Ziad: No . . .

Ibrahim: And the rest hate them.

[. . .]

Ibrahim: No, listen to me. . . . Seventy-five percent of the Arabs are telling you that they don't want them to be Arabs; what brought them to be Arabs? After all, they're Jews. . . . They're not Arabs; those [sic] with me—I can't stand them. What do you want, to bring me Jews that you define as Arabs? Now, those who understand the situation, that they are Jews who were born in Arab countries, are therefore Arab Jews.

Ibrahim maintained that while there is a logical validity of the definition of an Arab Jew, most Arabs (75 percent) had a "lack of understanding" or unwillingness of to recognize that logic and accept them into the Arab collective because of the animosity that they feel toward Jews.

Samir: I say that as long as Jews are found in Arab countries they can be defined as free Arabs.

Ziad: Arab Arabs. [Laughter]

Samir: [. . .] Put simply, when he arrives in this land, he stops being an Arab.

Samir pointed to the role of the Jewish state in defining the distinctions in identity between “Arabs” and “Jews,” including for those Jews who came from Arab countries. When nationalism is laden on to religion, the Jews stops being an Arab, according to Samir.

Facilitator C: He’s defined like that by whom? He’s defined that way or are you calling him that or is the state defining him like that?

Samir: I’m not defining him; I’m joining the 75 percent who don’t accept the category of “Arab Jew.”

Facilitator D: Why?

Samir: No, because it’s something . . .

Zuheir: Because it’s self-contradictory.

Samir: He’s either a Jew or an Arab.

It would appear that Samir, following Zuheir, returned to a more primordial distinction.

Facilitator C: There are still Jews living in the west; how do you define them?

Facilitator D: What does it do to you? Let’s [try to] understand how it affects you, Samir. What does this definition do to Samir? Why do you find it so difficult?

Samir: Because it doesn’t sound right to me, that is, there are things that a person can’t agree to, or straight thinking by a thirty-one-year-old who, from birth, was raised [to think] that there are Arabs and there are Jews, that there’s the occupation . . . there’s . . .

Facilitator C: Leave that aside in the meantime.

Samir: There’s evidence . . . that is, if you go to Egypt and claim that you’re an Arab Israeli, their response will be: “You’re a Palestinian Israeli? Why are you putting us on? There’s no such thing as an Arab Israeli, or a Palestinian Israeli. How can such a thing be possible?”

[. . .]

Samir: Just like an Arab Jew . . .

Samir supported the dichotomous position, but, unlike the men without a college education, his ontological narrative was well-reasoned and contained a contextual and political explanation. He explained the meaning of the political construction that he experienced in his childhood.

Facilitator D: What are you trying to say, that it's because of the situation here? Samir, is this category particularly difficult for you to accept?

Samir: Yes.

Facilitator D: If I understand you correctly, you mean that because of the existing conditions here, of the current struggle, this category is very hard for you [to accept].

Samir: That's right.

Facilitator D: For you personally.

Samir: Exactly.

Facilitator C: How would you explain the Jews' identity?

Samir: That they agree that they are Arabs?

Facilitator C: Because just one out of five . . .

Samir: Based on a racist rationale, you have one against the other . . .

Samir asserted that the social and political logic that led him to accept the Jewish-Arab dichotomy could not be the same process that Jews experience when they come to the same conclusion. In his words, racism is the source of the dichotomy—an accusation that he threw out, as if for no particular reason.

Facilitator C: Now you're joining Ibrahim . . .

Facilitator D: But the majority isn't interested in this definition. How do you explain that the majority says that this definition is incorrect? They also explain (it) just like you do? That is, do you think that the difficulty you have is shared with them? Or do they have other types of difficulties?

Samir: No, that they don't accept this category doesn't mean they the necessarily agree with one coming from the other direction, because there aren't very many possibilities.

Facilitator C: Do they [Mizrahi Jews] define themselves as Arab Jews?

Ziad: No, they're not proud of it.

Facilitator C confronted them with the radical position of the Mizrahim from the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow.

Facilitator C: There's a specific social movement in this country that has Jews who are Mizrahim, and one of them is a great researcher, he's even written a book called *The Arab Jews*.

Samir: Who is it? Sammy Smoooha?

Samir cited the name of a prominent Jewish sociologist of Iraqi origin who is not connected with the Rainbow. The group did not know anything about the activities of the Rainbow, nor did they appear to be particularly interested. The discussion returned to focusing on the Jewish majority.

Facilitator C: Is it possible that that they want to hurt them because they're Arabs, they'll call them Jews and not Arabs?

Ibrahim: Yes, those 80 percent.

Zuheir: Yes, yes.

Ibrahim: The 80 percent that love the Land of Israel.

Facilitator C: And they want to insult them [the Mizrahi Jews].
[. . .]

Ibrahim: That is, for them, we're talking about a curse, they're being Arabs.

Facilitator D: That is, (if) they call him an "Arab Jew," then it's a curse . . .

Ibrahim: A curse . . .

At this point, the discussion turned to Zuheir and Ziad.

Facilitator C: What is your explanation as to why they do say, Moroccan, Iraqi, or Yemenite? Could it be that, while they are fewer than in the past, there are still some who express themselves this way? That he doesn't belong to the Arab [people], but still uses this term? How do you look at these things, Zuheir? And what about the question that I've already asked?

Zuheir: I think that you can't say Jewish Arab, because those are two contradictory things. Either he's an Arab or he's a Jew. These are two nationalities. It's one or the other, it's impossible together. Now, the Jew who lives in Iraq . . .

Facilitator C: Why? Why? Why? Why the Arab . . .

Zuheir: You can define him as an Iraqi Jew . . .

Facilitator C: Why would the Jew whose mother tongue is Arabic [be . . .]

Zuheir: Iraqi Jew.

Facilitator C: His nationality is Jewish.

Zuheir: What's that?

Facilitator C: A Jew whose mother tongue is Arabic and his culture is Arabic?

Zuheir: Why would his mother tongue be Arabic?

Facilitator C: Why . . .

Zuheir: Arabic?

Facilitator C: Because the Jew who comes from Iraq would not know Hebrew, he would know Hebrew only as the language of the Torah.

Zuheir: Mother tongue.

Facilitator C: It's . . .

Facilitator D: But Zuheir . . .

Facilitator C: The language called “mother tongue” is the language that he grew up on, in his house . . .

Zuheir: Yes?

Facilitator C: And in his school, and in all those things . . .

Zuheir: It could be . . .

Facilitator C: Even the writers would write in Arabic.

Zuheir: That’s a scientific explanation . . .

Zuheir raised another possibility: the Jews who wrote about a possible Jewish Arab identity are Jews from Arab countries who are proud of their previous national identity, in the Arab nations from where they came.

Ziad: He (the Jew) is proud of his nationality. . . . He says it because he is a Tunisian, a Moroccan, an Egyptian, or a Halabi.¹³ He’s proud of this, but he doesn’t say he’s an Arab, because there would be a conflict about being an Israeli Arab, but he is proud of his homeland, where his roots are.

An argument developed between Zuheir and Ziad:

Zuheir: Naturally, because they come from Arab countries and speak Arabic, they would claim that they are Arabs . . .

Facilitator C: You mean because 20 percent are Mizrahim?

Zuheir: They are the ones who responded . . .

Facilitator C: Completely opposite from Ibrahim’s rationale.

Ibrahim: I am telling you, they are disgusted by the Arab nation!

Ziad: No, no, no!

Zuheir: No, exactly the opposite, they are proud.

Ziad: They are proud, believe me . . . they listen to Um Kultum . . .

Ziad: They miss their homeland.

Zuheir: Exactly. They miss the homeland.

Facilitator C: This is the last time I am asking you, Ziad. . . . My question is clear . . .

Ziad: I am telling you, my answer is that they miss their homeland, not that they are Arabs.

Zuheir: Not to being Arabs.

Facilitator C: My question is clear.

Ziad: They miss their country, not the state.

Ibrahim: Listen man, they curse in Arabic. . . . Is he proud of being an Arab?

Ziad: I'm telling you he's an Iraqi, or a Moroccan.

Ibrahim: So that means that they [the ones who curse in Arabic] aren't the ones who answered [that it's possible to be an Arab Jew].

Ziad: Yes . . .
[. . .]

Ziad: That's the group of Jews.

Ibrahim: No, I'm talking with Zuheir.

Ziad: No . . .

Facilitator D: Ah . . .

Ibrahim: Because they are cursing themselves when they say Arab. Could he define himself as an Arab?!

Zuheir: No, they are cursing one another. It's a sort of provocation.

Factually, Zuheir and Ibrahim were both wrong. The approximately 20 percent of the Jews who responded that a Jew could be an Arab were not mostly Mizrahim. From a critical Mizrahi point of view, the identity of the 17 percent of Jews who accepted the possibility of an Arab Jew, together with the additional 4 percent who responded "Don't know," is particularly intriguing. If there were a clear Mizrahi majority in this group, it could hint at a "hidden Arab identity" waiting to be "liberated." This would be consistent with Zuheir and Ibrahim's interpretations. A second possibility is that there is an Ashkenazi majority among the Jews in this group of respondents, in which case the critical reading would interpret the finding as evidence of an orientalist attitude, a common accusation in Mizrahi critical discourse. However, as noted, both of these hypotheses were disproved, and we found no difference between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim within this group of respondents.

In both Arab groups the discussion was lively, and the participants were clearly interested in the question. To a great extent, the group discussions resonated with the statistical finding among Arabs, since in each group one respondent expressed openness to the possibility of an Arab Jewish identity. Of course, we had no statistical reason to expect that the focus groups would produce results similar to the representative survey.

We also observed disagreements within both groups. Ziad, from the college-educated group, was open to the possibility of the existence of an Arab Jewish identity, and Tariq, from the group without a college education, rejected the possibility of its existence in Israel for contextual and political reasons. In this, they differed from the other participants, who viewed the Arab Jewish identity as a categorical error. In general, for most of the participants in both groups, the categories of Jew and Arab are separate and unbridgeable. The members of

the group without a college education presented a primordial view of Arabs and Jews as two stable identities, different from each other in essential ways that are neither related to historical circumstances or current conflicts. The opponents in this group presented an axiomatic, rather than reasoned, explanation, unrelated to context, time, or place. In contrast, the opponents to the idea of an Arab Jewish identity in the college-educated group provided historical and political context for their broad objections. At the same time, they, too, viewed these categories as stable and definitive, and thus they, too, were actually presenting a primordial position (based on kinship, blood, race, land, and other essential characteristics of belonging).

In both groups the discussion generally focused on the Arab Jewish identity as an objective possibility but did not even consider this identity as a political possibility. During the discussions, the participants did not draw any connections between the theoretical question of the possibility of an Arab Jewish identity and Mizrahim in Israel as a distinct, identifiable group. I note again that in the pilot stage of the research, we found that a significant percentage of Palestinian citizens of Israel were unfamiliar with the concept of “Mizrahi.” During the discussions, Facilitator C, who had been exposed to critical Mizrahi academics and activists during his studies and activism, used the term. But the term was not in common usage among the research subjects, and they tended to view the Arab identity of Mizrahim through the prism of the specific Arab country from which they came (Iraqi Jews, Moroccan Jews, and so forth). In other words, the Arab discussants did not use the comprehensive term “Mizrahim” and did not recognize Mizrahim as a “group.” They did not express any connection to those Mizrahim who have an Arab background and they did not even hint at a possible political connection between Mizrahim and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.

When Facilitator C mentioned the Mizrahi Rainbow, the political organization that promotes the Arab Jewish political identity, to the educated group, they had not known about the organization or its message. Nor did they express any particular interest in hearing more about the it or the political possibility it presents.

The focus groups echoed the survey findings. Overall, it would appear that the subversive political meaning of the Arab Jew has not reached the hearts and minds of Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

RETHINKING GROUP BOUNDARIES

We began our examination of the question of an Arab Jewish identity as an objective possibility from a historical perspective. From there, we continued into the present. As in the previous chapters, this empirical section began with a presentation of the statistical results of the question we were exploring. In this case, we explored the positions of Jews and Arabs regarding the possibility of

this identity and followed up with Jewish and Arab focus groups who interpreted the findings and cast additional light on their meaning.

Permeable and Impermeable Boundaries

In the Jewish focus group, emotions flared when the possibility of an Arab Jewish identity was raised by the “organic” representatives of the progressive-critical discourse (Riki and Amos). However, even for them, the dissolution of identities went only as far as the family sphere and they could not accept the possibility of inter-religious marriage. We see in the demographic data that a taboo on inter-religious marriage in Israel exists on a broader scale: the percentage of marriages between Jews and non-Jews and between Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians is minuscule.

This does not mean that in Arab Jewish encounters we do not find shared ethnic and cultural symbols. In Israel’s dense and crowded environment, Jews and Arabs meet frequently in public space—at work, at cultural events, in the media (Lamont et al., 2016; Lamont and Mizrahi, 2012; Mizrahi and Herzog, 2012). These meeting points are spaces that are open to negotiating social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002), part of the strategies used by the social players, especially Arabs and Mizrahi Jews, in the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries (Wimmer, 2013).

In previous research, I examined situations in which boundaries between Mizrahi Jews and Arabs are flexible in some spheres of life and almost impenetrable in others. Left-wing and human rights activists find this difficult to comprehend. Over a decade ago, I first presented the ostensible paradox of the evidence of friendly and respectful relations between Mizrahim and Arabs in the workplace. In my article “Sociology in the Garden: Beyond the Liberal Grammar of Contemporary Sociology” (2016), I presented a human rights activist’s confusion as she tried to make sense of a Mizrahi contractor’s genuine and human concern for his Palestinian workers and their living conditions, even though he held right-wing political views. Subsequently, research conducted by Vicki Bronshtein (2015) on the relationships between Jews and Arabs at mechanic shops in Israel’s geographic center, which was part of her MA thesis under my supervision, showed that relationships between right-wing Mizrahi workers and their counterparts among Palestinian citizens of Israel were proper, respectful, professional, and even friendly.

Progressive left-wing activists have long assumed that if the two sides were to meet in a common and relatively equal space, they would recognize their shared humanity as equal and free individuals and, as a result, all other identity boundaries (religious, national, ethnic, and so forth) would break down. However, according to evidence in the field, Jews and Arabs do indeed express their shared humanity in the workplace, but this remains in the work sphere and does not cross the boundaries of belonging and loyalty to the political collective. In the familial and political sphere, both sides define themselves in absolute terms of “us” and “them”

(Jenkins, 2014). Most do express a “universal humanity” in Enlightenment terms, but this does not lead to embracing a “politics of universalism,” which downplays the meaning of the group boundaries of religious and national identity. As Rogers Brubaker has noted, nationhood is not merely a “subtype of ethnicity” (2014), let alone peoplehood, in which religion and nationhood are fused and in which the rooted Mizrahi subject is ingrained. These boundaries remain intact, even in situations in which right-wing and traditional Mizrahim appreciate and identify with Arab culture.

About a decade ago, an Israeli television show provided a striking example of this when Nasrin Kadri, a Muslim singer, won first place on *Eyal Golan is Calling You* (2012), a variation of *American Idol*, in which Golan, a well-known Mizrahi star, searches for the next star Mizrahi singer. Kadri won thanks to high ratings from the audience and from Golan and his team of judges, who were delighted by the technique in her performance of Arabic songs, excitedly declaring that she is “the real thing.”

For decades, musicians working in the popular Mizrahi genre fought for recognition and representation within mainstream Israeli music (which was largely Ashkenazi). But an increased recognition of Arabic music did not provide evidence of a crossing of familial and political boundaries, and the Arab-Jewish connection remained contained within the boundaries of the cultural sphere.

This division between the different spheres of life provides an additional perspective on the limits of the liberal grammar that I have been discussing throughout this volume. As I will show in the following section, emancipation from the liberal grammar allows us to turn our questions from the “inconsistent Mizrahim” to progressive activists and critical researchers alike. The question we should be asking is: why do the differences in Arab-Mizrahi relationships in various spheres seem so strange? So enigmatic? Why do progressive researchers and activists view this as an unexplainable contradiction?

The Limits of the Liberal Grammar

The poet Robert Frost (1914) wrote that “good fences make good neighbors.” He captures a key part of the liberal grammar from which critical activists and researchers draw their political and interpretive positions. They start out from the individualistic ontology, which sanctifies the autonomous individual who is equal and has free will and rises above religious or national boundaries, all of which are perceived as secondary or a hindrance. From this, they draw the assumption that if the two sides would only “know each other” they would find their shared humanity. Our findings show that signs of common humanity among traditional and nationalistic communities do not require them to erase the groups’ religious, national and/or familial boundaries. Rather, maintaining group boundaries allows for recognition and even an embracing of common human unity.

Research intended to examine the manner in which Jewish and Muslim religious groups view peace and shared life reveals the significance of boundaries for both groups. This earlier research (Mizrachi and Weiss, 2020) was based on meetings between Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox Jews with right-wing political orientations and religious Muslims who belong to the Islamic Movement. An ethnographic scene captures the essence of the encounter. The scene took place after a four-day dialogue between these two groups held in the ultra-Orthodox city of Elad, where the authors were participant observers:

The atmosphere starts to prickle once Rabbi Aryeh Deri, the controversial and charismatic leader of the ultra-Orthodox Shas Movement and a former Minister of the Interior, bursts into the room, together with his entourage. As Deri enters, the speakers immediately vacate the dais for him. After describing his many endeavors as a government minister, highlighting the mobilization of resources for projects aimed at reducing institutional discrimination against Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel, he animatedly rattles off the similarities between the two communities while reminding the audience of their deep common roots in a highly religious, traditionalist Middle Eastern culture that respects its elders. He employs their shared linguistic heritage to support the creation, if only momentarily, of a shared warm and comfortable milieu. One theme resounds above all others: “We do not want to assimilate!” Deri’s proclamation earns loud, across-the-board applause. By “we” he means Jews and Muslims alike. Deri’s partiality for clear, stable social boundaries powerfully resonates with the audience in their use as foundations for a shared peaceful and respectful political space. In any typical peace forum convened by leftist secular liberals, Deri’s statement declaring the necessity of walls would be considered offensive, implying as it might ethnic prejudice, racism, or fractured intergroup relations. So why did Deri say what he did in the midst of this open, warm and friendly setting? Why would he suggest reinforcing the walls between Arabs and Jews? And why would anyone celebrate separation precisely at a moment of bonding? (p. 172–73).

From within the safety of religious and national borders, the two groups (which included both men and women) show clear affection for each other, including body language and warm handshakes, embrace shared humor in both Hebrew and Arabic, and hold similar positions on the education of children. The participants from both groups viewed themselves as the representatives of their wider communities, and not merely as individuals speaking solely for themselves, when they addressed vital, controversial political issues.

We compared this observation with observations conducted among liberal-secular peace activists and rural Palestinians that took place in the South Hebron hills in the West Bank (Mizrachi and Weiss, 2020). First, the social and cultural distance between the peace activists and the rural Palestinians led to an awkwardness that characterized the whole meeting, while the inter-religious meeting was characterized by a sense of social ease. Second, at the inter-religious meeting

there was a shared belief that religious boundaries constitute a sacred marker that should not be questioned, and this was reflected in the seating arrangements: the genders were separated (with the exception of married couples, who were seated next to each other), in accordance with customs and religious observance in both communities. However, in the southern Hebron Hills, the Jewish peace activists expressly requested that everyone mix together and sit on the floor. The Palestinians refused, and the Palestinian women brought themselves chairs and sat outside the circle.

While the liberal imagination views religious and national borders as an obstacle to recognition of shared humanity, because they prevent the autonomous and free individual from fulfilling his wish to cross group boundaries in all areas of life, including in the familial and the political spheres, in the traditional-communitarian model, maintenance of the religious and political boundaries is a condition for the recognition of the other's humanity and the creation of shared lives.

As we moved from the past to the present, we learned that Arab Jewish identity is an objective possibility. However, probing the conditions of possibility reveals that the rooted subject, whether Jewish-Mizrahi or Arab-Muslim, draws clear lines between different spheres of life. While friendship, mutual respect, and cultural affinity can be maintained in the public sphere, in work, and in culture, the familial sphere (marriage) and the political sphere (loyalty to the political community) remain impermeable. The progressive-critical discourse that is based in liberal grammar and predicated on sanctified individual autonomy demands complete behavioral consistency across all spheres of life. Indeed, in many progressive communities, the refusal of one individual to marry an individual from another religious community is seen as racism. The theological roots of this position will be discussed in the concluding chapter. For now, I will say that recognition of the meanings of the rooted subject in general, and of the Mizrahi subject in particular, is necessary not only in order to understand the limitations of the liberal-progressive interpretive position, but also to broaden the political imagination and face the challenge of living together with difference.

For the rooted Mizrahi subject, maintaining the familial boundary and political loyalty to the Jewish people and the Jewish state serves as a defense of their connection to the Jewish whole and Jewish continuity. The distinction between work and cultural spheres, on the one hand, and the political sphere, on the other, along with the defense of the familial and political spheres, enable the rooted Mizrahi subject not only to "discover" the humanity they share with Arabs but also to experience a deep emotional connection to some aspects of Arab culture, with which they are intimately familiar in their personal and communal lives.

In the next chapter, we will examine the significance of defiance, which is another tenet of the liberal grammar, once again through the eyes of the rooted Mizrahi subject.

Rootedness and Defiance

Visions of Morality and Social Change

DIVERGING FROM MULTIPLE HERMENEUTICS: GUT REACTIONS AND MORAL INTUITIONS

Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter is the result of an unexpected turn in the course of the research. At the end of the previous round of the focus groups, many of the Mizrahi informants told us that they would like to come back to continue to talk about the topics they had discussed. Although the request excited us, we were not surprised, since the participants had impressed us with their involvement, interest, and strong desire to express their opinions and voice their concerns throughout the process. In response to this request, I diverged from the methodology of multiple hermeneutics, which is based on group discussion of the statistical findings of the survey the participants themselves had created, which we had pursued to this point.

IDEAL-TYPE VIGNETTES

Instead of creating a conceptual discussion about the gaps between desirable and the existing situations, I chose to examine the respondents' "gut reactions" and moral intuition and experience (Kleinman, 2006) with regard to "real" or "archetypical" people. We presented the informants with four vignettes about four protagonists; each protagonist was composed of different characteristics, family background, sexual orientation, place of residence, occupation, attitudes to the state of Israel and Israeli society, general political and moral positions, and political activism.

In creating these protagonists' stories, we included components of the liberal grammar in each of the stories in order to confront the respondents with "real people" as tangible versions of the "good person." The protagonists in the vignettes were presented as complex figures, and I deliberately created an ostensible dissonance in the participants' minds. That is, in each of the protagonists we combined different units of meaning that belong to separate worldviews or to different types, in order to challenge the participants' social taxonomy. (For example, we described an individual with right-wing positions who is active in the LGBTQ community).

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP MORAL EXPERIENCES: CREATING THE GROUPS

In constructing the groups, we recognized, on the one hand, that up to this point, the moral experience of the participants and their gut "sense of right and wrong" (Kleinman, 2006, p. 2) had been examined among strangers that shared similar demographic characteristics, forming relatively stable organic groups.¹ We had assumed that the group would allow for the emergence of an echo chamber for shared intuitions while also serving as a space in which differences in moral intuitions could take shape. This assumption proved to be correct. Yet, as we have witnessed throughout the previous chapters, the moral experience of the participants as individuals evolved during the interactions with others. As anthropologist Webb Keane has noted, "We do not discover ourselves already fully formed among others, with whom we must then contend. Rather, we come to be who we are within, and by virtue of, relationships with others, their bodies, their possessions, their languages, the ways they inhabit our imaginations and emotions. What follows this claim is far from settled" (2010, p. 66).

In other words, the relatively harmonious relationships among the participants, whom we had categorized as belonging to the same social network of meaning, did not necessarily mean that their individual moral experiences were identical or that the moral and social positions that they brought to the group were fully formed or definitive. Indeed, the social network of meaning chosen on the basis of their demographic characteristics as a "group" were fairly stable.² On the other hand, we have seen that the participants often disagreed among themselves although they reached common group positions through their interactions. These moments of disharmony provided an opportunity for a more nuanced reading of diversity within rootedness.

This time we created two new, mixed-gender groups, one of participants without a college education and the other of participants with a college education. The decision to create groups differentiated by educational level but not by gender stemmed from the class similarities we had observed in the women's and the men's groups, as well as from technical requirements (given the small numbers of participants available in this round.) The choice of only male protagonists was a

deliberate methodological consideration, intended to enable us to avoid adding gender differences to the already-complicated profiles.

DEFIANCE AND MORAL REASONING

I begin this introduction to the empirical section by presenting the most salient, central finding: of all of the characteristics of the fictitious protagonists we created, “defiance” against the social and political order in the name of external universal reason and as a way of living a moral life generated the strongest objections from the participants. Participants in both groups viewed social change as emerging from *relational reasoning* that derives from social relationships within the existing order, which is not imposed in the name of any universal moral principles.

Defiance as a Derivative of Universal Reasoning

Among moral and political communities identified with the progressive left in academia, politics, and civil society, the act of defiance against the social order derives directly from the belief in universal reason. This is ostensibly the result of moral decisions based on general Kantian principles that guide mature individuals as they act according to their consciences with regard to the existing social order. It is a universalist position that dictates a never-ending struggle for the rights of various groups perceived as “victims” of hegemony.³

As anthropologist Katriel (2020, p. 66) writes, “Defiant speech is one mode of resistance in grassroots activism, representing an attempt to intervene in the public sphere by challenging hegemonic constructions of reality and the power arrangements that sustain them.” Katriel further defines defiance as an action that is intrinsic to life in democratic, modern liberal societies and notes that “protecting expressions of lack of consent is the test and hallmark of democratic societies, ensuring the plurality of the public sphere” (p. 2). Katriel describes the discourse of defiance as it finds expression within the activities of the peace camp that she investigated—identified with the progressive left and a predominantly homogeneous, elite group of well-educated Ashkenazim (Hermann, 2009).

In general, for many progressive activists, the struggle against the existing order does not merely represent one possible agenda among many; rather, it is a moral duty of the conscientious and “good person” whose actions stem from a deep political and moral commitment to subvert the social order through the politics of defiance, in the name of “liberation” and in order to bring about social change.

Rootedness and Relational Reasoning

As we have noted, participants in both groups objected to the politics of defiance and believed that social change could be achieved from within the existing order rather than constant disruption of that order from an external position based on universal morality. They believed that the moral justification for social change is to be found in relational reasoning that derives from life within the

social fiber of the Jewish Israeli polity. There were, however, differences between the groups.

For the middle-class subjects, Mizrahi progress within the existing order is the organic route to social change. They experience themselves as full members of the Israeli Jewish mainstream, and the horizons ahead are open. They are thus not particularly troubled by instances of discrimination on the part of Ashkenazim that still occur here and there. They envision social change as a result of hard work, achievement, and active participation in the formation of the Jewish Israeli mainstream. They reject defiance in the name of “Mizrahiness” or the representation of Mizrahim as an oppressed minority group. The subjects from the working class, by contrast, view the politics of defiance as a threat to their identity and a challenge to the religious and primordial borders of the Jewish state.

It is important to note that the notion of relational reason creates an immediate reference to critical approaches that view relational power as merely a reflection of an actor’s position in the power structure. The reading that I am suggesting here does not deny the existence of hierarchies and power relations; however, it does not view the moral experience of our subjects in the field as simply produced by an existing power structure (as noted in the presentation of the liberal grammar in the introduction). The suspension of over-suspicion requires a suspension of the stable meaning that we researchers attach a priori to “structures,” and the absolute and external meaning that we give to “morality” derives from universal reason, which is deeply embedded in the liberal grammar of the critical discourse.

From a critical viewpoint, this discussion is an opportunity to revisit the various guises of false consciousness. To the critical eye, the position of the working-class Mizrahim appears as an internalization of the neo-liberal discourse that prioritizes an ethos of a meritocracy, according to which “anyone can make it,” a naïve belief in the Israeli version of the American Dream, while ignoring power relations and mechanisms of social reproduction. However, their experience of mainstreaming is revealed to be grounded in reality. As we saw in chapter 3, the participants are indeed experiencing social change and upward mobility, and Mizrahim are increasingly taking part in the formation of the Israeli mainstream in social, cultural, economic and political spheres.

The working-class participants’ objections to defiance stem from their deep need to defend the state and its Jewish character and the boundaries of collective identity on the basis of primordial codes (such as kinship and the ethics of belonging to the Jewish people) and/or religious codes. From a liberal-progressive point of view, this position is often seen as repugnant; even if it recognizes groupness and promotes the value of diversity, the liberal-progressive point of view finds it difficult to accord moral value to intergroup boundaries or to find a role for them in the liberal scheme of things, especially when they collide with individual autonomy.

It would appear that it was on the basis of this position that the facilitator reproached the participants in the working-class group. In response, they tried

their best to convince him that their rooted position does not make them “bad” or “immoral” people who lack compassion or human sensitivity. They attempted to present evidence to support their contention that that are kind toward others. However, they found it difficult to present an articulated, thought-out and coherent thesis that would explain how their rooted position, which denies defiance as a prime channel for social change, squares with their morality.

Traditionalism and Defiance

In the final part of this chapter, we will attend briefly to the traditionalist school in the new Mizrahi discourse, which articulates a moral language for its position and seeks to provide deep cultural content to the experience of rootedness. This school presents rootedness as a valuable social resource that forms the foundation for a coherent cultural and political program for social change. Perhaps it is not surprising that members of this group belong to the well-educated Mizrahi middle class. These activists make tradition the basis for an identity within the liberal framework of identity politics. For example, they demand recognition of the Mizrahi rabbinic tradition and equal representation of Mizrahi tradition within the public religious educational system.

On a deeper level, some intellectuals from the traditional stream (see, for example, Buzaglo, 2008) view traditionalism not as a return to the past, but as a dynamic revitalization in the present that is in constant flux and adapts itself to the times (see also Toubul, 2021). While in the progressive liberal discourse, primordial and traditionalist norms are usually seen as problematic, for traditionalist intellectuals and activists these primordial and traditional norms provide the key to the resolution of deep divides within Israeli society, such as left-right and secular-religious.

Furthermore, for Buzaglo the traditionalist movement, which is deeply planted within Jewish tradition, simultaneously engages with parallel movements around the world.⁴ Common to all these movements is the view that traditionalism is not merely a “culture” in the folklorist’s sense or a leftover from a dark, oppressive past, but rather a valid, alternative source of authority for the political and moral order.

I began this chapter, unlike the previous ones, by highlighting some of the central insights from the findings. I chose to do so in order to equip readers with a general map that might help them place the detailed dialogues that I present below within a clear analytic framework.

THE ENCOUNTERS

In both groups, the discussions opened with a brief reflection on the participants’ experiences in the previous meetings. Immediately following this, the facilitators explained that they would read each vignette, and after each reading, they would then ask the participants to rate on a scale of 1 to 4 how close they felt to each protagonist.

The four protagonists (whose full vignettes are given in appendix 3) were:

1. Shmuel, a heterosexual man of Iraqi origin. He is a teacher and has a family. He holds strong moral positions identified with the political left and believes that control over another people is morally corrupting. He expresses his concerns about the state of human rights in Israel.
2. Shaul, a gay man of Iranian and Sephardic Mediterranean origin who lives with his partner with whom he is raising a child. He is a successful economist who has “made it” by dint of his own efforts. He is identified with the political right and expresses his concerns about the future Jewish identity of the state in which his son will grow up.
3. Reuven, a Mizrahi straight male, who lives in a heterosexual family. His wife is the primary breadwinner, while he works as a maintenance man. He also volunteers with an organization that prepares youth for combat army service (a well-regarded “national mission”).
4. Yossi, a Mizrahi man who was unable to attend college because he devoted himself to supporting his family. He is hard-working and self-made and has managed to build a successful company. He gives to charity and supports the needy, contributes to the neighborhood synagogue, and tries to attend on Sabbath more often. He is not interested in getting involved in politics or social activism.

We will first discuss the group of men and women without a college education. These group members had already participated in the previous sessions divided by gender. To refresh the readers’ memory, we will briefly reintroduce them here.

Men and Women: Defending the State from Defiance

This group included three young men: Eliran, 20, an instructor in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) technical high school; Ron, age 20, a soldier on active duty; and Yehezkel, 28, a Jewish religious artifacts salesman. The older participants were Haim, 60, a factory worker; Gidi, 60+, a retired IDF veteran; Sasson, 65+, a butcher; Herzl, 47, religious, a small businessman; Hannah, a mid-50s former secretary in an industrial plant; and Ahuva, a retired nurse in her early 70s.

Each time, after reading a vignette, Facilitator B asked the participants to indicate on a scale from 1 to 4 just how close they felt toward the protagonist, reminding them that 4 meant very close and 1 indicated a sense of distance.

After they had rated the 4 protagonists, the participants were asked to reveal their answers:

Gidi: 2, 2, 3, 4.

Eliran: 2, 3, 4, 3.

Herzl: 1, 1, 3, 3.

Ron: I gave everybody a 2.

Hanna: 2–3, 3, 3, 3.

Ahuva: 2—but I’m not really happy about it, maybe just 1.5. I would give the next guy a slap, barely a 2. The third—4; the last one—1.

Yehezkel: 1, 2, 4, 4.

Sasson: 1, 1, 4, 4.

Haim: 1, 2, 4, 3.

Facilitator A: Now we will look at each character, and we will understand what was praiseworthy and what you criticized. We will try to understand your decisions. Because what is really important is to understand our thinking. It’s clear that there isn’t any right or wrong here from our point of view, but what really interests us is the perception that guides you with regard to each character. We’ll start with Shmuel. You remember Shmuel Farhi. Why [did you give him] a 2?

Gidi: The first part of this small news story—I was very pleased with it. He says he’s a teacher in Sderot.⁵ [. . .] In the less personal part, he writes [. . .]: “The conflict with the Palestinians is corrupting us.” [. . .] Why “corrupting”? Say there is an unresolved issue . . . you express your views in the ballots. You have freedom of speech. Next, he writes, “We have to recognize that we must establish two states for two peoples.” I say it’s this way, and you say it’s that way. We have a government, it was elected, let it negotiate. We want what’s best—why go to extremes? He says “must.” What do you mean, must? Come to the negotiating table, talk to them. Maybe we can reach a compromise? The last issue [. . .] migrant workers. Some say “I’m for it” and [others say] “I’m against it.” I’m thinking about this too, and I say, we need some of them and we don’t need all of them [to be in Israel]. Why fight [among us Israelis]?

Gidi was the first to express clear, sharp objections to Shmuel’s defiance of the state. Gidi was aware of the unsolved problem in the Occupied Territories but opposed a sweeping position that views the situation as corrupting. He was furious at the left’s presentation of its moral position as a supra-position above the political order and the elected government. Gidi did not present a primordial position that denies the legitimacy of electoral democracy. Rather, he viewed the elected government as representative of the state and rejected the existence of a supra-moral position that is above the “rules of the game” that stem from social relationships within which we act.

As in the previous chapters, the Mizrahi subjects in this group strongly opposed the idea that the state is involved in an evil that is corrupting society and that they

must therefore defy the government. They rejected the very concept of opposition to the authority of the state and the government. For them, the state is not a neutral instrument that has failed to protect the rights of universal citizens and non-citizens, whether deliberately or not. They identified with the government because “the government is the state, and the state is us.”

Facilitator B: What upset you the most about Shmuel?

Haim: [. . .] You don’t have to fight for the migrant workers and homosexuals. What is there to fight about? You have migrant workers [in Israel]. Somebody must take care of it from the top. I think we don’t need them here. You have to bring in the desirable amount, as they used to decide, and not let their numbers grow bit by bit. They’ve multiplied here too much. [. . .] They’re brought for a specific job. They finish and must go back home. That’s my perspective. [. . .] God forbid, if he’s working he deserves everything. When he’s here, he’s here—he’s been brought here to work. God forbid there would be slaves here—these are not slaves. He can come and get all that he deserves. But [once] his stay is over, goodbye, thank you, here’s your [flight] ticket.

Haim reinforced the ethnic-national starting position from which he drew justification or lack of justification for the struggle for others, the authority of the state and its leaders, and the boundaries of identity and citizenship. According to Haim, social problems are supposed to be solved in a top-down manner by the government. It is not the role of the individual citizen to defy the government, and there must be a clear division between the in-group and the out-group, that is, between “us” and “them” (guests, foreigners, strangers, and so forth).

The discussion continued:

Yehezkel: They call it “social ills.” Now, these migrant workers they have children, they all go to the military—celebrities. The migrant worker children—who are they anyway? We have Jewish children, our own children across the street here. A child goes hungry. I have to worry about him first thing, “the poor of your own city take precedence.” If it’s the child of someone from the Philippines, then with all the sympathy—and there is love, the people of Israel are compassionate and merciful and truly care for each other—I will give him Bamba [a popular Jewish children’s] food. I have to be concerned with him now [before anyone else].

Yehezkel presented the Talmudic verse, “the poor of your own city take precedence” (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 71a) which distinguishes between those who are “family” and those who are outside the family. However, he added, this

boundary is not impermeable and does not lead to a lack of compassion and sensitivity for the other.

Yehezkel was angry at attempts to dissolve these primordial boundaries, for example, celebrities who dissolved family boundaries. This echoed descriptions in the local media of initiatives taken by Hollywood celebrities (such as George Clooney and Angelina Jolie) for the benefit of underprivileged children throughout the third world. From his rooted position, Yehezkel offered an alternative to the politics of universalism. He drew authority for this moral position from Jewish tradition, rather than from a personal conclusion. He did not express himself in the singular; rather, he spoke in the name of “the people of Israel,” which had been so vilified and of whom he is a part. Our people, he tried to explain, are compassionate toward people and children from other peoples, but compassion and offers of aid do not entail acceptance of the universal regime supported by the progressive left.

At this point in the discussion, we could already discern repeated objections to attempts, which they identified with the progressive left, to label them “immoral people,” along with their vociferous attempts to express their own position about the group boundaries as morally valid.

Facilitator A: I want to check with Hannah. The score you gave seems to be exceptional—2.5.

Hannah: The first part [of the vignette] was nice, just fine. A guy with a social mission who’s happy with what he’s doing in life. Very nice. In the second part, it seems to me he fights against everything that can be fought. It’s not like he picked a certain direction or something. He seems to me that he’s looking for a battlefield, and wherever there’s war, he goes there. That’s how I see it.

Facilitator A: So there’s something not genuine there, you feel.

Hannah: Yes. [. . .] I believe that when someone is an activist, [. . .] he can promote one goal, maybe two or three, but not twenty! It shows that he simply enjoys saying that he fights or that he’s active.

Eliran: [. . .] In a certain way he does care about society, simply not about the right people. He’s looking for the margins of the margins, people that I don’t understand how you can call them Israelis and what they have to do with Israeli society. They have human rights and labor rights. I don’t believe migrant workers should be given permanent status or citizenship.

[. . .]

Herzl: There’s a slight difficulty. You wanted to show us the dilemma between the first and second part—or is it the same person? Because I think that until the end of the first paragraph, it’s a

person who lives in Sderot, and once you start with the second, then he's already moved, there's no such thing.

For Hanna, who is one of the less traditional participants without a college education, excessive activism created a problem of credibility. Eliran was concerned about the groups he defends and emphasized the structured boundaries of the politics of care. In Herzl's view, this protagonist could not simultaneously contain all of the contradictory characteristics. That is, the protagonist could not be categorized within Herzl's taxonomy because he combined components of meaning that do not belong to the same worlds.

Facilitator B: Let's move on to Shaul. We have more diversity here, 1—3.

Facilitator A: Let's take someone who chose a 1.

Sasson: Once he started talking to me here about where he lives with his male partner, he lost me completely. I don't get along with homosexuals. Don't get along with them, there's no helping it.

Ahuva: Then don't. I don't understand what's it to you people.

Sasson: I don't get along—that's my opinion. These people are corrupting all that's good in society. I live in Tel Aviv. She [Ahuva] lives in Afula, she doesn't know what goes on in Tel Aviv. [. . .] The demonstrations, the pride parades they have in Tel Aviv. Cut the nonsense. You can see them [everywhere]. They're corrupting all that's good. [. . .] Once he said, "I live with my [male] partner," he lost me.

[Everyone began talking all at once]

Up to this point, the group had proceeded as a harmonious echo chamber, in which the participants supported each other's moral intuitions, forming, in Durkheimian terms, collective representations. But although Sasson presented an overtly homophobic position, the other participants did not broadly dismiss Shaul's sexual identity. Ahuva's objections to Sasson's position led to tensions. Ahuva is "on the same team": she is made from the same organic fiber as Sasson, shares the same social network of meaning, and lives in the same moral community. Sasson could not simply dismiss Ahuva's position by claiming that she belongs to a different, despicable, and external moral community. He could not tag Ahuva as a "secular, left-wing progressive."

Sasson attempted to resolve their moral collision on the basis of differences in their hometowns: because she lives in a smaller, peripheral city, Ahuva is naïve. However, the other participants did not join Sasson's position about Shaul on the basis of his sexual preference, either.

The discussion continued:

Gidi: Professor Uzi Even used to lecture here. He is an educated man, an enlightened person, he is a university lecturer.

Sasson: So what? So what if he's a professor? He's messed up. Mentally, he's messed up.

Ahuva: Why? Is it his fault? Nature made him that way.

Sasson: It's not nature, it's him.

Ahuva: It's not him.

Sasson: Don't tell me no.

[Everyone began to talk at once]

Facilitator B: We understood what Sasson thinks. Let's hear Herzl.

Herzl: [. . .] On the homosexuality issue, he blew it for me. At least don't say that my son will have a Jewish state to grow up in. If we go to extremes and say we will all be homosexual in seventy years' time, we won't have children, [and] then we won't have a state either.

Herzl also clearly opposed homosexuality and was among the two participants who, together with Sasson, rated themselves as the furthest from this person's story. Herzl justified his opposition with his concern for the Jewish future of the state. However, his concern for the country did not convince Ahuva, who then received support from Hanna.

Hannah: I *did* relate to Shaul. The fact that he's homosexual is of no interest to me. What he does in his private life, in his own private bed, I really don't care about. What I did relate to was the fact that he climbed up from a relatively low position economically [. . .] and made something out of himself. [. . .] He cares about the country, he cares about what's going on, really. I think he's a very positive human being. The fact that he's homosexual, I don't even pay attention to that line.

Hanna made it clear that she had no interest in an individual's sexual preferences, as long as they are confined to the private sphere—"his own private bed"—and therefore she did not cast aspersion on Shaul and was positively impressed by his energy, advancement in life, and concern for the country. Sasson, on the other hand, continued to pathologize Shaul.

Sasson: Once this disease . . .

Hannah: Why do you call it a disease?

Sasson: It's a disease, not a tendency. It's a disease.

Hannah: If it's a disease, if someone was a terminal patient with something else, would you have treated him like this?

Sasson: Most of the AIDS and all those other diseases are from the gay people.

Hannah: But if someone had the flu, would you have treated him like this?

Ahuva: That's ignorance. Homosexuality is not a disease.

Herzl: He's talking about . . . the most virtuous thing is to procreate.
[. . .]

Hannah: There's a certain percentage of the population that's incapable of that. There are also infertile people. There's all sorts of things.
[Everyone began talking at once]

Facilitator B: Did anyone else give Shaul a 3?

Eliran: I did. First of all, I appreciate his background very much . . . I don't think there's a particular problem here. I also have homosexual friends, it's irrelevant. [. . .]

That's the only reason I didn't feel very close to him, because I'm not a homosexual. I appreciate his perspective very much. I highly appreciate his background, and the fact that he fights for what he believes. It says here that he worked hard for his [higher education] studies, despite his economic situation. That reminded me a lot of my mom. Grandpa didn't want her to go to the university at all, and my mother fought for it and saved cent after cent and went to study. I identified with that very much.

Young Eliran did not join Sasson in his objections on the basis of sexual preference, nor did he view sexual preference as a significant justification for discrimination. He even shared his close relationships with gay people, declaring, "I also have homosexual friends." He viewed gay people as equal partners in public space and justified his identification with Shaul by noting that Shaul is a hard-working person who was able to climb upward, even though he came from a low socioeconomic position.⁶

Ahuva: There is lack of knowledge about homosexuals here. I have nothing to do with them, but it so happens that you are very much lacking in knowledge. They do have children, sir. [. . .] The homosexuals are not poor people that need to be cared for. What's annoying about them is that demonstrativeness.

Facilitator B: You mean they should be quiet.

Ahuva: Leave in peace with yourselves. What you do in your own bed, be my guest.

Facilitator A: You're actually saying that it's no big deal. So why did you give him just 2, because he externalizes it?

Ahuva: No, because later on he attacked the state like it's the state's fault.
[Everyone once again began to talk at once]

Facilitator B: He doesn't want cowardly politicians.

Gidi: He writes, “too much cowardice,” “most politicians are willing to give up national territories with unbearable thoughtlessness.” This means he’s disrespecting people. What do you mean “thoughtless”? There’s a Knesset, there’s a government, there are ministers, there are committees—they decide. You voted for them. Me, you, he—all of us. On the other hand, he writes that “you cannot believe the promises made before the elections.” That’s politics. If he doesn’t know it, I suggest he go learn something about it. That’s what electoral politics is like. “I’m not sure my son will have a Jewish state.” You don’t like it here? Scram. It’s our state. We have to strengthen it.

Ahuva: He’s worried. He is afraid for his son’s future. I’m also willing to worry [mockingly].

Gidi: I’m also worried about my son’s future.

The discussion about Reuven, who at first glance does not fulfill the traditional male role of the primary wage earner and whose ability to earn money is inferior to his wife’s, did not generate any opposition.

Sasson: Reuven is a prince. He contributes to society. He’s fine. 4. I don’t have any issues with him.

Hannah: One thing about Reuven bothers me, even though I gave him a 3. [He says], “At this time, I don’t earn much as a gardener but I’m lucky that my wife is a sharp businesswoman.”

Facilitator A: Why does this bother you, Hannah?

Hannah: Because he’s a man without ambitions, and he’s lucky that he has someone who deals with things, so it’s OK, what’s the problem. Other than that, he’s a very positive person in my opinion. Only that part.

Sasson: The second part of the question is worth the whole upper part.

Hannah: I said that in my opinion he’s a very positive person and I gave him a 3, but that part bothered me. I don’t care that it’s his wife. Even if he said “I don’t make any money.” His lack of ambition bothers me more than the fact that his wife makes more money, and he counts on that. That interests me less.

Facilitator A: You’re a little interested that his wife earns more?

Hannah: No.

Ahuva: Why did he say that? What’s in it? Sometimes, a woman studies a certain profession, and she brings in more.

Hannah: It doesn’t matter.

- Haim:* He worked. While he was working to help her study and advance.
- Hannah:* I don't have a problem that his wife earns more than he does. That's fine. I don't have a problem with that.
- Haim:* She's got it a bit more. He worked. Paid for her studies. Today, she makes more money.
- Hannah:* That's fine, I don't have a problem with that.
- Facilitator A:* You seem very liberal to me, that the wife earns more than the man is fine with you. You don't have any problem with that?
- Gidi:* No problem. The head of Tnuva [a large dairy conglomerate] is a woman. She makes a ton of money, and her husband earns much less.
- Ahuva:* Same thing with Galia [Maor]. She's head of Bank Leumi.
- Gidi:* There are many successful women who earn more than the husband.
- Hannah:* It might be because of the husband's support.
- Haim:* Actually, the husband is the one who leads all the time, but he encourages her to study. He worked and she studied, and he took care of work and the house while she was out of the house.
- Facilitator B:* But he took on the role of a woman, no?
- Haim:* At a certain time, he gave her strong back up at home. He gave it, because she wanted to study, and he let her. Today, they are picking those fruits.

Not one of the participants expressed—at least not directly—any premodern view that a woman earning more than a man is an affront to the proper order of things, family values, or the “natural” position of the man as the wage earner. This modern liberal norm was accepted by the members of the group without any particular difficulty.

From here we moved on to the next part of the discussion, in which the facilitators exposed the group to the activities of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, an organization that defies the existing order in the name of Mizrahiness and with a universalist concern for all the weaker groups in the country.

Facilitator B: Now I want to tell you a story about an organization, and we want to hear your opinion about it. In the early 1990s, a group of Mizrahim organized and defined themselves as Mizrahim.

Ahuva: The Panthers.⁷

Ahuva confused the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow with an earlier protest group, known as the Black Panthers, named after the American group.

Facilitator B: No, the Panthers were in the 1970s. In the 1990s, a group of Mizrahim, some of whom were very well-educated, decided

that Ashkenazi hegemony was creating economic and cultural discrimination toward Mizrahim. Around this time, the government was giving the kibbutzim ownership of land, and these activists demanded that land and homes should be given to the people, mostly Mizrahim, who had been living in public housing. Some of the group concluded that the demands for equality and justice should include everyone in the country, including, for example, women, Arabs, and homosexuals. Others were worried that this would negate their Jewish cultural affiliation. It was a very difficult argument. If you had been there, what would you have done?

The group members did not relate directly to the facilitator's presentation or to his question.

Sasson: I say something else. To take care of the Arabs so long as they pledge loyalty to the state of Israel, serve in the military or national service, and then get their rights. As long as they don't do that, they deserve nothing.

Facilitator A: [. . .] I want to look further into this. Why should I worry about somebody else's rights, even if he does fulfill his obligations?

At this point, Facilitator B lost his composure. Distressed by and frustrated at the responses in the group, he raised his voice:

Facilitator B: It's my impression that there are two things that you value very much. One, is that they should lie low!

Haim: Who's to lie low, the Arabs?

Facilitator B: No, everyone!!! They should avoid making a fuss. Why on earth is Shmuel fighting? First of all, they should keep a low profile. Reuven and Yossi are good guys, they don't fight, they sit still. There's something good about lying low and not making too much of a fuss, it's good. This group says: "It's good."

The other thing this group is saying [. . .]: "The tribe." "We're a tribe." "We have to worry about the tribe." The tribe is organized in a certain way. "Our tribe has no homosexuals." "Our tribe is orderly." "Our tribe has no migrant workers." We are the tribe with our Jews. Whoever annoys the tribe even a little bit stays out or should stay out. You say, "lie low and we'll maintain the tribe." Whatever's inside is good. Anyone who makes noise or annoys the tribe is not good for us.

[. . .]

Gidi: You can have demonstrations and you can have everything, so long as it remains within reason. [. . .] Those [Arabs] in Umm

al-Fahm who go out [. . .] [and demonstrate] against the country and burn and act [out], that's not reasonable. It's unreasonable. [. . .] You should be harsh with them. [. . .] If you come and shout against the state, then the state doesn't need to give you anything. [. . .] Do you know that the Ministry of the Interior transfers funds to [Arab local] authorities on a regular basis?

Ahuva: But they're citizens, don't forget. They're Israeli citizens.

Ahuva reminded the group about her commitment to the principle of equal citizenship.

Gidi: Why demonstrate against the state? Why post a picture of [Hezbollah leader Hassan] Nasrallah? If you're against the state, you won't get anything from the state. You'll collect your taxes from the inhabitants, and you'll have your own sewage and your own education, and over there you'll do [. . .]. I say if you want to get something from the state, you should respect it.

For Gidi, the idea of a demonstration against the very existence of the state is an internal contradiction. From his republican perspective, the discourse of rights is possible only within the framework of a political solution based on loyalty and honor to the state.

Facilitator B tried to place Gidi's test of loyalty in the ethno-national context, in order to identify racist roots.

Facilitator B: What you say is very interesting. For example, what would you say to the ultra-Orthodox when they demonstrate? And the majority of them don't serve in the army, either. They don't accept the state or Zionism.

[Everyone began talking at once]

Eliran: What about the parking lot in Jerusalem, that all the ultra-Orthodox were demonstrating against?

Facilitator B: What do you have to say about it?

Eliran: It's not OK.

Facilitator B: Why not? They demonstrated. What's wrong with that?

Eliran: There's freedom of opinion. I believe in pluralism and believe in everything. But when people lie down under cars over there . . .

Facilitator B: That's exactly it. Let them keep a low profile—let the ultra-Orthodox Jews also keep a low profile.

Eliran: They should fight, but . . .

Herzl: One of the deepest and most powerful messages in the Bible says "who are you to protect the Torah and Jerusalem?"—if you're truly religious . . .

Facilitator B sounded agitated at this point.

Facilitator B: “. . . sit still!”

Herzl: “You shall hold your peace.” “I [The Lord] shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” [Exodus 14:14].

Facilitator B: It’s true that you’re saying it’s not good to lie down [under cars in protest], it’s like—just keep still.

[. . .]

Herzl: You can protest in a reasonable way like he said.

Facilitator B: What’s a reasonable way?

Herzl: The reasonable way is one that does not threaten public safety or disrupt public order.

Haim: Demonstrate, show your presence, [but don’t . . .]
[Talking all at once]

Facilitator A: We should be wrapping up now. I want to share a thought that occurred to me during our discussion today. [. . .] What I realized in both meetings and especially today—what you’re saying, if I get it correctly, is that we are against discrimination because we’ve been discriminated against. [. . .] You’re saying you’re against discrimination, but then you’re also saying, I can be against discrimination that affects what Facilitator B calls “my tribe,” the tribe that’s close to me. There’s a close tribe and a distant one. The closest tribe are the Mizrahim and Yemenites.

Herzl: Jews.
[. . .]

Facilitator A: I want to tell you why I’m bothered by this view. I’m bothered by the fact that it may be making us blind and callous about the suffering of others. [. . .] It sort of rationalizes why we don’t see the others’ suffering. [. . .]

Yehezkel: If I see a wounded kitten on the street, and I don’t go and treat it but continue to ignore it and move on, this doesn’t make me cruel. It’s true that I could, I did it once in Lod, I saw a car run into a dog. We went and called an animal welfare ambulance. [. . .] On Passover Eve I went with another friend, a man of means, and distributed food baskets to families. Three, four families in the neighborhood that we know have very little. We brought it to them. I know that I’m concerned, I’m worried now. The fact that there are more families and all kinds of stories in the press about families with an empty fridge—I can’t take care of everyone, but this won’t make me harsh. I mean, you must have natural compassion and natural sympathy. Even for migrant workers who

are frisked in the middle of the street and beaten up, it weighs heavy on your heart. Even more, you say it can't be that way, that's human nature. But you can't change the world. A bird in the hand. If you want to mess with the wars of the entire world and fight everyone together, you can't. [You have to] focus on a single issue. [. . .]

Ron: I think he reached an accurate conclusion for this discussion. Every time we talked about Mizrahi discrimination then everybody jumped, but discriminations from the past, that didn't interest anyone. [. . .] I am one of those who don't experience Mizrahi discrimination, I've said that several times. I was brought up perhaps in a very egalitarian home, and I feel for others' pain very much. I would dream about an equal society. As far as I'm concerned, everyone's the same. I have no problem with anybody, so long as he's a human being. Arabs are something else, that's an enemy, that can hurt you. I'm not into politics all day long, and I don't know much beyond that. I know that Arabs are not [included in this]. Right now, I'm talking about Jews as a society.

Yehezkel: I know that discrimination is wrong—it says so in Jewish Law and the Shulchan Aruh [the important sixteenth-century Jewish legal code]. It says that a father cannot discriminate between his sons. Our patriarch Jacob favored Joseph over all his brothers, and what this led to is a story we're all still suffering from. [. . .] You can't discriminate, not even at home. I know that from all this discussion and even from before, because I was raised that way. Our father would always tell us to keep away from controversy, steer clear of trouble, everything that has to do with evil. Simple, natural education. He said, keep away from that. I will educate my child that way. My child will also tell his friends, he will open up a circle. Change starts with little things, I mean with the little man and not necessarily large societies.

Facilitator B: We need to let you go and also move out of this room. We would like to thank you very much for coming and participating. [. . .]

The group was not willing to stop here, despite the attempts by the facilitators to end the meeting. As we will see immediately below, they were troubled and perhaps even offended by the facilitators' description of their position as absolutely immoral. In other words, it is possible to infer from the following section that the participants were responding to the imposition of the critical-progressive moral grammar, according to which constant defiance and attempts to undermine the

state are identified as the core of being a good person. The participants seemed to insist on upholding their sense of worth as moral human beings.

Gidi: From your perspective as facilitators, how did you come to think we said we don't care for the others? I think we do give to others, to society. I'm not talking [only] about Sephardic Jews. I'm saying society as society, which we are part of. We do help our fellow people. We do give when we need to. Give me half a second and I'll give you ten examples.

[. . .]

Ahuva: I'll give you an example. I volunteer in a hospital, with the Ministry of Welfare. How can you say I'm wrong?

In response to the feedback from Facilitator B, who portrayed them as a closed, tribal group that has sealed itself off from the suffering of the "other," they presented themselves as moral people. Their ethics did not derive from a fully formed universal reason externally imposed upon their life, yet Yehezkel presented himself as generally compassionate, even toward non-humans such as kittens. Ron emphasized his support for the value of equality, but this includes only Jewish society, and he justified excluding the Arabs from the discussion not because they are less human but because they are enemies who threaten the very existence of the state of Israel.

They once again emphasized, in their own words, that they were "moral people" who contribute to all of society and the needy (*Gidi*) and volunteer in hospitals and social welfare organizations (*Ahuva*). However, neither the language with which they sought to defend their morality nor their presentation of themselves as moral, sensitive, and compassionate people received any response from the facilitator.

In sum, in this discussion the Mizrahim expressed their clear and consistent opposition to defiance of the state. Their moral experience was shaped by their social relationships within the Jewish whole, with the state as its protector. Any form of defiance externally imposed upon the state in the name of universal reason posed a threat to their sense of collective identity and was understood as a violation of the rules of the game. Within the boundaries of the Jewish state, they accepted the principle of civic equality for all (including non-Jews) as long as this meant a minority that accepts the existence of the Jewish state and completely and loyally fulfills its civic duties.

They did not view themselves as an oppressed minority; this stance was alien to their lived experience (as expressed by Ron). They remained completely indifferent to the story of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow. They not only didn't know about it, but the story they were told did not lead to any political energy or identification. They opposed the universalist politics that the Rainbow seeks to advance, which equates Arabs with Mizrahim and positions both groups as minorities that suffer from the oppressive power of the state.

To this point, one can find some similarities between the position of our Mizrahi participants and a modern republican position insofar as the participants do not negate civil and democratic logic within an ethnic democracy (Smootha, 1997). And yet, it is important to note that defiance against the state does not necessarily refer to defiance against specific political representatives (especially those who are identified with the left) who might happen to be serving in positions of power, but rather to defiance against the Jewish state itself, which is a reflection of the Jewish whole within which they are rooted.

We will now move on to the group of Mizrahim with a college education.

*Mizrahi Men and Women with a College Education:
Mainstreaming and Aversion to Defiance*

The participants in this group of college-educated men and women were: Reut, 37, a pharmaceutical sales representative; Bat El, 29, a self-employed graphic designer who lives in Afula, a town in Israel's periphery; Osnat, in her 60s, who works for a newspaper; Gadi, in his early 50s, a computer technician from Jerusalem; and David, 25, a religious student studying mathematics. (Reut, Bat El, and Osnat had participated in an earlier group of college-educated Mizrahi women which is not discussed in this volume. In this session, they joined Gadi and David, whom we met in the group of college-educated men.)

As in the previous group, the session began with the facilitators reading a vignette, asking the participants to rate their sense of distance from or closeness to the protagonist, and then moving on to the next vignette. They then asked the participants to discuss their responses, beginning with "Shmuel."

David: Shmuel started out fine, but the second paragraph is one big no-no. [. . .] This type of person tries to blur the country's Jewish identity.

Facilitator B: How is that?

David: "The occupation is corrupting"—no way. "Two states for two peoples," "active in the Association for Civil Rights," "fights for migrant workers' rights," "homosexuals." [I'm] far from that. [. . .] For example, all this campaign for migrant worker rights. It's simply an attempt to flood the country with non-Jews and blur its identity. [. . .] I don't believe that the interest here is just [. . .] because they care about migrant workers. It's simply because if you flood the country with migrant workers, its Jewish identity is slowly erased. [. . .] It's wrapped up under the guise of humanism and human rights, and all those lovely words [. . .] There could also be some good intentions there, like "we're all human beings" and all. [. . .] But I believe there's also a purpose there, I don't know how hidden it is, of mixing the Jews with the gentiles, so that the Jewish identity becomes blurred.

Facilitator B: Why would anyone want to do that? To blur it?

David: That's the key question—it bothers them. They want a “State for all Citizens,”⁸ let's say.

Osnat: Who's “they”?

David: All these people who for example support the migrant workers' struggle and all those issues.

Reut: The Association for Civil Rights?

Facilitator B: They want to blur, that is they don't want Jewish, like denying their Jewish aspect.

David: They want to pull it into a state for all citizens.

Bat El: I don't think they looked at the Jewish side or . . .

David: I believe they did.

In this group, David was the only one wearing a kippah (traditional male head-covering) and therefore was assumed to represent the ideological right. Unlike the opposition voiced in the group of participants without a college education above, his suspicion was based on an understanding of the broader ideological context within which groups identified with the progressive left in Israeli civil society operate.

Bat El: It's like demonstrations for animal rights, OK, excuse the comparison [. . .] but [. . .]

Reut: [. . .] The Association for Civil Rights [. . .], people who are so far away from Judaism, they don't even think, they're looked at as non-Jews. Right? They don't really relate to that, it's a non-issue as far as they're concerned whether they're Jews or not, they are looked at as human beings. [. . .] Just like they won't leave a run-over cat on the road, they also wouldn't leave a Sudanese I don't know where, same thing.
[. . .]

Bat El: OK, about Shmuel—I also liked the first part. The second part—a bit less. He's too much—I don't like these kinds of people that want to make everything beautiful and plant flowers in the garden, like everything's all right in the ground, I don't know, this doesn't suit me . . . too much ideology.

Facilitator B: Like a bleeding heart?

Bat El: Bleeding heart, yeah. [. . .] I don't like this kind of people. They also have something underneath that they want to hide—that's Shmuel. [. . .] Shaul annoyed me a little, and it's not because he's gay, on the contrary—I love gay people, I think they're very creative and cute, but he's not pleased with what's going on, and he gets carried away too much. “My son won't have a state”—

that's a little exaggerated. Like [. . .] we know there are difficulties in this country, but [. . .] saying "That's it. Twenty years from now he won't have a house to build?"

Facilitator A: Is he whining?

Bat El: Exaggerating, yes, very much so.

Reut: Hysterical.

Bat El: Yes.

Reut: Shaul is hysterical.

[. . .]

Bat El: [. . .] I analyzed their character, according to whether I wanted to be their friend or not. [. . .] [Shmuel] is too much of a bleeding heart, he contributes too much to the weak sectors, and the needy, and women, and those, and the others. [Her tone is very disparaging]

Facilitator B: Why [are you speaking in] this tone?

Bat El: Because he's like that, he's annoying.

[Everyone began talking all at once]

Bat El: [. . .] I love the ideological ones, I love them very much, and that's his first part.

David: But so long as they keep it in the closet.

Bat El: But, no, I don't have a problem with that, I mean he can do what he wants with it. [. . .] But I really hate those who are too much like "I'm for the workers" and "the homosexuals and women are important to me," and all that.

David's position regarding the possible damage to the public square and the character of the state was a minority position in this group. The other participants were not concerned about it.

Facilitator B: Why don't you like them?

Bat El: Because I don't think they can talk, I don't *want* them for me, like Shmuel as a woman, for example, if anything. Why should he talk? [. . .] Shmuel [. . .] must have some kind of flaw in himself he would like to make amends for, and he finds a way to do it. [. . .] I think he is personally weak. [. . .] Usually in psychology all those who are very, eh. . . . Let's say, for example, a person who is very, very neat and tidy and he's very upset and he's meticulous and all that, then he's restless inside.

Reut: It's like he's growing on the weak people's backs.

Bat El: He needs to make up for that.

Reut: He empowers himself using others' weaknesses and all that.

Bat El: Precisely, that's the man, that's him. That's Shmuel, that's him.

Reut: He kind of fills himself up with others' content in general, [because] he has none [of his own].

Bat El: Yes, exactly.

Facilitator A: It seems to me, I have a feeling that with both of you, Reut and Bat El, have this image that looks more reasonable to you, the image of a person who fights for himself.

In this group, the logic of Bat El's objection to Shmuel's and Shaul's defiance and opposition to the state was different from the opposition presented in the group composed of participants without a college education. Bat El described this defiance in terms of personality ("weakness"), while Reut added the instrumental and manipulative aspect of defiance by a person who seeks to reinforce himself by showing "concern" for others. In other words, Reut and Bat El doubt the authenticity of the social activist, who is, in their view, not motivated by constant struggle against all of society's wrongs and a deep desire to mend the world.

In critical-progressive circles, this stance of defiance is part of the moral duty to defend the "plurality of the public sphere" (Katriel 2020, p. 2) in the name of universal reason, or Jewish values deeply rooted in the liberal-progressive vision of global social order. But for Reut and Bat El, this position is false, over-played, and not part of a web of genuine social relationships. They suspect it of being inauthentic behavior based on personal and psychological factors.

Yet at the same time, their opposition reflects a position that goes beyond the psychology of the individual.

Bat El: Actually, Yossi is a friend, and he gives in. He gives in because he is pulled into it, because they need him more, and so he gives in. He wanted to go to university, but he sacrificed himself for another. I identify with this . . .

Facilitator B: But he's not a weakling.

Bat El: No, he's not weak, he isn't acting out of weakness. [Everyone begins to talk at once.]

Reut: He gives in according to his own priorities.

At this point, Reut and Bat El agreed about the importance of making choices from a position of strength. Reut echoed the neo-liberal logic and clarified her position regarding the individual's responsibility for their own situation.

Reut: I'm talking about responsibility, and a socialist state takes care of all of its citizens and provides welfare benefits. On the one hand, social benefits are supportive, and even people who contribute and

do things for others, support them, but on the other hand they decrease the individual's level of personal responsibility, the poor, neglected individual who doesn't pick himself up, because he depends on all sorts of other places to take care of him. And from where I come from, if you have personal responsibility and you take responsibility for yourself and promote yourself, you don't come out so pathetic, you just have to be in that state of mind.

Gadi: I wanted to say that I didn't give anyone a 1, because none of them are a burden on society, they are all working. Not one of them is a bum or is on welfare, and even Yossi, who got a 2 from me, I value him, and I didn't give him a 1, because he works, and he contributes to society and isn't counting [on others]. . . . What Reut is saying, counting on our socialism, on the state that helps poor and weak people, people who picking themselves up.

Osnat expresses a minority opinion, with a social-democratic criticism of the state.

Osnat: The state doesn't help all that much.

Reut: It helps.

Gadi: Unemployment, welfare benefits.

Osnat: Believe me, they've really cut back.

This random group of college-educated Mizrahim turned out to be quite diverse, and it included a right-wing ideological voice (David); various tones of neo-liberal voices (Bat El and Reut); and a social-democratic voice (Osnat). At the same time, not one of the participants related to the four protagonists' Mizrahi identity as an important factor that could explain their choices or generate criticism.

At this point, Facilitator B presented the story of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, in which Mizrahiness serves as an organizing principle, and the status of the Mizrahim is addressed through political opposition to the existing order and efforts to facilitate social change.

David and Reut were quick to respond. David denied the problem, and Reut was outraged by the attempt at defiance in the name of deprivation.

Gadi: That they wanted to give ownership to the homes in the veteran *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* was not because they are Ashkenazim, not because they are Ashkenazim. There were arguments, they brought various claims that they were the ones who settled on the land, they settled in the development towns and poor neighborhoods, so they don't have housing.

Gadi argued that if there had been a policy of discrimination against certain towns and neighborhoods, it wasn't a result of the ethnic background of the residents, but because of their geographic location. Reut quickly joined in.

Reut: I can, there is another point to what Gadi says. . . . There's this general Mizrahi whining about how they were stuck in the transit camps and all sorts of dump places, and all sort of . . .

[. . .]

Bat El: Well, if there are values, then there should be values [for everyone].

Reut: What? Aren't there any Ashkenazim that have to be helped?

Bat El: There are.

Reut: No? Everything is great for all of them?

Bat El and Reut supported a political position that promotes general values and principles, rather than Mizrahi identity politics.

Facilitator A turned to David.

Facilitator A: David, what do you say?

David: The first part, I don't like the part for the sake of the Mizrahim, I just can't connect to it. The second part.

Facilitator A: Why?

David: I didn't completely understand what they want to do—affirmative action? Demonstrate? It doesn't seem right to me.

Facilitator A: You mean, not this and not that.

David: Yeah, maybe.

Facilitator A: That's interesting, because I think maybe there's something—correct me if I'm wrong. On the one hand, it's like you said at the beginning, when we went around the circle, and you said that from your point of view, regarding the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi story, I don't know what you are talking about.

David: I don't think that I don't know what you are talking about, it's like, it's not dominant.

Facilitator A: OK, it's not dominant. Like, it doesn't play an important role.

David: Right.

Facilitator A: So you say that one side of the Rainbow, the side that goes on the Mizrahi issue, you say it doesn't speak to you, because it emphasizes something that from my point of view . . .

Reut: No way.

Bat El tried to clarify the reservations about the Mizrahi issue.

Bat El: I would say speak only about [general] values, but then I would lose the Mizrahi side of the Rainbow.

Facilitator A: And would you be willing to lose the Mizrahi part of the Rainbow?

Bat El: I think so. Enough already, how much can you deal with the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi thing. We have to stop this, if we really want to put a stop to the ethnicity problems, so just stop.

Gadi joined Bat El's and Reut's position.

Gadi: Right, yes. I wanted to say that I agree with what Bat El says, that really get out of the Mizrahiness a bit, because, like Bat El says, I can't feel that I am discriminated against because I am Mizrahi.

The participants were taking a strong stance regarding defiance toward the state or a hegemonic group in the name of the politics of Mizrahi identity. Did this stance stem from their naïve reading of reality—that is, was it an expression of denial of the fact of discrimination toward Mizrahim? David provided a fairly clear assessment of the situation.

David: I'm not sure that this is passé among the Ashkenazim.

His observation was immediately supported by Reut:

Reut: Right.

This strong agreement between Reut and David should not be taken for granted. They are both young, educated Mizrahim, but they belong to different, and occasionally hostile, social sectors. David's head-covering identifies him as belonging to the national-religious right, while Reut is a secular young woman from the geographic center of Israel. At first, it would appear as if they belonged to opposing camps, each embedded in a different world of meaning, and therefore it would not have been surprising if they had been deeply suspicious of each other. Despite this, with regard to Mizrahiness, they were in complete agreement.

David: I believe that among certain places, it still exists in the background. I assume that everyone who spoke up here, me for example, simply decided to ignore that point, but I'm not sure that the issue doesn't exist for all of the Ashkenazim.

Facilitator A: Why?

David: You would have to ask them.

[. . .]

David: If, for example, we take this point about the Ashkenazi employer who had an Ashkenazi worker and a Mizrahi worker, and if he picks the Ashkenazi, then it's possible, I assume that the minute that he does this, he is making some sort of generalization, [and thinks] so if I am going to have problems, the problem will come from the direction of the Mizrahi worker.

Facilitator B: And what's the source of this generalization?

David: It seems to me that it's reality, that most of the criminals sitting in jail, for example, and most of the low-lives that a person meets during his life—are Mizrahim. So man, I know it's not acceptable today in the spirit of this culture to make generalizations, but I believe that a generalization isn't such a bad tool. The employer hasn't got the time to start checking out everybody, he needs a specific criterion to distinguish between this one and that one, so he uses ethnicity. Less chance of problems and screw-ups.

Facilitator B: You don't use generalizations.

David: In general, I do. I believe in generalizations as a criterion, but when you have to check each case, I try to be in the middle, between generalizations and on the other hand, a specific person is entitled to be judged on his own. But I believe that the Ashkenazi that does this, he does it on the basis of this distinction. I don't know, personally, I'm not so shocked by this.

[. . .]

Reut: I translate to myself what David said, into my own language, it's that an Ashkenazi boss would prefer that the head of the team under him would be an Ashkenazi. They speak the same language, intuitively, it's easier to get him to do things . . . talking the same language. A Mizrahi boss, would he prefer an Ashkenazi worker or a Mizrahi—I wouldn't take for granted what he would do.

[. . .]

Bat El: Right, right.

Reut: It's not at all clear to me what he would do. I don't think he would prefer the Ashkenazi.

Facilitator B: Does this mean that the Ashkenazi is more predictable than the Mizrahi?

Bat El: Yes.

Reut: Yes.

It seems that even in situations where the participants recognized discrimination against Mizrahim, it did not aggravate them, and they certainly did not justify defiance in the name of Mizrahiness. In fact, most of the participants even accepted situations of discrimination with equanimity and understanding (Osna did not express an opinion, and she may have been in the minority).

This is the moment at which the power of the liberal grammar of the critical discourse could push our interpretive pendulum toward suspicion. From this position, it would be difficult to avoid adopting the overly suspicious stance that views the participants as expressing yet another denial, or even false consciousness

in one or more of its many variations. In order to capture the moment and use the suspicion against itself—that is, to become suspicious of suspicion—we must engage our sociological imagination at its most powerful and resist the urge to derive ethics entirely from universal reason or moral psychology. Ethnographic realism warns us against trying to do so through an appeal to seamless cultural traditions or cohesive moral communities (Keane, 2010). Freed from the commitment to the ethics of secular universal reason, which views their position as “an anomaly,” a “problem,” a “reactive position stemming from a pathological situation,” and so forth, we can ask: how do we make sense of the equanimity and understanding expressed by the young, educated and successful Mizrahim with regard to discrimination against Mizrahim?

Viewed from this alternative interpretive position, I suggest that their moral experience stems from relational reason, that is, from a moral-political position that develops in the context of wider relationships. Once again, it is important to emphasize that the relationality discussed here should be analytically distinguished from relationality that derives solely from power relations.⁹ Furthermore, this political-moral position does not stem from the sanctified principle of universal reason. As successful, middle-class Mizrahim, they are familiar with these principles, which form part of their cultural tool kit (Mizrachi et al., 2007; Swidler, 1986, 2001). Rather, they deliberately and consciously reject the rigid ideological application of these principles, which they do not view as an effective resource to advance their position in the flow of social life.

At the beginning of the session, the participants were asked to share their thoughts after the first meeting. David explained that looking back, he found it difficult to understand the in-depth discussion about Mizrahiness and thought that defiance in the name of Mizrahiness was an artificial way to bring up a topic that wasn't even relevant or connected to his life. As we saw, David was aware of signs of discrimination in various social contexts. However, surprisingly, he understood the logic underlying this discrimination, and didn't see it as the epitome of evil, as an excuse to adopt a defiant position toward the entire social order, or as cause for fighting.

David: In the previous meeting, in general, I had a sense that someone was trying to wake up the sleeping dogs.

Facilitator B: What feeling?

Facilitator A: Sleeping dogs?

David: This subject isn't so dominant in life, and it's strange to get to it and talk about it deeply. That's it, not much more.

David was openly attempting to convince the others that this topic is foreign to him and that it seemed phony and fake. At this point, the lights of the critical discourse begin to flash: “False consciousness!” “Denial!” However, in the following example, the critical monitoring system faced an even more challenging test.

At the beginning of the discussion, Reut shared the moments of “insight” that she experienced in the previous meeting. This occurred when she spoke about school and how she had never experienced discrimination even though she attended a school for gifted, elite children. She added that all of her friends in her class were Ashkenazim, and that she had been the only Mizrahi. When the facilitator pushed her and asked how she explained this, she stopped for a moment, and exclaimed, “Don’t force me to get it.”

At the beginning of this meeting, she said she came to a realization at the previous session. She described the event as very enlightening, and she had thought about it in the weeks that had passed since that meeting.

Reut: In the previous meeting, I felt the penny drop—and it was like a million bucks. I actually came to realize the size of the gap, and I think that [. . .] the strong common denominator of the people who came here is that, in fact, they deny the very existence of this gap. They live their lives, they study and advance without any interference, and whenever other people talk about some kind of gap, or difference in opportunities . . . then they get told or they respond, “It’s all subjective,” and “it doesn’t really exist.” In the meeting we had, which was entirely about the issue of tracking, which was accepted as a fact that you cannot really deny . . . I said I studied at Boyer [an elite school for gifted children in Jerusalem], and what do you mean, there was no gap. All my friends were Ashkenazi. I went back home and asked myself, “So what was I doing there?” Like, maybe there is something to it. So I went along with it and said, “All right, this must have been my trump card to get me to where I wanted. On the whole, I’m pleased with my accomplishments. I don’t stir up any hornets’ nests, I leave it just the way it was until now, and I move on.” But yes, I mean, this insight somehow follows me around. It is empowering, not the opposite. I mean, it’s precisely that I didn’t embrace victimhood, but. . . . But yes, there’s some injustice here, I described it more in terms of injustice. That it’s a little exasperating.

Facilitator B: It’s like it woke up angry feelings in you that weren’t there before?

Reut: First of all, for me, the default feelings are angry, then I get offended, hurt, I feel that. . . . In my case, first I get upset, then it can be that I will now be upset about this for about a year, and then the filtered emotion of what it really is will come. But yes, it’s kind of. . . . It’s like this Big Brother, that somewhat sat there, probably, at least I hope, I would like to believe that it wasn’t malicious, that they said, “These people will go here and the others will go there,” but the very pretentiousness of coming and saying, “We’ll draw up a state along those lines, and these will go here

and the others will go there.” So I come, too, my education is the economy, and free economy, and the fittest survive and succeed and win, and this for me the basic resource to climb the ladder with. So it doesn’t fit my worldview. This idea that someone will come and go, wait a minute, let me straighten this puzzle out . . .

Facilitator B: But it sorts of sounds like, you said that after all, the market’s invisible hand is not so invisible after all.

Reut: That’s it, right, this is what I realized here, and I tend to believe it’s true. I mean, I don’t know, I believe you, I never studied the history or dug into this, I didn’t deal with it so much. I accepted it as given and when I looked at those materials, it didn’t seem proper to me. I guess it [discrimination] never went away, and it’s not for nothing that things happened, but on the other hand this is the market, this is the [local] swamp and we will swim across it with this, with what we have today.

Even for a suspicious reader, Reut’s heartfelt testimony left no room to doubt her awareness of the unequal structures. Reut was not in “literal denial,” in the words of Stanley Cohen (2001). She was aware of the possibility of structural inequality and even trusts the academic experts who confirm the existence of structural ethnic inequality. However, her conclusion from this realization did not lead her to adopt a defiant position toward the hegemony in the name of Mizrahiness in order to destroy the foundations of the oppressive structure; rather she chose to move forward within the “swamp” according to the rules of the game and the market, as she has until now.

Reut did not believe that power is static and does not regard her inferior position as permanent. She looked the unequal structure straight in the eye, recognizing its past implications and current significance. To critical ears, her de-politicization of the neo-liberal discourse could be heard as uncritical acceptance of crushing, Darwinian power. For her, this is an empowering force and a general metaphor for an open social horizon. The image she adopts is not one of *power over*, but rather *power to*—that is, the power to act and to determine your own life trajectory.

For her entire life, Reut had been surrounded by an Ashkenazi majority in elite educational institutions and in her work as an economist in central Israel. In contrast, Bat El has experienced life on the periphery, where she has been part of the majority. For this reason, she found it difficult to make the connection between the discussion of Mizrahim as a minority group and her lived experience.

Bat El: In my area, I’m talking about Afula—I live in Afula, if you’re interested. And I don’t know, the deputy director of education is a real Moroccan-type, he’s even one of the old-timers. . . . I work with the municipality, they are my customers, so I go to the municipality, and I said to myself, he’s a Moroccan, that’s

it, that's it. I started going over everybody, one by one, one is a Yemenite—and I look at the good jobs, and they are our representatives in Afula, good jobs . . .

At this point, it is important to remember that Mizrahim make up a majority of the Jewish population (see Y. Cohen, 2015, ch. 1), and in the periphery, as Bat El described, they are identified with the political, cultural and economic elite. This trend fits with Alba and Nee's (2003) description of the experience of assimilation and ethnicity in light of demographic trends in the United States, in which groups that are officially defined as ethnic minorities become demographic majorities. As they note, "The foreign-born and their children now constitute about 20 percent of the American population. They are concentrated in a number of large states such as California, Florida, New York, Texas, and Illinois, magnifying the regional impacts of immigration. Their presence has been dramatically visible in California, the nation's most populous state, where one in eight Americans resides" (p. 9).

Osnat: The stigmas still work, in my opinion. They work today, too, but there are other players. There are the Ethiopians, the Russians—they are all sorts today, there are other players in this equation, and not only Mizrahim.

ROOTEDNESS AND MAINSTREAMING

Unlike the subjects with no college education, the subjects with a college education did not view defiance against the state in the name of Mizrahiness as a collective threat. Instead, they did not understand it because it did not relate to their life experiences, and they felt it even weakened or stigmatized them.

The participants in this group spoke from a position of integration in the civil and social Jewish Israeli mainstream. They take their identity as Israeli Jews in the civil space of the Jewish polity for granted. For them, the moral and political significance of discrimination by Ashkenazim stems from what I have referred to as relational reason, part of the flow of life and the dynamic quality of ethnic relationships as middle-class Mizrahim who have become part of the mainstream. Incidents of discrimination do not change the way they experience their lives as people deeply connected to Jewish Israeliness for whom the horizons are open.

This description is consistent with the model of assimilation in American society presented by Alba and Nee (2003) and with my arguments regarding the assimilation of Mizrahim into general Jewish Israeli society through the expanding middle class. Alba and Nee argue:

Assimilation, as a form of ethnic change, may occur through changes taking place in groups on both sides of the boundary. Consequently, we define assimilation as the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences. "Decline" means in this context that a distinction attenuates in salience, that the occurrences for which it is relevant diminish in number and contract to fewer and

fewer domains of social life. Individuals' ethnic origins become less and less relevant in relation to the members of another ethnic group (typically, but not necessarily, the ethnic majority group), and individuals on both sides of the boundary see themselves more and more as alike, assuming they are similar in terms of some other critical factors such as social class; in other words, they mutually perceive themselves with less and less frequency in terms of ethnic categories and increasingly only under specific circumstances (p. 11).

The phenomenon in American society described by Alba and Nee is currently taking place in Israeli Jewish society. This can be attributed to three primary factors. First, Mizrahim constitute the demographic majority among Jews and the expanding middle class has made them part of Israeliness.¹⁰ Second, Mizrahim are constantly moving from the working class into the middle class (U. Cohen and Leon, 2008; M. Dahan, 2016). Third, there is no doubt that they fully belong to the Jewish polity (Mizrachi and Herzog, 2012), and this distinguishes them from other minority groups who are either situated outside of the Jewish polity (such as migrant workers and asylum seekers) or are found next to the Jewish polity because, although they are citizens, they are not full partners (Palestinian citizens of Israel).

These three factors reinforce the process of the mainstreaming of Mizrahim in Israel. Congruent with the model proposed by Alba and Nee, the process of assimilation of Mizrahim in Israel can be explained by their organic connection to the Israeli mainstream. This, however, does not entail erasure of their ethnic identity in favor of processes of modernization, as earlier theories of modernization had posited and hoped; nor it is a process of cultural self-negation in the face of the Western-Ashkenazi hegemony that fixes their inferior position in the process of modernity, as Swirski and others have claimed. Even if these arguments do have some basis in reality, in the process evolving before our eyes, we can observe the foundational role of Mizrahim and Mizrahiness in the ongoing creation of the Israeli mainstream.

The constitutional role of Mizrahiness in the evolution of Hebrew, especially Hebrew slang, provides a clear example. From a survey 1,500 internet users conducted in 2017, linguist and journalist Ruvik Rosental (2017) discovered that four-fifths of the most common slang words in Hebrew came from Mizrahi sources. In popular music, "Mizrahiness" plays a foundational role in defining Israeli mainstream culture and determining the musical taste of the middle class.¹¹

Guy Abutbul-Selinger (2022) shows that Mizrahi identity has become a cultural resource for Mizrahi adolescents, granting them qualities, such as self-confidence, hipness, authenticity, and a sense of belonging, that have become valuable in mainstream Israeli society. For those with an education, Jewish Israeli rootedness is allied with what Alba and Nee (2003) refer to as mainstreaming. From this position of full integration and involvement, a struggle in the name of "Mizrahiness" by a small minority made no sense to our middle-class Mizrahi informants. It did

not fit their experiences and choices; it was irrelevant to their lives and perceived as disempowering and stigmatizing.

Here we see the difference between the two groups. Working-class participants revealed a tendency to defend the state from defiance because the state represents the Jewish kingdom and is the epitome of the Jewish whole as a primordial and religious entity. For those with a college education, their Jewish Israeli identity reflects their integration into mainstream Israeli society and their rooted identity as citizens whose horizon is open and who are full participants in the creation of civil space, culture and Israeli identity.

In both cases, the moral and political meaning they attach to instances of inequality stemmed from what I have termed relational reason, rather than from a universal reason imposed on their organic social life. Both groups expressed a moral position not derived from a structured, comprehensive school of thought, but from their actual moral experience, deeply embedded within social relations. The working-class participants exemplified a more primordial and religious form of rootedness, which is often criticized by progressives. Try as they might, they were unable to convince even the facilitator that their objection to defiance was not immoral or a sign that they are inhumane or uncompassionate.

While the rooted working class was defenseless against the well-articulated progressive ethic, over the past few years a growing movement has taken root in academic culture and public discourse. This movement, traditionalism, presents rootedness as a deep, well-argued position and demands its proper representation in society, culture, and politics. In the next section, I will briefly address this traditionalist stream in social thought and public discourse. This new Mizrahi movement consists of intellectuals and social activists who struggle to make Mizrahi tradition present in Israeli cultural and political life, a positive identity in the liberal isomorphism. They seek to overturn the “problem with the Mizrahim” by transforming it into a solution for all of Israeli society.

ROOTEDNESS IN THE MAKING: DEFIANCE IN THE NAME OF TRADITIONALISM

In his book “The Third Israel,” Rabbi Piron (2021), a former Israeli Minister of Education, writes about his family: “Regard for the importance of the State was like a regular member of our family. This included strong emotions, as well as self-negation in the face of that which was greater than we: the duty to serve the commonwealth, to be emissaries to our people” (p. 13). Piron also articulated his stance toward traditionalism:

There are those who think that regard for the centrality of the institutions of the state is an anachronistic worldview, because liberals, enlightenment and global culture cannot coexist with regard for the state that sanctifies place, community, and one’s own people. Regard for the institutions of the state ostensibly prioritizes togetherness over

the individual. It presents sacred values in an era in which we are used to disputing and reconsidering all of our two-thousand-year-old beliefs. In the face of the outburst of sanctification of individual liberty and individualism, the regard for the centrality of the state and its institutions seeks to sanctify togetherness, to enhance the role of the sublime, of that which we cannot know, and national glory. Traditionalism is in need of renewal; first, it is identified only with Mizrahim . . . although it should not be viewed as characteristic only of them. . . . Traditionalism is a deep, coherent view of the world, with deep roots in the chronicles of our people and the world.

The political-cultural project that Piron is promoting is part of a broad trend among Mizrahi intellectuals and activists to present the traditional position identified with rootedness as a position with conceptual, historical and cultural depth that is valid in and of itself and has roots in the past, yet turns to the future as it innovates and renews itself.

In his pathbreaking book *A Language for the Faithful*, philosopher Buzaglo (2008) presents the traditional position that I have described here as rootedness as one that views the connection and loyalty to a whole that is greater than the individual. This description reflects the nuclear identity of those whom I have defined as the rooted Mizrahi subject. Buzaglo views the revelation at Mount Sinai as the constitutive event of the Jewish people. However, he warns, just as this event is a cornerstone in the early history of the Jewish people, it could become a source of contention among the Jews. The contrast between secular and religious could become an argument over the question of revelation. He writes, “loyalty to Jewish identity, to the fate of the Jewish people and its values—and not loyalty to the report of the event on Mount Sinai—is what binds together the many faces of Judaism that we meet in our generation” (p. 19).

The rooted Mizrahi subject is identified with the traditionalist who is loyal to the greater Jewish whole and connected to it through his/her very soul. The traditionalist’s religious and primordial Jewish identity is not fixed in the past, but rather, as Yadgar and Halsall (2015, p. 2) write, the rootedness of this primordialism is in constant flux: “Traditionalism is a dialogical (yet surely not equal) stance in relation to tradition; it is a concept that denotes an individual’s or a community’s loyal yet reflective—favorable and even sanctifying in principle yet interpretive, critical and selective in practice—attitude toward what they view as the tradition that constitutes their identity, that is: constitutes them as subjects.”

The flexible and dynamic character of traditionalism in its meeting with modernity is a clear example of what S. N. Eisenstadt (2002) has referred to as multiple modernities. It is by no means premodern nor fixed in an ancient past, but rather inherently connected to modernity, and it even plays a central part in the design of that modernity. However, it is important to remember that ignoring the loyalty of the traditionalist position to the Jewish whole, in the name of a universalist politics that views boundaries of identity (religious and primordial) as unnecessary, can be viewed by the rooted Mizrahi subject as an existential threat.

To be sure, Jewish traditionalism is not exclusively Mizrahi and a significant proportion of non-Mizrahim in Israel also define themselves as traditionalists.¹² Ashkenazi traditionalism as portrayed in the popular musical *Fiddler on the Roof*¹³ represents a premodern form of traditionalism, whereas Mizrahi traditionalism in its current form is definitely modern (Yadgar, 2013). It is also important to note that many Mizrahim, especially those who belong to the expanding middle class, do not necessarily identify with traditionalism. Yet their republican position is deeply embedded in the mainstream Jewish Israeli identity, in which rootedness is taken for granted.

As an intellectual position and a political proposition, traditionalism serves as a valuable resource, enabling Mizrahim to define a flexible new political agenda that is capable of creatively coping with the challenges and crises of identity Israel is currently facing. At the same time, traditionalism serves the educated Mizrahim as a valuable resource in the politics of identity within the Jewish religious space.

The organization Memizrach Shemesh serves as an example of the demand for representation of traditionalism within the Jewish ethno-national space. Memizrach Shemesh epitomizes the connection between the democratic and liberal codes of civil society and Mizrahi-Sephardi tradition. According to their website, “Memizrach Shemesh is a *Beit Midrash* (House of Study) and Center for Jewish Social Activism and Leadership in Israel. We cultivate leaders and train activists who are dedicated to the values of communal responsibility and social action rooted in all Jewish traditions including those of the Sephardi and Mizrahi heritage.”¹⁴

In 2014, Memizrach Shemesh triggered a public storm about the Jewish studies curriculum in religious schools when it published findings showing rabbis from Muslim countries over the past two hundred years were underrepresented in religious school curricula in comparison with Ashkenazi rabbis. The issue was raised on social media and generated so much attention that the head of curriculum in the Ministry of Education was forced to appoint a pedagogy advisory committee, composed almost entirely of representatives of Memizrach Shemesh and its original sponsor, the Alliance Israélite Universelle. The committee was tasked with introducing the pedagogical advisory team to the philosophy and thought of Mizrahi rabbis and proposing relevant educational programs. The advisory committee demanded that every quote from an Ashkenazi rabbi be matched with a quote from a Mizrahi rabbi. They further demanded that the ministry add educational units focused on the Sephardi tradition, such as a unit on *piyut* (Mizrahi liturgical poetry), which, they asserted, was the manner in which Mizrahi rabbis inculcated their theological messages. Ultimately, the head of the Jewish philosophy curriculum in the Ministry of Education published an additional manual that included the philosophy of leading Mizrahim, such as the Ben Ish Hai and Rabbi Khalphon Hacohen. In most cases, quotes from these rabbis replaced the quotes from Ashkenazi rabbis that were in the previous manual.

While not all of their demands were met, and the activists therefore considered their success to be only partial, the ministry did give the organization a key position in its deliberations and acceded to their demands for curricular changes. This can be seen as an important achievement, especially in view of previous attempts by Mizrahi activists that failed to bring about any change, leading many parents over the years to abandon the public education system and transfer their children to ultra-Orthodox schools (Picard, 2018).

This incident permits a glimpse into the dynamic space of negotiations and struggle for the representation of the Mizrahi tradition in the name of the liberal principles of equality and diversity. However, it is important to emphasize that defiance in the name of “tradition” can only be wielded by educated Mizrahi traditionalists who are familiar both with liberal-democratic values and Mizrahi-Sephardi tradition. The efficacy of defiance in the name of tradition was possible due to the organic connection between the religious-Zionist establishment and the state institutions and their acceptance of the principles of democracy, equality, and representation. Based on their double position as “traditional and well-educated,” the activists could serve as cultural brokers for effective political activity. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that these acts of defiance as a means for social change were contained within the Jewish ethno-national space.

This chapter completes the analytical description of what I have described as the ideal type of the rooted Mizrahi subject, who refuses to be categorized according to the liberal grammar of the current critical discourse and remains in an ontological position of rootedness, as distinct from the ontology of the autonomous individual. I will now place the rooted Mizrahi subject within a broader analytical framework alongside other forms of rootedness in Jewish Israeli society. I will ask: what is the difference between the rooted subject and the concept of the embedded subject, familiar to us from early sociology and the thought of Michel Foucault? What are the implications of the proposed analysis on the concept of understanding—*verstehen*—in sociology, in particular, and in the human sciences, in general, with regard to the nature of power relations? In the next, and final, chapter, I will expand the discussion to the broader implications of the findings of this research.

The Need for Belonging

The Connective Power of Rootedness

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.

—SIMONE WEIL

We began this book with the “great paradox”—that is, asking why people who belong to disadvantaged populations fail to think and act in ways others believe to be in their best interest. We probed this paradox in the Israeli context, examining the situation of Mizrahim in the social periphery. Throughout the history of modern Israel, Mizrahim have been viewed through the prism of broad universalist paradigms, such as socialism,¹ modernization, secularization, and liberalism, all of which emerged out of the Enlightenment. “A problem in search of an explanation,” Mizrahim were not “modern enough,” lacked class consciousness; declined to become part of the workers of the world; and didn’t join in solidarity with other minority groups in the name of universal justice and human rights. Critical thinkers have always viewed the political behavior of marginalized Mizrahim as reactive and resulting from the social ills to which they were subjected.

THE EMERGENCE OF ROOTEDNESS

I began my journey by confronting the heart of “the great paradox:” why are the Mizrahi subjects indifferent to their inferior status? Why are they not outraged by their lack of equal educational opportunities? The comments of our focus groups members clearly indicate that they do not doubt that inequality does, indeed, exist; in fact, as the statistical analysis indicates, they are more aware of this discrimination than other groups, such as Ashkenazim and Palestinian citizens of

Israel. However, when during group discussion they were confronted with this supposedly painful realization, they did not express even an inkling of anger toward the state. Even when they recognized discrimination and inequality, they viewed these ills as part of the natural process of state-building and viewed themselves as full partners in that process, even if they had to pay a certain price along the way.

They did not think of themselves as an oppressed minority. We did not witness any process of unmasking or revelation that led to resentment or to the first signs of consciousness-raising. Both Mizrahim and Palestinians accepted the structure of opportunities in the 1970s as natural; yet, contrary to the expectation of the liberal-progressive left, the Mizrahim viewed the position that both groups were victims of the Zionist-Ashkenazi hegemony as a category error.

This apparent awareness of discrimination and absence of moral outrage demanded a deeper explanation. As the research progressed, the subjects' alternative underlying grammar emerged. Its cornerstone was an ontology. While the autonomous individual lies at the heart of the liberal grammar's ontology, our disadvantaged Mizrahi subjects articulated an ontological position characterized by what I refer to as the "rooted individual," deeply connected to an imagined whole that is greater than him/herself. This greater whole is rooted in history and in a sense of temporality, forming a continuum from the imagined past through to the present and into the future. The rooted Mizrahi's lived experience, core identity, and consciousness constitute what I have termed the "rooted Mizrahi subject."

For the rooted Mizrahi subjects, it is the Jewish whole, not the autonomous individual, that serves as the starting point for evaluation, even in the face of oppressive social hierarchies, inequality, and overt discrimination, and even in instances when their position is inferior to that of Palestinian Arabs. They do not view inequality as an irredeemable sin, but rather as part of the sacrifice that participation in the greater, more important story of nation building demands. In their view, they have always been, and will continue to be, full partners in this epic drama, and this is how they evaluate their position, then and now.

The rooted subject is embedded in time, and temporality is an intrinsic dimension of rootedness. The rooted Mizrahi subject in this research crosses between Zionist (national) time and ancient mythic (religious) time. Both of these temporalities and both narratives are fused into their core identity. They do not view the state as a "neutral entity" whose role is to serve universal citizens. For them, the polity is Jewish, and they are an integral part of it. Therefore, they consider the very possibility of a political alliance between Mizrahim and Arabs against the state inconceivable, despite any similarities in the positions of these two groups in the social hierarchy. The concept of rootedness enables us to move beyond the axiomatic equation *inequality = injustice*, derived from the liberal grammar and its notion of *homo aequalis* (Dumont, 1980).² This liberal assumption provides the foundation for what Andrew Abbott (2016, p. 350) has defined as contractarian

ontology, the belief that “a nation or society [is] a community of political equals implicitly linked by a social contract. Public life [is] a realm of absolute equality in both rights and responsibilities.” The contractarian ontology has characterized much research on Mizrahim, but it provides no explanation for their ostensibly odd behavior. The interpretive process that I presented in the opening chapter sheds light on rootedness as the foundation of an alternative ontology that can provide the answers we seek.

We examined the meaning of time and history and their relationship to social structure and the critical, more pessimistic view of social reproduction. Throughout the group discussions, our informants rejected the critical understanding of injustice as produced by oppressive structures that perpetuate inequality, abuse, and oppression across time; supported by a historical narrative that is the story of the “victors;” and pushing the oppressed to the edges of history. The Mizrahi subjects refused to accept the role of “subalterns” in the critical script, instead embracing the “history of the victorious,” which, in our case, takes place in Zionist time. They rejected the pessimistic critical view of social reproduction, domination and inequality; rather, they viewed inequality as the fair of participation in the epic drama of nation building. They viewed social structures as dynamic and perceived positive change in their own situations. When we compared their subjective impressions with external independent data, we saw that their belief in the narrowing gaps is indeed supported by empirical evidence.

While to this point we had put distributive justice to the test, we further confronted the subjects with the politics of recognition, which is the other key logic of liberal thinking. We exposed Mizrahi informants to what a critical approach would view as unforgivable and painful evidence of their underrepresentation, not only in the progressive left-wing parties that they vilify, but even in the right-wing ones for which Mizrahim serve as the political base. Here, too, to our amazement, they did not express even the slightest sense of political indignation. Moreover, they did not view their underrepresentation at a given moment in time as an irredeemable injustice. Rather, they gave priority to the good of the state and the Jewish whole over ethnic representation based on affirmative action. Their objection to affirmative action did not stem from a strategic disagreement regarding the best way to improve the position of Mizrahim as a minority group, but rather from a concern for the greater whole that is embodied in the Jewish state. In other words, they asserted that it is important that good, qualified people lead the state, irrespective of their ethnicity.

Moreover, they believed that Mizrahim were increasingly included in leadership positions. As in the previous chapter, this optimistic impression is once again grounded in empirical reality. In contrast, when seen from a critical-progressive point of view, the apathy of ordinary Mizrahim to situations of underrepresentation and misrecognition is an expression of “false consciousness,” the internalization of oppression, or the result of their inferior position in the power structure.

Overall, ethnicity is not the organizing principle of their opposition to the liberal left elites; rather, they oppose its rootless, cosmopolitanism, and the danger this represents to the Jewish whole and the Jewish identity of the state. Rootedness sheds light on what the literature on populism and right-wing nationalism identifies as the tension between the horizontal axis of “we,” the people, and “them,” the external enemy, and the vertical axis between the people, as plebs, and the elites. From a rooted point of view, the two dimensions are connected. Their opposition to the elite (overwhelmingly identified with the secular progressive Ashkenazi left) stems primarily from the threat they pose to the boundaries of the Jewish whole. They see the people as a bounded community to be guarded from threats (physical or identity-related, domestic or foreign). When the religious and national Mizrahi right do protest their exclusion, as we saw in chapter 4, the protest focuses on their exclusion from the Jewish whole as expressed in the Jewish polity. In other words, the demand made by the national-religious right for recognition and representation was not articulated in universal terms, that is, in terms of civil equality, but rather remained confined within the boundaries of the Jewish whole. Ethnic exclusion in this sense does not focus on ethnicity as an organizing principle that is shared by Arabs and Jews, but rather on the demand for inclusion of their Jewish/Mizrahi/Sephardi heritage and their equal participation in state institutions, politics, culture, and economy.

Once again, by reversing the direction of inquiry, we can understand that the Mizrahi subjects refused to adopt the position of an oppressed minority group working with other minority groups (Palestinians, asylum seekers, people with disabilities, etc.) against the state. In contrast to the moral language of representation and recognition, we revealed the rooted meaning of representation and recognition shared by the Mizrahi subjects and highlighted the collision between these two disparate social networks of meaning.

We then confronted our subjects with one of the most subversive critical theories—the thesis of the Arab Jew as proposed by the new Mizrahi discourse. We showed subjects the historical and cultural affinities between Arabs and Jews, which point to an Arab Jewish identity as an objective possibility (as defined by Max Weber). Subjects were then exposed to a critical-radical attempt to constitute or reinvigorate an Arab Jewish identity, which, from the point of view of critical Mizrahi discourse, represents a political possibility and poses a severe threat to the core identity of rooted Mizrahim.

In asserting this political possibility, critical Mizrahi scholars have sought to untie the Gordian knot between religion and nationality in Mizrahi identity and promote an alternative historical narrative linking Arabs and Jews. This Gordian knot fuses the Zionist narrative and temporality with the mythic narrative and time into their ontological story of “who I am” (Somers, 1994), fundamental to their core identity. Thus, any attempt to untie the Gordian knot, even if it is merely an exercise in political imagination (Shenhav, 2006), produced existential

anxiety and deep, emotionally laden resistance among the Mizrahi subjects. In the Palestinian group, participants were not overly excited about the possibility of Arab Jewish identity, either. Palestinian participants did not challenge Mizrahi rootedness and even reinforced the existing identity boundary. While some of them, especially in the middle-class group, did recognize Arab Jewish identity as an objective possibility, none considered this identity politically feasible. It is important to reemphasize that in the pilot stage of the research, we learned for the first time that almost half of Palestinian citizens of Israel lacked familiarity with the concept “Mizrahi.” In the same vein, during the discussions, Palestinian participants viewed Mizrahim through the prism of the specific Arab country from which they came (Iraqi Jews, Moroccan Jews, and so forth). Furthermore, they did not recognize the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi political divide (between left and right) in the most salient social sites (see appendixes 1 and 2). Hence, the Arab-Jewish divide seems to be entrenched on both sides.

These findings echo previous research on the differences in meaning that autonomous and rooted subjects apply to group boundaries. In the liberal imagination, group boundaries constitute an inherent obstacle to peace and coexistence because they limit the ability of autonomous individuals on both sides to fulfill their desires to cross national and religious boundaries (as in interreligious marriage, for example). The Mizrahi subjects and their Muslim counterparts view these religious-national boundaries as constituent features of their core identity (Mizrachi and Weiss, 2020). Indeed, additional ethnographic research has shown that for ultra-Orthodox, Mizrahi, and observant Muslim rooted subjects, maintaining these boundaries is a prerequisite for expressions of common humanity and creation of a shared, respectful space for peace and coexistence (Sadeh, 2021). In a broad sense, this is thus a study of the rooted meaning of identity narratives (Somers, 1994) and group boundaries.

Finally, we explored the idea of defiance as a means of social change. The term emerged in response to the trigger we created by introducing the informants to vignettes featuring fictitious individuals with varied characteristics. When asked to evaluate the affinity they felt toward these characters, subjects objected most strongly to those who used “defiance” against the social and political order in the name of universal reason.

The act of defiance, which has captured the modern political imagination since the French Revolution, is often regarded as a noble quality of the individual who uses his or her moral judgment (in the Kantian sense). It is part and parcel with the emancipatory spirit that is deeply ingrained in the liberal grammar. As both a personal and general quality, both groups of Mizrahim opposed defiance, although there were differences between them. While working-class subjects objected to defiance against the social order because they viewed it as a threat to the state and to the Jewish whole, middle-class respondents viewed defiance in the name of Mizrahiness as dishonorable and irrelevant to their lived experience

of full integration in the Israeli Jewish mainstream and as full partners in its creation.

From a progressive critical view, the opposition of the working class to defiance is primordial or “primitive” or a reflection of their dichotomous position as victim-victimizer. Middle-class mainstreaming as rootedness, in the critical view, is possible only because the middle class takes its Jewish-Zionist identity for granted, and this is an expression of its submissive and cowardly conservatism.

Once again, freeing the interpretive space from essentialist universalism, which asserts that liberation from the Jewish-Zionist narrative is necessary, made it possible to view this as merely one possibility alongside others. It also enabled us to recognize that these other possibilities are not based on “error.” Rather, they stem from an alternative internal logic that exists beyond the liberal grammar of the critical discourse.

ZOOMING OUT

We will now expand our gaze and situate the Mizrahi rootedness that revealed itself in this research within a broader analytical and empirical framework. Rootedness defines the relationship between the individual and the collective. Following Eisenstadt’s conceptualization of collective identity (1998), I will present a broad typology of rootedness. Within this typology, we will place Mizrahi rootedness along a continuum, from closed religious rootedness to the rootlessness of the radical left, which is congruent with the liberal grammar of the pervasive critical discourse that I have described at length.

Rootedness and Sources of Collective Identity

In its generic form, rootedness has two basic elements. The first is the code of collective identity, which defines the boundaries of the whole; the second is temporality. Rootedness is deeply embedded in a narrative of time, including the birth of the whole and the story of its development through time. The group’s continued existence is perceived as a link in a chain through time, from the past and into the future, connecting the generations.

Eisenstadt (1998) distinguishes between three codes that define the collective identity of every society at this time: the primordial code, the transcendent code, and the civil code. He writes:

The primordial code [. . .] focuses on components such as gender and generation, kinship, territory, language, race, and the life for constructing and reinforcing the boundary between insider and outside. This boundary, though constructed, is perceived as naturally given. The second, civic code, is constructed on the bases of familiarity with implicit and explicit rules of conduct, traditions, and social routines that define and demarcate the boundary of the collectivity. [. . .] These rules are regarded as the core of the collective identity of the community. The third code—the

sacral or transcendent—links the constituted boundary between ‘us and them’ not to natural conditions, but to a particular relation of the collective subject to the realm of the sacred and the sublime, be it defined as God or Reason, Progress or Rationality (p. 232).

Eisenstadt further notes that these codes combine in different measures, degrees, and styles in different societies at different times and according to changing geopolitical and social milieux. In the real world, they do not appear to be mutually exclusive. More than one code is typically present, even in groups and individuals who are closely identified with one and reject the others.

For the democratic-liberal public in Israel and throughout the world, the civil code is the central code that demarcates the boundaries of the political community as defined by the modern state. Indeed, in Israel, as in other countries in the West and elsewhere, for many in the secular democratic camp, the civil code is the only code that defines the boundaries of the collective. In his ambitious book *The Civil Sphere*, sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (2006b) presents three points that are important for our discussion. The first point (which is also the least original) is that civil society is a sphere, or a social area, that is analytically (and to a great extent empirically) separate from other spheres, including the political, economic, familial, and religious spheres. The second point is that the unique purpose of civil society is creation of solidarity with a universal character—that is, not narrow, communal or particularistic solidarity, but rather the creation of a national, regional or international “we” that generates a sense of connectedness among all members of the community and extends beyond particularistic commitment and narrow loyalties. Third, civil society is not solely an institutionalized space; it is also a cultural space based on consciousness or on a “network of understandings that creates structures of feelings that enable social life” (p. 54). This network exists under the surface of social institutions and the self-awareness of social elites, and in order to recognize it, one must be aware of its particular symbolic codes.

The distinction between “pure” and “impure” or “contaminated” is the foundation of these codes, enabling the distinction between a legitimate member of a democratic society and one who should be marginalized or, alternatively, must undergo “purification.” With these codes, Alexander is presenting a form of “ideal type” of civil society, as it developed in the West. More specifically, he distinguishes between the characteristics that define the *motivations* of the legitimate players in the civil space, such as rationality, autonomy, and activism; the characteristics that define the relationships between those legitimate players, such as openness, criticalness, and modest altruism; and the characteristics that define its institutions, such as law, inclusivity, and quality.³

The civil border, which distinguishes between the political community of the state that is “us” and the human space beyond—“them”—is the sacred code for the determination of the proper moral, political, and cognitive order. In Israel, the civil code emphasizes Israeliness as the definition of the collective, in contrast to Judaism,

which is the nucleus of a collective identity that stems from a primordial and religious-transcendent code. In its secular iteration, familiar from liberal democracies throughout the world, “the civil collective” is not homogeneous. In the Israeli context, we can distinguish between at least two primary forms. The first marks the left-most point in the civil collective, which is the radical progressive position that I have termed “rootless,” based on the individualist ontology described above. The autonomous, choosing, and equal individual is the universal citizen who resides in a neutral state, free of any social connections that may obstruct his/her autonomy. Therefore, any sign of rootedness, any connection to a national, religious, tribal, or particularly racial whole that limits the autonomy of the individual and his/her civic status as a universal citizen, generates discomfort, along a spectrum from suspicion to resistance and repugnance. In this view, the justification for the social order is human rationality and universal reason and the autonomous individual is assimilated into universal humanity. Progressive rootlessness, in its most extreme iteration, breaks down temporal connectedness to any whole if it limits individual autonomy: ideally, the autonomous individuals build their lives without any connection to a whole imagined to have existed in the past and without any sense of needing to limit their choices according to collective belonging (for example, in choice of a partner), and without concern for maintaining the future of any whole. I repeat that this definition refers to an ideal type, although it does reflect the position of many progressives in the world as well as the liberal grammar.

Let us turn to the other dimension of civic code—the temporal dimension. Republican-secular rootedness is embedded in “national time,” or, in the Israeli case, “Zionist time.” The Zionist story, “From Holocaust to Redemption,” is the story of the whole that was reborn in national time. It is important to note that Zionist time does not only mark the birth of the nation; it also marks the birth of “the new Jew,” who is modern, rational, secular, and suitable for the democratic-liberal order and the modern marketplace economy. Zionist time is thus not only a national project; it is also a project of identity. Those who are unfit for this project are religious Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews, Mizrahi traditionalist Jews, ultra-Orthodox Jews (Mizrachi, 2004) and anyone who rejects the Jewish identity born out of the European Enlightenment.

Religious rootedness, on the other hand, is connected to ancient, pre-national mythical time, the epic time of religious revelation. The extreme “closed rootedness” of the ultra-Orthodox sanctifies the boundaries of the religious-Jewish collective and depends on Halacha (ritual law) as the sole source of authority for the moral, political, and cognitive order. The democratic-civil space is seen as a secular dimension, external to the “sacred whole,” and the Jewish-sacred whole and the closed rooted identity that lies within its boundaries must be protected from any influence from the secular surroundings. The refusal of some Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox to recognize the Zionist state is a clear expression of this position.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the rooted Mizrahim who are at the center of this research cross between religious and national temporality, and between the civil, primordial and transcendental codes, encompassing both the religious and the secular logics. This rootedness is composed of a combination of mythical, ancient Jewish identity and Zionist nationalism, moving between them flexibly, but remains inextricably within the national-religious node. In a similar fashion, they make a connection between the democratic-civil, collective, and the primordial religious codes; they are full participants in the civil-democratic space yet are deeply respectful of Orthodox religiosity. Shlomo Fischer (2010) has referred to this as “vicarious religious,” that is, religious belief that is based on religious authority and intermediary religious figures (such as rabbis, etc.), even if it does not entail full commitment to religious observance. For this reason, the progressive Ashkenazi left continues to suspect Mizrahim of being the “unmodern” and contaminating the secular, modern space, at times presenting them as repugnant.⁴

This description of Mizrahi rootedness is congruent with accounts of Mizrahim in the literature on traditionalism in Israel. Meir Buzaglo (2008, p. 19), for example, describes the “loyalty” to the mythical Jewish identity (the revelation at Mt. Sinai) as part of the Mizrahi traditionalist position, yet, he notes, at the same time, the Mizrahim remain flexible and adapt tradition to changing circumstances in the present, which is an integral part of their Jewish identity. Other scholars, such as Yadgar and Halsall (2015), have emphasized the deep connection to tradition that coexists with a pragmatic and reflexive adaptation to the changes in the present as an essential part of the traditionalist structure.⁵

However, rootedness is a broader analytical and empirical concept. Unlike traditionalism, it is not embedded in the singularity of the description of one feature of Mizrahi behavior. Rather, this is an attempt to suggest a broader analytical term for a general form of belonging and to place it alongside other variations, including the non-Mizrahi and the non-Jewish. Unlike traditionalism, rootedness is positioned in the current research literature as an alternative to the individualist ontology of the liberal grammar in the current critical discourse. To be clear and to state the obvious one more time: the rooted subject, in all of its forms of belonging, is not necessarily a traditionalist, whereas the traditionalist, as described in the literature, is definitely rooted. The congruity between these two analytic concepts in the Mizrahi context demands further empirical and theoretical exploration, which is beyond the bounds of our discussion.

Table 2 shows the varieties of rootedness in Israel. On the two poles of the vertical axes, we find the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox and the liberal-progressive left. In each of the codes of collective identity and temporality they show up as almost complete opposites, as if they were mirror images. The relationship between groups in Israel today reflects the deep split that occurred in Europe during the

TABLE 2 Varieties of rootedness among Jews in Israel

		Collective Codes				Temporality		
		Transcendental		Primordial	Civic	Mythic Rooted Time (ancient)	Zionist Rooted Time (nationality)	Out of Rooted Time
		Universal Reason	God					
Groups	Ultra-Orthodox (close rootedness)		×	×		×		
	Religious Zionists (utopian rootedness)	×	×	×	×	×	×	
	Rooted Mizrahim (pragmatic rootedness)	×	×	×	×	×	×	
	Secular republicans (open rootedness)	×			×		×	
	Progressive liberals, radical left (rootless)	×			×			×

Enlightenment. Indeed, the only category that the two groups share is a rejection of Zionist time as a constitutive event in collective identity, and both reject the definition of a collective border that distinguishes between “us” and “them” according to modern Jewish nationalism. While the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox adopt an a-Zionist position that rejects the state as a source of their nuclear identity, the radical left adopts a post-Zionist position that rejects the definition of citizenship on the basis of Jewish nationalism. The republican-secular position, which is characterized by “open rootedness,” appears in the chart above the rootless position of the radical left and is distinguished from the radical left precisely at this point, as it is connected to both Jewish time and open Israeli-civil rootedness.

We can see that rooted Mizrahim and religious Zionists share common spaces. Both groups oscillate between Zionist time and mythic time, between civic and primordial codes, and between belief in God and belief in universal reason. It is important to note that we are not talking about a distinction between Mizrahim as a whole and religious Zionists, since, as I have noted, Mizrahim can be found in all of the political and cultural segments of Jewish society, including religious

Zionism, where they form part of the spiritual and political leadership. It is instead rooted Mizrahim from Israel's social periphery, those who are at the center of the "great paradox."

Despite the ostensible similarity between the two groups in terms of their position across both modern secularism and the faith and bounded communitarian spaces, there is an essential difference between them. The rooted Mizrahim from the social periphery combine modern secular and religious beliefs and are organically connected to Zionist and mythic time, without holding on to a vision of change for society as a whole or attempting to redefine the political center. They accept secularized social reality, connect both to the modern state and Jewish tradition, and move flexibly between different spheres of life (see Fischer, 2016). In contrast, religious Zionism is an ideological movement that views the state as a means to achieving utopian aspirations. The philosophy of Rabbi Kook, the defining thinker of religious Zionism, argues for participation in the modern, mundane political sphere in order to effect transcendent goals (Mirsky, 2014), marking a fusion of mythic time with Zionist time.

Events taking place in Israel while I write this chapter illustrate the significance of this chart. In January 2023, Benjamin Netanyahu established an extremist right-wing government, unlike any he had formed previously, composed of Likud (which serves as the left boundary of the coalition), religious Zionist parties, and ultra-Orthodox parties. Several months after the government was established, it undertook initiatives to limit the powers of the judicial branch. These efforts were met with unprecedented public protest on the part of the liberal-democratic center-left, which brought the judicial initiative to a halt (see Shultziner, 2023).

Ostensibly, this was a constitutional crisis regarding the meanings of democracy, but it quickly revealed itself to be a deep crisis of trust and identity between two polarized camps. The alignments within and between these camps is striking and sheds light on the social codes that guide their political behavior. The public conduct and behavior of Likud activists are often described as "contaminating" the ideal of the civic code. Their behavior is viewed as "irrational" and "dependent" (on a strong leader, for example) rather than independent, not blindly obedient to the rule of law, and based in personal relationships rather than formal codes (see Alexander, 2006). The democratic-liberal camp fights for proper civic ideals, such as the rule of law, rationality, secular democracy, and the authority of professional experts. This group is composed of the republican-secular center together with the radical and progressive left, an alliance that is not self-evident. The republican-secular center includes prominent former senior military officers, well-connected academic experts, and members of the economic elite, including from the powerful tech sector (Shultziner, 2023).

The Zionist republican center has always been, and remains, the focus of severe criticism by the radical left, which perceives the military elite as responsible for the perpetuation of the Israeli occupation and the economic elite as representatives of

exploitative capitalism. Yet they have joined together against what they view as a threat to the power of the judicial branch, the institution that to them represents the holy of holies, the sole source of authority for the civil order, and which, in essence, makes the country livable. In this time of crisis, these two camps share civic codes through which they distinguish themselves as worthy from the right wing, made up largely of Mizrahim (whom both camps view as populists and whose attachment to tradition and Orthodoxy is repugnant) and the ultra-Orthodox (for whom civil space is secondary or even meaningless when compared to the sacred Jewish whole, the Torah of Israel and the people of Israel). From the other side, and especially for the Likud-voting rooted Mizrahim, the protestors, and most certainly the radical left among them, represent a traitorous, rootless elite that is refusing to accept or even see the will of the people.

Each side has used negative images from the repertoire at its disposal (Mizrahi et al., 2007; Swidler, 1986). Right-wing politicians have called the protestors anarchists in order to reveal the “real face” of the protest as nothing more than an outburst by the radical left that is outside of the broad public consensus. From the other side, supporters of the legislation are seen, often very broadly, as messianic and anti-democratic. The republican and democratic elite, in particular, has also marshaled its influence on media and elsewhere to disseminate opposition to the legislation and demonization of its supporters (Shultziner, 2023).

The judicial crisis revealed a deeper crisis rooted in the struggle over collective identity. To describe the two sides solely along the vertical axis of the “people” vs. the “elites,” a struggle determined by social and economic forces, would not be a mistake but does not fully capture the deep identity crisis. The right-wing Mizrahi rootedness that characterizes the hard-core voters for Likud and Shas represents a sense of peoplehood⁶ along both the horizontal and the vertical axes (Brubaker, 2017, 2020). Rootedness serves as an organizing principle for both sides in the conflict over Netanyahu’s judicial reforms.

As we see in table 2, Mizrahi rootedness is located between open civil rootedness and ultra-Orthodox closed rootedness. From the point of view of open civil rootedness, which is characteristic of the center-left democratic camp, “Israeli” identity as a civil identity defines the boundaries of the national collective, its inclusions and exclusions. As we move to the left, toward the progressive radical position, not only is Judaism viewed as an obstacle for the *homo aequalis*, but the very use of Judaism as a collective boundary comes to be seen as immoral and even repugnant (racist, misogynist, exclusionary, etc.). In terms of temporality, this position is “out of rooted time,” since rootless progressives do not view themselves tied in any obligatory fashion to a particular collective chain or ancestry. From the other side, if we focus on the closed ultra-Orthodox rootedness (in its Ashkenazi form), we see that that the civil code is not only not sacred, but represents a merely administrative space. Democracy, from the ultra-Orthodox point

of view, is a foreign idea. It therefore has no deep moral validity, and certainly cannot define the boundaries of the collective. For them, the sacred collective is the Jewish collective, which draws its sources of moral authority from the divine and not from any universal reason. The Torah, which was given to the Jewish people at Sinai (in the mythic time), defines morality, not the secular institutions, such as the Supreme Court, which are imported from other peoples.

Research by Rosner et al. (2023) sheds light on the axis of the forms of rootedness between these two extreme positions. Their research, conducted among the Jewish population in Israel, presents vignettes that deal, among other issues, with the dilemma between civil and Jewish identities. One of the vignettes:

Betty, born to non-Jewish parents, who came to Israel for love and is serving in the IDF. Most Israeli Jews (58%) see her as non-Jewish, but a substantial minority (34%) think that Betty should be considered a Jew. Why? Apparently, living in Israel and serving in the IDF are the explanations for this, as is evident from a cross-referencing of the responses pertaining to Betty's Jewishness with those of another question, in which the participants were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement 'Those who serve in the IDF and self-define as Jews, are Jews.' Four out of ten Israeli Jews concur with the proposition that IDF service reflects a process of joining the Jewish people. Among secular Jews 64% agree. Agreement declines among the more traditional groups with traditional-not-so religious 36%, traditional-religious 18% and so on" (p. 35–36).

Most Jews in Israel are positioned along the continuum between these two types of rootedness, and the radical rootlessness, which is homologous with the liberal grammar of the current critical discourse, actually represents the identity of a small portion of the Jewish population (and a small portion of the Palestinian population, although they were not the focus of this research). It is therefore important to emphasize that, as previously noted, some of the characteristics of rootedness, especially of "closed religious rootedness," echo the typical portrayal of premodern societies or communities, with all of the accompanying political and cultural implications. However, we emphasize that the rooted Mizrahi subjects discussed here are utterly modern. They are fully integrated into the modern industrial state in which they live. In their personal life, they experience freedom of choice and movement, participate in the democratic politics and accept its rules, accept liberal ideas such as the LGBTQ discourse and gender equality in the job market, and cope with many other emerging modern-liberal contemporary challenges in our time. Furthermore, rooted subjects should not necessarily be equated with rooted communities or groups, and rooted subjects do not necessarily belong to a socially bounded group. Although rootedness can be related to a community, as in cases of religious or ideological communities in Israel or elsewhere, rootedness appears in different guises. Its proximity to the concept's "ideal type" varies from right-wing Orthodox nationalist (Mizrahi or Ashkenazi)

to moderate secular republican. Among Mizrahim in Israel, rootedness runs along the full spectrum, including progressive or other non-rooted Mizrahi individuals. Put simply, Mizrahi Jews in Israel belong to all political camps, from radical progressive left to closely rooted ultra-Orthodox and religious Zionist settlers. Rootedness, in its various manifestations, thus represents what Eisenstadt (2002) identified as “multiple modernities,” a reality that transcends the old, entrenched dichotomy between “tradition” and “modernity.”

The Universal Essentialism of Rootlessness

From the discussion to this point, we see that Mizrahi rootedness is one among other forms of rootedness all of which display different collective representations of belonging. Not only is the definition of right-wing voting Mizrahim as rooted not unusual among Jews (and of course, among non-Jews as well, including Muslims, Druze, and other groups in the region), but rootedness is the prevalent position, while the rootlessness shared by the progressive left and the liberal grammar of the current critical discourse represents the outlier position in the social fabric of Israeli society.

From this point, I wish to return to the argument that I presented at the beginning of the book, the significance of which is clearer now: my main goal is not to essentialize right-wing Mizrahim or other non-liberal subjects; rather, it is my intent to de-essentialize the liberal grammar by which they are read. From the point of view of the rootless liberal grammar, the political conservatism of disadvantaged Mizrahim is perceived as an *anomaly*. Their behavior is a “symptom of a problem” rather than beliefs and actions in and of themselves. There is an assumption here regarding the unfulfilled essence of equal and autonomous individualism that is free of any social binds that would prevent individuals from fulfilling themselves according to their choice.

A “real” representation could take place only if the subject were to undergo a liberal-progressive redemption that would liberate him/her from the chains of rootedness. The critical scholar’s concern with granting representation to rootedness is understandable and, at times, is even justified. In the eyes of the modernization theorists, who were tainted with orientalism and at times with cultural racism, rootedness was considered “premodern,” or, to be blunter, “primitive.” It is important to remember that theories of modernization, as well as critical theories, which sought to expose the oppressive meaning of the former, evaluated the behavior of right-wing Mizrahim from within the framework of universal moral, cultural, and political frames. Ironically, both of these paradigms impose one essential representation on Mizrahim and other rooted subjects, which liberates them in preparation for their true purpose in life as autonomous, rational, equal, and choosing individuals suitable for the liberal-democratic order.

The lack of representation of Mizrahi rootedness has created a severe misrepresentation of the Mizrahi subject in the research literature and a consistent failure to

understand the frequent resistance of rooted Mizrahim to the liberal-progressive “liberating” message. As I have argued before (Mizrachi, 2016, p. 36), with regard to the objection to the ideals of human rights by Mizrahim from the social periphery: “The politics of universalism, rooted in the liberal grammar of human rights and viewed from the liberal standpoint as a key to social emancipation, is experienced by the target population as a heartless betrayal and a grave identity threat.” Lest we create the impression that these are static and stable divisions, as if it were a stable topography of social reality, I will reiterate that among real people, connected to the social networks of meaning that I briefly described in chapter 4, reality is dynamic, and movement between the networks is evident. In line with the cultural turn in sociology (Alexander 2021), I certainly do not regard forms of rootedness as “cultural entities” that entirely dictate people’s consciousness and behavior in a top-down manner. Moreover, the components of rootedness presented in table 2 are not always clearly distinct from one another in peoples’ minds. For example, Zionist time is actually anchored in mythic time and deeply embedded in the Zionist ethos of returning to Zion after two thousand years in exile (Raz-Krakotzkin, 1994), and the civic code for the many democratic liberals in Israel who accept the Law of Return is neither uncomplicated nor purely universal (see Haj Yahia 2021). Yet, in unsettled times (Swidler 1986), such as, for example, during the constitutional crisis when opponents to the legal reform felt that their collective identity was under siege, people tend to over-emphasize the civic democratic code and deepen the entrenched moral divide (see Lamont 2002) between “we”—the liberal-democratic protesters—and “them”—in their view, the repugnant ultra-orthodox, messianic religious Zionist and populist Likud members (who are predominantly Mizrahim). At the same time, members of the coalition called upon democratic rhetoric and civic codes, such as the rule of law and standard procedures, in their attempts to gain public legitimacy and reach their political goals.

Yet, I argue that as an ideal type, forms of rootedness shape more than visions of moral and political order and group boundaries. As we have seen, both the intensity of closedness and openness can vary along different types of rootedness, thus shaping the cultural repertoire available to people (Swidler, 1986; Mizrachi et al., 2007; Alexander, 2021). Furthermore, of course, all forms of rootedness, including those shared by the various political and scholarly discourses, are equally embedded in history and culture.

To be sure, the ontological position of the liberal grammar that is identified with the progressive left occupies an extreme place on the continuum of rootedness. The entire spectrum, from the rootless position on the one side to closed rootedness on the other, represents a structural tension intrinsic to social life, the tension between liberty and belonging. The rootless position represents the belief that individual and group liberty is essential to human wellbeing. Yet in its extreme form, I suggest, it denies another essential aspect of human wellbeing, that is, the need for belonging (see Seligman 2023).

The tremendous space that universal reason has taken in the political imagination since the Enlightenment has made it difficult to entertain any thinking about its own particularistic sources. The position that views reason as the universal and sole precept for the moral, political and cognitive order poses a challenge to any attempt to turn the enlightened gaze upon itself and explore its parochial roots. As Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004, p. 273) wrote, “the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power.”

Facing the gravitational pull of Enlightenment thought in its current progressive iteration, we had to reactivate our sociological imagination, which had been trapped within the boundaries of the liberal grammar, so that the “recalcitrant subjects,” who insist on spoiling the critical-progressive researcher’s precious universal story, could make their voices heard. The attempt to deny tradition its power has not been the only way in which Mizrahi rootedness has been denied. Indeed, blinded by the Enlightenment, critical discourse has failed to see that its own position is, in fact, a tradition.

Against the gravity of the liberal grammar and its exclusive ontological stance, I sought to open space to a number of different coexisting, rooted ontologies. In contrast to the interpretive position of the critical discourse, which is characterized by the hermeneutics of suspicion, I present the interpretive position that stems from the suspicion of suspicion, accompanied by the activation of the subject by means of methodology that I have termed multiple hermeneutics.

Finally, in contrast to the politics of liberation, I strive for a politics of liberation from liberation, and I suggest a very preliminary design for an alternative politics, based in political and research experience. Recognition of rootedness provides a foundation for an initial design of a politics of relationships.

Beyond the Liberal Grammar

As we have discussed, the liberal grammar as an ideal type combines an ontological position that places at its foundation a social world characterized by relations of power and domination and views the equal, free autonomous individual as trapped within oppressive structures, with an interpretive position that is motivated by over-suspicion and negation of overt reality. As a political position, it emphasizes the politics of liberation and seeks to free the individual from those oppressive forces and structures through acts of resistance, subversion, and disruption.

The Ontological Stance and the Limits of Power as Domination

With regard to power, my argument is simple. Whether conscious not, the liberal grammar has narrowed the use of the word “power” to mean domination, which is an image of conflictual reality based in hierarchical social, economic and symbolic relationships. This image is appropriate, for example, for the vertical dimension in the literature that relates to populism as a “glitch” in the democratic-liberal

structure. Indeed, the literature on the populist left (and even Laclau's [2005] sophisticated analysis) relates to material and social relationships of domination as the organizing logic of populist behavior.

I am aware that many critical readers may still, even after my explanations and reservations, feel uncomfortable with the fact that I consider them to have an individualist ontology and narrow vertical perception of power. However, it is important to remember that whether current critical research is attending to predatory market forces, processes of social reproduction, historical processes, or the justifications for social hierarchies, most of this research is guided by the axiomatic principle of the *homo aequalis*, according to which inequality is an anomaly. Therefore, even if the individualist ontology of the liberal grammar is not consciously present in its working assumptions, the focus on inequality as an anomaly derives directly, as mentioned earlier, from individualistic ontology. The assumption that it is a problem rarely requires explanation. This is another indication of its status as doxa within current critical research. Thus, recognition of rootedness as a non-individualistic ontological position based in the need for belonging, which cannot be reduced to hierarchical structures, expands our interpretive space and even opens up new horizons for political thinking.

I am endeavoring to disentangle the dimensions of identity and meaning from any hierarchical social structure. Recognition of rootedness as a meaningful dimension with its own internal logic, rather than derivative of hierarchical structures, is a key to understanding the "paradox" with which we opened this research. Disentangling meaning from concepts of social domination leads us to another theoretical possibility regarding the necessary connection between power and meaning, which might shed light on the prevalent conceptual ambivalence in the literature on populism.

As Roger Brubaker (2020) notes, the connection between the vertical dimension (which distinguishes between the "people" and the "elites"), and the horizontal dimension (which distinguishes among the "people," between "us" and "them," the external and internal enemy) remains analytically and empirically controversial and ambiguous. Brubaker acknowledges that these dimensions are empirically intertwined, although they are analytically distinct from one another. He explains, "Trumpism and European national populism bring the vertical and horizontal registers together by characterizing 'the elite'—political, cultural and economic—as 'outside' as well as 'on top': not only as intensive to the economic struggles of ordinary people, but also as indifferent or condescending toward their way of life. The elite are seen as not only economically insulted but also culturally deracinated: in effect, as rootless, cosmopolitans, even if that older anti-Semitic populist language is not used" (2017, p. 1192). Recognition of the intertwining of the two dimensions leaves us, Brubaker says, with "an impure definition of populism" (2020, p. 62), which, he argues, is not necessarily a bad thing, as it enables us to follow the ambiguity and complexity of populism itself.

Brubaker's important distinction between the economic and cultural dimensions is critical for understanding the vertical axis of the consumers of populism, who are most often absent from the discussion. The assumption about power in the vertical axis, which is so prevalent in the literature on populism, narrows the meaning of power to relationships of social and economic domination. However, the meaning that the "consumers of populism" (in our case, the rooted Mizrahim) attribute to liberal elites is not limited to their political and economic domination. The bulk of their resentment focuses on their domination over the meaning of morality and the political order. They are occasionally bothered by the universalist civil positions, even in its national forms (such as the broad use of the discourse of human rights), the minimization of the Jewish identity of the State, and so forth. This is not because the elite is primarily Ashkenazi, or because this elite is economically predatory, but rather because some of the norms and values that it promotes constitute a threat to the identity of the Jewish whole in which the Mizrahim are rooted.

When we position Mizrahi rootedness with regard to the three meanings of "people"—plebs, sovereign demos, and bounded community—we realize that Mizrahi rootedness includes all three. These meanings are frequently used when referring to both the vertical dimension—in which Ashkenazi liberals are the elites and Mizrahim serve as plebs—and the horizontal—boundaries between "us" (as a bounded community) and "them" (those outside of the ethnic community). However, rooted Mizrahim demand their right to recognition as sovereign demos in the struggle against the left-wing liberal elites with regard to the meaning of democracy. They protest against the rootlessness and cosmopolitanism of the liberal left (see Mizrahi, 2016) and its frequent challenges to the Jewishness organizing principle of the state as a bounded community.

The liberal-democratic camp is mostly characterized by an intermediate, secular republican position, which is loyal to the civil code, engaged in a struggle over the image of the state as liberal, democratic, and secular, and shies away from, and even sometimes opposes, Jewish tribal discourse, the presence of religious symbols in the public sphere, and religious authority in civic contexts, such as rabbinic control over the institution of marriage among Jewish Israelis.

Mizrahi rootedness moves along and between these axes and reveals itself as an organizing principle for the behavior of right-wing disadvantaged Mizrahi Jews, who are often defined all at once as fascists, racists, and populists. Although Mizrahi and other forms of rootedness we have discussed here may seem to be limited to the singularity of the Israeli case, similar cases may be found in other contexts. Other forms of Israeli rootedness likewise remain to be explored, and some of them may add analytical clarity to this complex phenomenon.

In the broad theoretical context, it would appear that the meaning of vertical "power" has been narrowed down to power-over, which solely comprises economic, social, and political relationships of domination. This is common in the critical discourse in general and research on populism in particular. However,

it ignores the struggle over the meaning of identity as an integral part of power struggles. In this regard, it echoes Michel Foucault's (1978) concept of power, which is deliberately distinct from hierarchical domination.

For Foucault, power exists inextricably within a power-knowledge nexus that constitutes the social weave in which meaning and subjectivity are deeply ingrained. Power is "everywhere," and it encompasses all dimensions of knowledge and meaning. Any power-knowledge network exists in time and place, and at any moment in history there is no escape from the power-knowledge nexus that envelops our lives and defines their meaning. However, within the power-knowledge nexus, power and meaning are intrinsically interwoven, and power is an all-encompassing dimension that swallows up other dimensions of meaning. If we attempt to describe the case before us from within a Foucauldian framework, we might view the Mizrahi subjects' rejection of the liberal grammar and their refusal to be "liberated" as a form of resistance to the liberal-progressive regime of truth rooted in the Enlightenment.

However, there are several important differences between the view I am developing and the Foucauldian position. The first point is methodological, in the broader sense of the term. I have reservations about Foucault's starting point, that power is everywhere, which implies that people's full subjectivity can only sink into power's black hole. By contrast, we keep asking about the precise meaning that living subjects in the present attach to the power-knowledge nexus within which they live. We ask whether rooted Mizrahi subjects experience their world of meaning as resistance.

We also note the implications of the difference between the diachronic (historical) view of the subject and the synchronic view that I present, which follows the living subject.⁷ I will briefly deal with the reality of "deep diversity," in which rooted subjects live within different power-knowledge systems that coexist simultaneously in one political space. This reality resists being categorized according to Foucault's diachronic position.

Let us begin with the distance between engineered and real-life subjects. The meaning that living subjects attach to the power-knowledge nexus in which they live and their resistance to other networks of power is not completely foreign to Foucault. He attends to these issues in his later works, in which he examines the actions of subjects as creators of meaning—as ethical agents who have the ability to constitute themselves by attaching ethical meaning to their lives and changing surroundings. In these later works, which deal with pleasure and concern for the self in ancient Rome and Greece, Foucault examines the active element of the subject, their role as a creator of meaning, and the actions they perform in order to constitute and maintain the self when faced with codes and systems of meaning in a historical context (Foucault, 1988, 1990).

However, Foucault's genealogical approach to the study of a subject examines change diachronically, so that historical changes become evident only in

retrospect. For example, in the Middle Ages, body and desire made up the components of the “self,” while in the modern period, emotions have become the fundamental components of the self along with other transformations (such as different manners of subjectification, techniques of the self, and telos).⁸ In contrast, my research, like many studies in the social sciences, is synchronic and seeks to closely follow a living subject. More broadly, in any particular power-knowledge nexus, we ask: what is the meaning the subjects attach to that nexus in real time? The meaning of such a nexus does not derive from a general, necessary, and universal principle, according to which we can evaluate how living subjects makes sense of the present.

However, the subject’s refusal to be categorized according to the universal liberal grammar is not necessarily a form of resistance. In our analysis, power may be everywhere, but it is not everything: our rooted subjects do not experience rootedness as a form of resistance. Foucault’s diachronic analysis cannot capture the polysemic nature of people’s “sense-making,” action, and creativity before they became a subject cast in a historical and genealogical script.

Finally, Foucault’s diachronic analysis follows leveled and chronological discursive transformations. As we face a global reality of “diversity” and “deep diversity,” we are witness to different networks of knowledge-power that coexist in a common political space. This is evident, for example, in the deep rifts among various forms of rootedness, which often represent distinct communities that share some political space and hold fundamentally different, often clashing, underlying justifications and sources of authority for the social and moral order (see Mizrachi, 2014; Taylor, 1999). As we showed in table 2, different forms of rootedness relate to different codes of collective identity, are tied to different temporalities, and are attached to different transcendental sources of authority. In these cases, questions of sovereignty and the role of the state, which play a secondary role in Foucault’s approach, are significant factors, and we have yet to explore the full set of questions about the conditions of possibility for disparate systems of meaning to coexist, take their place in the public space, and penetrate other systems of meaning and social networks.

*The Interpretive Turn: From “Suspicion of Suspicion”
to Multiple Hermeneutics*

In contrast to the hermeneutics of suspicion, the accepted interpretive position in the critical discourse (Felski, 2015), I entered into a conscious process of a pendulum swing, from the position of over-suspicion to the position of meaning. This involved turning the suspicious gaze upon itself, a suspicion of suspicion. To achieve this, I took an unusual methodological route, which enabled me to place the interpretive suspicion to the test among the subjects in the field.

Thus, activating the Mizrahi subjects was my first mission. This was accomplished through a methodological process I have termed multiple hermeneutics,

in which subjects were shifted from one interpretive position to another to enable them to read the data they had helped create. In addition to activating the Mizrahi subject, *multiple hermeneutics* served as my own methodological tool, helping me remain alert to the risk of becoming overly suspicious and sustain a mode of suspiciousness of suspicion throughout all stages of the research process. Throughout this research, I put the liberal grammar of critical sociology to the test by engaging the Mizrahi subjects, as individuals and as a group, with key issues, including social (in)equality and the structure of opportunity; representation and identity politics; social boundaries and collective identity; history and temporality; and social change and the meaning of defiance.

In and of itself, the bottom-up reading of the meanings that subjects attach to social inequalities is not new. Luc Boltanski (2008), for example, examined the gap between sociological assumptions about inequality and the meaning that “ordinary people” attach to evidence of inequality. He contended that when inequality is seen from below, there is a gap between the quantitative description of asymmetries in resources and opportunities (empirical measurements based on stratification studies of distributive justice) and the value and meaning that people who live within that inequality attach to it. Furthermore, Boltanski examined the suspicious interpretation that leads sociologists to assume that hierarchy = oppression. In many cases, he argues, this assumption has no basis in reality. There are different forms of hierarchy, and they have different meanings, so a hierarchical structure does not necessarily generate an experience of oppression.

In *On Justification* (2006), Boltanski and Thévenot identify six domains in which people define the common good. These domains are influenced by the tension between two constraints: *equality*, which is derived from the assumption of common humanity, and *order*, according to which a hierarchical structure creates a sense of stability and meaning.

I agree with most of Boltanski’s (2008) assumptions, as well as those of Boltanski and Thevenot, yet it is important to point to two key differences between their research and my own. While Boltanski examines the gap between sociology’s assumptions and the everyday experiences of people, in the current study I place critical sociology’s internal grammar in a defined ideological and political context. In this way, I am able to identify the roots of the collision between that grammar and the “alternative grammar” provided by the subjects. I argue that the gap between sociology’s assumptions and people’s experiences cannot be fully explained by a description of individuals’ attitudes in various contexts, but requires a collective representation (of course, as an ideal type) embedded in the alternative ontological position. In other words, people’s moral experiences are embedded in collective systems of meaning, through which they interpret phenomena. These collective systems of meaning do not determine the way individuals think and act, but form part of a larger repertoire through which they create new meaning and make sense of the social world (Swidler 1986).

The methodological route that I took and the alternative grammar of root-ness that emerged from my inquiry call for revisiting another key concept in critical research: the adjective “critical.”

Is It Critical?

What is criticism? Who are the critics? And what are the targets of the criticism? Over the past few years, responding to these questions has become ever-more challenging, and examination of critical discourse reveals a troubling situation. In Israel, criticism, whose initial supporters sought to position it as a liberated, universal, intellectual-political space, is largely identified with the progressive left. Its social boundaries are limited to the bourgeoisie, a homogenous elite that is well-educated, secular, and liberal. The methodological route I have taken in this study invites us to reexamine the adjective “critical,” often attached to sociology and characteristic of current mainstream social research. What does this description mean? And who is permitted to criticize whom?

In this regard, too, I find it important to relate to Boltanski’s work. His pragmatic approach led him to examine criticism in the real world. He is correct when he states that sociology’s critical language and the social sciences’ focus on inequality have already seeped into other fields, including, for example, the media, and into public and political discourse; the added value of sociology as a distinct critical position becomes redundant. From the point of view of pragmatic sociology, there is a difference between a description of reality and a critique made on the basis of what that reality is “supposed” to look like. From the point of view of people as social agents, criticism does not necessarily amount to antagonism toward system itself, but rather complaints and grievances in concrete, specific social contexts. For example, for critical sociology, entrance examinations to universities are a means to reinforce and maintain the strength of the strong. But ordinary people do not perceive the individual case (failure, for example) as proof of group bias, nor do they necessarily interpret failure as an injustice. This “lack of understanding” does not stem from error or false consciousness (internalization of oppression); rather it is a result of the desire of ordinary individuals to pass the test and receive the value that it can provide (Boltanski, 2008). Boltanski recognizes the importance of the way critical sociology has described the world. However, he contends that the point of view of these descriptions is itself social, partial, and bound by institutional contexts. And it is a pessimistic view.

In *On Critique* (2011), Boltanski discusses the interactions between real people and meaning-making institutions and points to the complexity of their hermeneutic relationships. However, according to Boltanski, the criticism of “ordinary people” does not extend beyond a pragmatic, micro- and institutional level analysis, nor does he identify bottom-up criticism that is rooted in a collective logic that

would serve as an alternative to the progressive criticism adopted by the sociology of domination.

How does recognition of rootedness expand and deepen the critique of the drift of critical sociology toward the liberal grammar? Is the suspicion that accompanies attempts to extricate dimensions of meaning from relationships of power and domination nothing more than a reactionary process that sends us back, in retreat, to “non-critical” sociology?

Between “Critique” and “Social Criticism”

When we attach the adjective *critical* to sociology, what do we really mean? The term encompasses a set of meanings that stem from diverse intellectual traditions. Since its inception as a scientific discipline, sociology has wrestled with two distinct meanings of the term: analytical critique and social criticism. The latter refers to a particular normative position, while the former refers to understanding the conditions of possibility of a social phenomenon (in the Kantian sense).

Throughout its history, sociology has been plagued by a tension between a commitment to the production of scientific knowledge (to study the conditions of possibility of social phenomena) and the quest for social justice or reform in particular normative terms (Boltanski, 2011) that derive from the Enlightenment. In fact, modern scientific sociology developed against the background of the social and cultural changes that began in the sixteenth century and led to criticism as a cultural phenomenon (Eisenstadt and Curelaru, 1976). Among the founders of classical sociology, it was Weber (1958), the father of interpretive sociology, who emphasized the need to maintain the boundary between science and values so that sociology could continue to exist as an academic discipline. In presenting his position on the need for scientific investigative space, Weber had been influenced by Dilthey’s (1989) distinction between understanding (*Verstehen*) and explaining, which is the epistemic disposition necessary for science. He was therefore fully aware of the interpretive, subjective nature of human sciences. He sought to protect sociology from the encroachment of politics (as social criticism) into science (as critique). Drawing the line between politics and science is necessary, according to Weber, because it makes it possible to separate critique in the analytic-scientific sense from the conflictual arena of good and bad.

Of course, this does not mean that analytical critique takes place in an apolitical space. Rather, its deep political meaning is fully revealed in those instances in which the analytical description of reality shakes up the listener, contradicts their normative beliefs, and forces them, in Weber’s words, “to recognize ‘inconvenient facts’—I mean, facts that are inconvenient for their party opinions.”

Although in critical circles over the last decade Weber’s notion of value neutrality has often been equated with simple or even naïve positivism, many of those critics failed to recognize Weber’s nuanced reading of terms like “neutrality” and

“values” (see Hammersley, 2017). More importantly, Weber’s warning about the risk of conflating values and science is often read one-sidedly, as an attempt to protect science from the inroads of politics. Less intuitively, Weber’s distinction between science and politics can also act in reverse, referring to the use of the former in the latter (see Gieryn, 1999; Shenhav, 2006). Modern attempts by scientific disciplines such as genetics, biology, psychology to anchor the social order in science were heavily criticized by critical sociologists, who have exposed the political assumptions underlying various scientific theories and their constitutive role in ratifying existing power relations (Gieryn, 1999; Gould, 1981; Mizrachi, 2004; Shenhav, 2002).

Yet, I ask, is contemporary critical sociology not complicit in the very phenomenon it criticizes? Does its political loyalty to liberal justice and human rights not constitute science in the service of politics? Most representatives of critical discourse would reject this suggestion, and a review of some of the classic critical schools reveals that most critical thinkers carefully preserved the line that divides between social criticism and critique, most adhering to the tenets of analytic critique. Even Marx does not offer a “social criticism,” but rather a coherent, reasoned description of the nature of social reality, the course of history, the place of consciousness, the source of class differences and so forth. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and Foucault’s portrayal of the knowledge-power network, to name just two, follow similarly in this vein. Not one of these “critical” approaches is colored by a “social criticism” that stems from a partisan position based on loyalty to a political faction or a declaration of allegiance to a set of values; none take such partisanship as the starting point for scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the following excerpt from Max Horkheimer (1978, p. 148), the intrinsic tension between social criticism and analytic critique persists:

People always ask what should be done now, they demand an answer from philosophy as if it were a sect. . . . [P]hilosophy . . . holds a mirror up to the world. . . . But it is no imperative. Exclamation marks are foreign to it. It has replaced theology but found no new heaven to which it might point, not even a heaven on earth. But it is true that it cannot rid itself of that idea, which is the reason people always ask it for the way that could take them there. As if it were not precisely the discovery of philosophy that that heaven is none to which a way can be shown.

Concomitantly, Theodor Adorno warned against the “danger . . . of judging intellectual phenomena in a subsumptive, uninformed and administrative manner and assimilating them into the prevailing constellations of power which the intellect ought to expose” (in Butler, 2001).

Clifford Geertz’s paper “Anti Anti-Relativism” (1984) warned us some four decades ago that attempts to bring back lost certainty in absolute moral standards have failed, and they are motivated by fear of the nihilism and the loss of a moral anchor to which relativism can lead. Negation of anti-relativism, as the title of

the paper suggests, does not necessarily mean, Geertz argues, adopting relativism, a label that is sometimes used to brand someone as morally defective and lacking any conscience. The anti-relativist position that he rejects is the position of certainty that adopts the liberal grammar as a starting point that is transparent to itself and thus removes itself from culture and history. This is a particularistic and narrow position of social criticism: normative, partisan, and sectarian. Today, Geertz's paper seems like a desperate attempt to extract anthropology from its position as a moral science and to reposition it as a science of morality, which investigates different forms of moral life. In retrospect, we see that his attempt failed (see also Fassin, 2012).

Foucault freed critique from political purpose or liberation, whether concrete or imagined. For him, critique was first and foremost a praxis whose goal is the constant disruption of any "truth" presented as self-evident, or central to the order of things. Such purported truths, he warns, conquer the space of sovereignty through subjugation of all other truths. Hence, even analytical critique cannot be divorced from culture and history and is always deeply engrained in time and place, in a world of meaning, within which it operates alongside the object of its analysis. It does not call, therefore, for judgment that distinguishes between "good" and "bad" in the name of universal reason or any other truth.

Yet even if we have weathered the storm of the suspicious reactionary approach, we are still left with questions. Would freeing sociology from the bonds of the liberal grammar and the mode of suspicion lead to a kind of "emancipatory" critical stance? Is analytical critique itself a product of history? If so, is its particularity likewise an object of critique? Is a hermeneutic position that rests on analytic critique able to serve as a firm anchor for scientific inquiry in an age of "deep difference"? The most radical move to break the limits of secular interpretation in the social sciences is the 2009 collection edited by Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular?* In the introductory chapter, Brown claims that the idea of critique is itself an Enlightenment conceit that assumes that reason, which enables us to arrive at scientific truth through the objective method, is revealed only when the authority of religion is shed. Kant's demand to subsume everything within critique, including reason itself, captures this idea. Critique is thus intended to supplant religious authority or any other authority not anchored in reason, and, as such, it is able to replace belief with "truth" and subjectivity with "science."

Theologian John Milbank (1990) pioneered this direction of inquiry by introducing the notion of "radical orthodoxy." Milbank proposed to overturn the ingrained perspective of the secular academy on the relationship between theology and social theory. In his incisive study of the founding figures of social theory, Milbank exposed the limits of secular logic. This reading discerns the field's theological foundations, undermines the notion of a secular and "emancipated" social theory, and offers a theological alternative.

Milbank's radical move inspired anthropologist Joel Robbins (2006) to call for a reexamination of the theoretical grounds for the concept of otherness in contemporary anthropology, which, he claims, poses a fundamental problem for the field. Robbins argues that the Christian cosmology furnished by Milbank, which assumes a connection between people based on peace and shared humanity, challenges the secular basis of anthropology regarding otherness, which it views in terms of conflict and protection. Robbins suggests that anthropology consider the other not only through this conflictual lens, as "the suffering subject" (Robbins, 2013) in need of protection, but as someone who can teach us about the ontologies of human relations that animate Western thought. Indeed, rootedness, as a counter-ontology to that of the autonomous individual, transcends the conflictual limits of the sociology of domination and identity politics and opens new channels for thinking and acting.⁹

The question we ask is, therefore, what political horizon does the recognition of rootedness open before us?

*From the Politics of Liberation to the Politics of Liberation
from Liberation: Toward a Politics of Relationships*

As we have noted, the liberal grammar's political stance extols liberation. In its progressive version, it is characterized by an emancipatory spirit, prioritizing resistance, subversion, and disruption in the struggle against repressive power structures and the breaking of individuals' shackles. In the spirit of the French Revolution, liberation from oppressive tradition in the name of universal reason is at the center of the liberal political imagination. In the spirit of the socialist International's dream that "the earth shall rise on new foundations," the liberal grammar seeks to free the rooted subject from his/her rootedness. As I have documented in previous research (Mizrachi, 2016), the failure to recognize rootedness leads to fervent objection by the rooted subject (Jewish, Muslim, and other) to a politics that threatens their nuclear identity, which is deeply embedded in a greater whole to which they are connected in a chain of time (see Mizrachi and Weiss, 2020).

But how can we think of an initial outline for a politics that recognizes an ontological alternative to the individualistic ontology of the liberal grammar? First, the very recognition of an alternative ontology can free the liberal imagination from the drive to liberate the autonomous individual from their connections, and help us to recognize the power of the social and ethnic rootedness as meeting the fundamental need for belonging. In this regard, liberation from liberation frees the political imagination from the need to impose top-down universal reason as the key to the fulfillment of a moral and political vision. However, the political position of the liberal grammar is not merely a cognitive position seeking universal redemption. It is nurtured by an Eros that seeks to deconstruct and undermine the existing order. Its very reason for existence is the negation of the existing order as the starting point for thinking about "the political." This position is prominent

in traditions like the Frankfurt School, but is also alive in Foucault's approach to the political, which hardly be characterized as the universalism of the liberal grammar. Foucault (1977, p. 225), actually seeks to undermine this when discussing the political role of the intellectual: "I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present."

Thus, recognition of rootedness would appear to be an incarnation of Foucault's dream. It can be read as a subversive act that destroys universal truth and may therefore be regarded as a pristine act of resistance. To a great extent, the proposed effort to make rootedness present reveals its power to redefine the order of things. Yet, once again, if we bring our analytic lens closer to living subjects, we see that not only is the deconstructive political position not part of the life experiences of the research subjects as political subjects, they do not experience rootedness as a form of resistance. As we saw in chapter 6, the politics of defiance and deconstruction is met with resistance. While Foucault does state that the work of the intellectual is not necessarily identical to political praxis, the spirit of his thought is connected to an ethos of defiance, identified with the critical politics and viewed as a necessary model for political action (Katriel, 2020). Recognition of rootedness requires that we forgo the certainty prevalent in contemporary critical discourse and, in opposition to Foucault's approach, adopt a more modest political position.

Recognition of rootedness entails recognition of a continuum of forms of belonging, with individual and group differentiation in terms of connection to the whole, that is the need for both difference and belonging (Seligman, 2023). Recognition of rootedness does not mean that we must ignore the extreme position of rootlessness. Rather, we can enter into a political space of relationships, within which it is possible to learn about the conditions of possibility for radical connectivity between groups embedded in different ontological positions.

*The Connective Power of Rootedness: From Radical De-construction
to Radical Re-construction*

If we refer to this imagined political space as the politics of rootedness, we will see that the strength of rootedness as observed in the field is not its power to "deconstruct," but rather its ability to "re-construct," that is, to connect networks of meaning and to repair relationships from within.

From this modest position, I will present several instances of rooted politics in the fields of research and politics that exemplify the connective power of the alternative position and enable us to open new horizons for political thinking and action in situations of deep diversity.

It is important to note that while most of the prominent entrepreneurs and thinkers who act in the name of rootedness do not deny or ignore the various

forms of power differentials, the meaning of their activity is not derived from Foucault's conception of power or from the sociology of domination. They do not view cultural and political activity as part of a battle between conflicting forces. Nor do they view themselves as warriors who seek to liberate—in the name of universal reason—Mizrahim, Palestinians, or others from the Jewish state's structures of domination. However, as we have seen and as we will see, the politics of rootedness does not comprehensively reject liberal principles and often connects with them organically.

Theorists of "rootedness" who belong to the traditionalist stream in Israel that we discussed in chapter 6 do not act as "destroyer(s)" of the power of universal reason, but as restorers of the power of particular traditions, linking conflicting worlds and networks of meaning.¹⁰ Rootedness, as the key to social renewal and social repair, is not based only on opposition to power but also on bolstering fraternity, even though most traditionalist thinkers are well aware of the state of power relations. At the end of the last chapter, I discussed a critical Mizrahi position that, in contrast to the familiar critical-progressive stance, does not view the Mizrahi as merely reactive. Here, I drew attention to the ways "traditionalism," as a deep, valid position, is attempting to bring the internal content of Mizrahi rootedness to the fore. This relatively new and growing Mizrahi discourse joins "Mizrahi tradition" with a critical language. This new movement, comprised of Mizrahi activists and intellectuals, demands recognition of traditionalism as a positive identity worthy of representation in the public and cultural realms and in the educational system. Furthermore, they seek to turn Mizrahi traditionalism from "the problem with the Mizrahim," as it is viewed in universalist visions, into a key to the solution of the problems faced by Israeli society as a whole.

Meir Buzaglo, one of the most prominent intellectuals of the traditionalist school, views the meaning of loyalty to the Jewish whole as essential for the renewal of Israeli society. Similarly, politician Shai Piron, a former Minister of Education, and social activist Ophir Toubul both express this position. While fully aware of power relations and the marginalization of Mizrahi traditionalism, they stress the power of tradition to mend the cleavages rending Israel society. Toubul views traditionalism as the cultural springboard for achieving the common good, a mission that reaches beyond the "melting pot" project, which effectively erased traditional identities, or the liberal multi-cultural model that reinforced the politics of difference and the dismantling of society into distinct identity groups. These adherents to traditionalism view it as dynamic, revitalizing, yet pragmatic—as a stance that effectively links "old" and "new" traditions, acts on behalf of the common good, and can serve as the key to general renewal.

Their use of tradition does not signal a return to the past (which is in any case impossible) or to "tradition the way it used to be." Rather, it brings tradition into present modernity while, at the same time, recognizing that the representation of tradition always relates to some imagined origin in the past and that tradition itself

is in a constant state of flux (Buzaglo, 2008).¹¹ Concomitantly, it is important to note that the new discourse is quite removed from the “authentic” rooted working-class Mizrahi subjects, the meaning of traditionalism for whom has yet to be adequately investigated. Yet, as a political program, traditionalist rootedness holds connective power and embodies the drive toward renewal rather than resistance.

Grassroots efforts to promote unity in the name of rootedness are often not noticed by progressive critical observers. If they are noticed, they are viewed with suspicion and disgust, even when these activities ostensibly lead to positive results. This is because signs of unity are thought to be contaminated with primordiality or to derive their strength from tradition as a source of authority that deviates from the sacred progressive-civil code. According to the prevailing critical-progressive stance, it is the battle over liberty and equality that will culminate in universal fraternity.

The striking and persistent failure of this position across the globe in this highly contingent, illiberal moment seems to indicate that fraternity has deeper roots, some of which stem from a different ontology that is positioned outside the liberal grammar. However, the evidence of meaningful non-liberal fraternity remains unrecognized by critical-progressive observers. For them, fraternity that does not derive from freedom and equality is suspect; it is seen as a sort of deception or “cover story” that masks the essential power structure lying beneath the surface. The “true” state of affairs is known to critical-progressive observers but concealed from the rooted subjects in the field. This situation, as mentioned earlier in this book, perpetuates the overly suspicious hermeneutic mode.

Thus, recognition of the unifying power of rootedness becomes possible, as we have stated, only if we free research from the bonds of liberal grammar, as part of a conscious process against the predatory power of universal reason. From this position, it is possible to identify the internal logic that motivates the political entrepreneurs who act in the name of rootedness and to examine the conditions of possibility of its power as a unifying force.

Here, I mention the project to improve the status and living conditions of people with disabilities belonging to Israel’s Palestinian community (Mizrachi, 2014). Recognition of rootedness was necessary for social change through a process I have called *modular translation*, by which Muslim imams could mediate between two worlds of meaning—disability rights, on the one hand, and Muslim tradition, on the other. I described the imams’ strategy as “decoupling norms of conduct from their underlying justifications” (p. 133). By this I mean the creation of normative change for the benefit of people with disabilities by relying on religious rather than liberal sources of authority and justification. The imams emphasized unique traditions and stressed a positive approach to disabilities as a traditional obligation, thus strengthening faith among believers, reinforcing the moral duties of the religious community to treat people with disabilities equally and with respect, and making public space inclusive and accessible. This process

enabled normative change toward people with disabilities that was not articulated in terms of disability rights, which place the individualistic ontology (in the liberal grammar) at the center and imagine “emancipation” through a disconnect from the oppressive traditions and structural change. The change that occurred in this instance was based on the alternative worldview of rootedness, in its dual meaning as an organic connection between the individual and the greater whole (the concrete and imagined Muslim community) and as a deep connectedness to continuity and a return to the community’s roots.

In another arena, I discuss the power of rootedness to connect two communities from opposite ends of the political spectrum who met with the explicit purpose of advancing shared life. In this case, which I described at length in chapter 5, Mizrahi and ultra-Orthodox supporters of Shas and Muslim supporters of the Islamic movement, both considered the enemies of peace by the progressive camp, convened in order to imagine peace and a shared living space. As I have already noted, both sides perceived the preservation of group boundaries (religion) as a necessary condition for living together in peace. While religious boundaries are essential for revealing their shared humanity, from the progressive perspective, group boundaries of any sort hinder members of both sides from fulfilling their humanity, as the boundaries placed by rootedness obstruct equal and autonomous individuals from exercising their free will (Mizrachi and Weiss, 2020).

The existential sense of rootedness shared by participants of both sides provided a common ground for a respectful dialogue necessary for living together with difference. In the broader context of the international arena, we have recently witnessed the constitutive role of rootedness, or rooted politics, in the formulation of the Abraham Accords. Ofer Zalzberg (2021) recently wrote:

At first glance the Abraham Accords seem similar to previous peace accords Israel signed with Arab states. They are contractual agreements which determine the character of relations between states according to international law and the rights it grants. However, the Abraham Accords are distinct because they incorporate into the legal, rights-based framework of a diplomatic agreement explicit, operative references to the cultural and religious traditions of the Middle East—Jewish, Christian and Muslim. The operative dimension stems from referring to the traditions as part of the act of endowing legal recognition. The recognizing party commits to act in the future in light of the content of the recognition.

The Abraham Accords rely on a primordial tale about all peoples in the region, Arabs and Jews, who are children of the same ancestral father and share the same land. Their identities stem from the same root. This is the first time that the Arab side has recognized that the Jews are in fact a people and not merely adherents of a religion. Moreover, the wording of the agreement reveals an understanding that both peoples share a common ancestor in the Middle East, indicating recognition that Jews, too, are native to this place and not a foreign colonial power

(Zalzburg, 2021), and that they share kinship relations with Arabs (whether Muslims or Christians).

Although it has yet to come to fruition, another dramatic example of the power of rootedness to nourish fraternity between zealous Jewish and Arab rivals is the project initiated in Judea and Samaria¹² by the late Orthodox rabbi Menachem Froman, who was a founder of Gush Emunim, the original and most influential settler movement. Froman recognized the power of shared religiosity to serve as a deep wellspring of fraternity that could engender a political turnaround. He soon found receptive ears among a number of Palestinians. Today, on the basis of Froman's work, we can find several projects between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank through a group called Roots, which brings together Israeli Jewish settlers and Palestinians.¹³ Referring to Gazan Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was killed by the Israelis, who considered him to be an arch-terrorist, Froman told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, "Yassin once told me: You and I could make peace in *hamsa dakika*—five minutes. How so? Because we are both believers."¹⁴

The collection of empirical evidence I have presented is by no means exhaustive, nor am I promoting a naïve view of rootedness as the path to ultimate redemption. Recognition of rootedness can neither negate nor erase the body of liberal tenets. In many cases, rootedness joins together with liberal principles and allows for the opening of new avenues for contemplation.

Research conducted by Sadeh (2021) contributes an additional layer to our understanding of conditions that support a dialogue between rooted and progressive communities. Her study documents a rare event in the history of the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).¹⁵ For two consecutive years, as a result of some of the initial insights stemming from my work, representatives of ACRI's senior administration met with senior educators from Shas (the political movement of ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Jews), which had been a coalition member in all of Israel's right-wing governments for two decades. The meetings took place with the support of Shaharit (Creating a Common Cause), an institution that has spearheaded a political vision of the common good based on dialogue and mutual learning through meetings held between communities associated with diverse, often conflicting worlds of meaning.¹⁶

Sadeh shows that recognition by the leadership of ACRI of the Shas representatives' Jewish rootedness was an essential condition for initiating a dialogue between them. Recognition that both rootedness and progressiveness were distinctive and valid positions was reached through adoption of a position of unpretentious self-parochialization. That is, both sides renounced any stance of absolute certainty regarding the truth, and this was a crucial precondition for the respectful and productive give-and-take that ensued.

Sadeh's work is the first sign of a new research space that focuses on ways in which individuals and groups that belong to very different worlds of meaning

develop a praxis for living together (Seligman et al., 2008, 2015) and for shared political activity. Freeing the research gaze from the boundaries of the liberal grammar enables researchers to identify these spaces, to identify the conditions of possibility for radical and surprising connections that develop within these spaces, and to empirically locate areas of disagreement/agreement.

Another recent study in Israel examines the crisis of legitimacy faced by rights constitutionalism. This trend is of deep concern to many liberals. Drawing on a bottom-up direction of inquiry, Dana Alexander (forthcoming) argues that opposition to human rights by broad parts of the public is far from sweeping or over-riding. Rather, she notes, anti-human rights attitudes manifest themselves when human rights discourse comes into conflict with what Alexander terms an “ethic of belonging.” This ethic is at the heart of rootedness, and refusal to recognize its power and prevalence could deepen the crisis of public trust in rights constitutionalism and its agents, such as the High Court of Justice and human rights NGOs.

However, the ethic of belonging, according to Alexander, cannot be categorized into a clear-cut dichotomy between two conflicting political camps, each motivated by a ready-made consistent ideology. Rather, Alexander points to a more complex reality, in which both the liberal “rights” camp and its opponents rely on an ethic of belonging in different contexts, and the ethic of rights is widely accepted, even outside the liberal camp, when it does not clash with values of collective belonging and boundaries. Alexander’s research thus sheds light on the way in which rootedness, reflected in an ethic of belonging, as well as the discourse of individual rights, shapes the terms of negotiation over collective boundaries. Recognizing the role played by the ethic of belonging in political discourse can lead to a deeper understanding of the roots of the liberal constitutional crisis, as well as a reexamination of the conditions needed to preserve legitimacy of the liberal constitutional paradigm.¹⁷

These examples do not exhaust the ramifications and implications of rooted identity in its many forms. The very identification of rootedness constitutes an initial response to the current crisis in research and politics. In the research arena, the process proposed here points to the urgent need to extricate our research gaze from the bonds of the liberal grammar and to emancipate critique from the chains of progressive partisan politics. In the political arena, it calls for new horizons that extend beyond the liberal imagination.

Concern in the progressive camp over the more extreme examples of rootedness as self-secluding, tribal, chauvinist and racist makes it difficult to recognize that rootedness is a crucial component of social life and has value even for those who belong to its opposing camp. The theoretical and political implications for recognizing rootedness are not confined solely to the understanding of the “other,” or, if we dare to use orientalist language, “the exotic other,” among “us” (the enlightened progressives). It involves recognition of the partialness and limitations of the progressive utopian platform that seeks to “solve” the problem of

the lack of fit between the transcendent dimension of universal reason and social life on earth that refuses to obey its imperatives. Rootedness reveals an important dimension in social life and enables us to recognize that the tensions inherent in all types of transcendence (whether God or universal reason) cannot be resolved. It reveals the antinomies inherent in the utopian progressive vision, as well as the antinomies within utopian visions with rooted characteristics, such as religion and primordialism.

It points to, for example, the realization that the conflict between the universal politics of human rights and the modern idea of sovereignty of the state and defense of its borders (Arendt, 1958) is intrinsic to the human rights project itself. Indeed, this tension is at the heart of human rights, defined as universal but dependent on recognition by a particular political community. As Arendt notes, "From the beginning the paradox involved in the declaration of inalienable human rights was that it reckoned with an 'abstract' human being who seemed to exist nowhere" (p. 291). Hence her conclusion that the basis of all human rights is the right to belong to a political community.

These insights are too often forgotten by human rights advocates who embrace a position of certainty. The recognition of rootedness in its different guises may be a remainder of the liberal-progressive vision's own parochial roots as well. It may shade new light on the failure of the liberal left to break out of its own social boundaries and reach the hearts and minds of ordinary people, especially those who belong to disadvantaged communities. This is the paradox we faced as we began our journey. Rootedness sheds light on the gap between the universalism of the utopian progressive vision and the social particularism of both its supporters and its opponents, which echoes the unresolvable tension between the transcendent ideal and actual social life. Finally, as we have seen, rootedness appears in Israeli space along a continuum, on the one end of which we find "closed and sanctified rootedness," and on the other end of which we find rootlessness.

The fear of closed rootedness in liberal-democratic contexts is understandable. Nazi Germany provides the most dramatic example and continues to be the defining trauma in the history of the people of Israel. This example often serves to warn against any injury to democratic space and its institutions. In Nazi Germany, the extreme form of "closed rootedness" based on the primordial code was nurtured by racist ideology and canceled out the civic democratic code. This primordial code was not only utterly modern but its mode of operation in the Holocaust serves as an exemplar of modernity (Bauman, 1989). To be sure, religion did not serve as the source of legitimacy and the organizing principle of Nazism; it was sidelined, denounced, and even repressed by Nazi authorities. ISIS provides a closer example of an extreme model of "closed rootedness" fueled by a transcendent-religious code. In this case, the organization seeks to completely destroy the civic code, which is identified with the modern state, and replace it with an Islamic caliphate. Similar to other imperialist movements, in the primordial sense, ISIS

has been relatively open to inviting “others” (from Europe and elsewhere) to enlist in its ranks as foot soldiers in the struggle to fulfill the transcendental-religious vision for a new world order (as long as they meet the high bar of religious loyalty).

With these extreme examples before us, the importance in recognizing of rootedness in its different forms, and its ability to address the need for belonging, becomes even greater. On the other extreme, rootlessness also reflects a basic and necessary element of social life. I do not see these two poles as mutually exclusive. Rather, I see the very notion of the autonomous and the rooted subjects as representing two contradictory yet essential aspects of human good and wellbeing, that is: difference and belonging (Seligman, 2023).

In the current divisive climate in which we live, the politics of difference, which emphasizes the right of individuals and groups to demand equality on the basis of difference (Mizrachi, 2014; Taylor, 1994), exists alongside various rooted positions, which uphold an ethics of belonging (see D. Alexander, forthcoming). This conception might help find some means of connecting them as two opposing yet complimentary forces in social life.

I view this study as a point of departure for more detailed, nuanced research into aspects of rootedness in different political and social contexts and their implications for the global political and cultural crisis that liberal democracies are currently facing. The translation of the insights emerging from this study into an articulated normative platform is well beyond the scope of this book. Yet, on a normative note, I conclude that recognition of rootedness as a fundamental form of belonging is necessary for coping with the dual rift—the scholarly and the political—we are facing and the search for answers to the most acute political challenges in Israel and other democracies. This is the challenge of living together with difference. The task appears timely and even urgent at this current historical juncture.

APPENDIX 1

Shadow Cases

1A. ROOTEDNESS

Ashkenazi Women without a College Education

Adva, 50, bank teller; Penina, 71, homemaker/housewife; Debora, 78, former kindergarten teacher; Zippi, 30, homemaker/housewife.

Facilitator A: Look, there's another very interesting question here that interests us. Look, one of the questions in the research was the following: Is it possible to define Jews who speak Arabic as their mother tongue, who were born and raised in Arab countries, as Arabs. That was the question.

Netta: Oy, oy, oy.

Penina: Absolutely not.

Zippi: Terrible.

Netta: Terrible.

Facilitator A: Absolutely not. OK, no, we're curious, what the answers were, so we discovered that among Jews, nearly 20 percent, one in five people, said yes, so . . .

Netta: Probably Ashkenazim who said yes.

Zippi: Of course.

Netta: The question is, who are those Jews.

Facilitator A: It didn't divide up according to ethnic background.

Netta: OK.

Facilitator A: It didn't play a part. And among the Arabs, by the way, we had a figure of a little less than 20 percent, almost one in four, OK? It's pretty similar, by the way. Let's relate to the Jewish respondents. [. . .] I want to get your help to understand that both the majority that said it's not possible and the minority that said it is possible. OK? Where should we start? Maybe from the 80 percent, you identify with that more, right?

Deborah: I want to ask you, why you chose the Arabic language, among the Arabs. Why didn't you choose a European country, where the Jews spoke the local language.

Facilitator A: Wait, I . . .

Netta: That's an interesting question. Because I'm thinking about the Russians. [Everyone is talking at the same time]

Netta: I am thinking about the Russians.

Zippi: Yeah, why are they called Russians.

Deborah: Yes, the Russians.

Zippi: And no one objects to this.

Deborah: I come from Budapest, I speak the language, until I was in Budapest, I only knew Hungarian, expect that we studied German in school. And we were Jews, even ultra-Orthodox Jews, we didn't assimilate because of the language, and the Russians, too, no matter how much they wanted to deny that they are Jews, spoke Russian, but in school, they knew exactly who was a Jew. Why did you pick on the language?

Facilitator A: But wait a second, can I call you a Hungarian?

Deborah: No.

Facilitator A: I'm not allowed.

Deborah: Absolutely not. I am a Jew from the land of Hungary.

Facilitator A: That's how you define yourself?

Deborah: Yes.

Facilitator A: And if I call you a Hungarian Jew, are you OK with that?

Deborah: A Jew from Hungary.

Facilitator A: From Hungary. And if I call you a Hungarian, it's insulting? Or it's just inaccurate?

Deborah: Of course, I'm not a Hungarian. I speak the language, but I'm far from [being a Hungarian].

Facilitator A: What's the difference between a Jew and a Hungarian? What's the difference?

Deborah: Where were you born?

[. . .]

Facilitator A: Me? I was born in Israel.

Deborah: In Israel.

Facilitator A: Yes.

Deborah: You have never felt what we felt.

Facilitator A: No, but I didn't grow up in Israel, but wait a minute . . .

Deborah: You didn't answer my question, why you chose the Arabic language.

Zippi: I think it's more of an insult.

Deborah: Why did you choose Arabic among the Arabs, why didn't you ask me if I felt Hungarian with my Hungarian language among the Hungarians. Why did you choose, those, not those?

Facilitator A: We can clarify this later; I really don't have an answer.

[. . .]

Facilitator A: That is, I can be in a partner in the surrounding culture. Look, my accent is *yekke*,¹ I grew up in Germany, my family lived in a certain town in Germany for three hundred years, according to records that my uncle discovered. I love German literature, I speak German. I have trouble with the Holocaust, but I feel very much part of the culture. Now am I allowed to feel part of the culture of my land of origin, which could be Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt?

Penina: Certainly.

Netta: Culture, of course. The opposite is true.

Deborah: Excuse me, would you say about yourself that you are a German?

Facilitator A: What are you saying?

Deborah: Would you say about yourself, I am German.

Facilitator A: In part I am German, yes.

Netta: He would say, *yekke*.

Facilitator A: Both Jewish and German.

Deborah: A German Jew, a Jew from Germany.

Facilitator A: Why is it important to you? It's really important to you that I feel that if I gave the wrong answer, I'd shock you.

[. . .]

Deborah: Look, if you said Arabs, they hate us, so the Germans hate more.

Facilitator A: That is the difficulty, if I say . . .

[Everyone talking at once]

Deborah: If you say German, I have nothing but disdain for you, disdain.

Facilitator A: Because I kill Jews.

Netta: Why?

Deborah: Because, because what they did to me and what they did to me.

Netta: But him? You're talking about him as if he represented all of the Germans.

Deborah: If he declares himself—

Netta: The German culture—

Deborah: The German culture is what the German culture did to the Jews.

Netta: Ok, I'm not . . .

Deborah: If you say that about yourself, and you don't emphasize that you are a Jew from Germany and grew up there, you could please say, I grew up there and I speak German and I read and I love the music, but I am a Jew.

Netta: Ok, wait a minute.

[Everyone talking at once]

Facilitator A: Is this the same as an Arab? Just a second, Netta, is it the same for an Arab.

Deborah: Very similar, very similar.

[. . .]

Facilitator A: I'm not allowed to say that I am a Jew with Arab origins because that's like declaring about myself, "I kill Jews," "I'm bad for the Jews," "hostile to the Jews."

Deborah: No, no, no. If you are from Arab origin, and you say that you are a Jew, you belong to me.

Facilitator A: Zippi doesn't agree with you.

Zippi: Yes, also say Jew . . . [talking all at once] To just say Arab isn't right.

Deborah: You have to not just [say] German, if you declare yourself to be a Jew from Germany then you belong to me.

[. . .]

Deborah: Sorry, [addressing Facilitator A by name].

Facilitator A: Yes.

Deborah: A Jew from Germany won't say, I am a German.

Facilitator A: Yes, I don't want to offend you, but you seem very hurt right now. I did not mean to, I am asking questions.

1B. THE STRUCTURE OF OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION

Ashkenazi Men with a College Education

Nathan, 62, statistician with an MA in information systems; Gidi, 73, educator who holds an MA degree; Zvika, 44, physician; Gershon, 32, professional photographer and college graduate; Ze'ev, 63, with a BA in statistics and economics; Jorje, 55, psychologist; and Amir, 44, high school teacher with an MA.

Zvika: You agree that it's not Ashkenazim?

Nathan: Probably not.

Zvika: Everyone agrees that it isn't Ashkenazim. Everyone agrees women had it harder than men, but it was probably easier than for Arabs and Mizrahim?

Gidi: Naturally.

Zvika: We are talking about university, not the exact sciences. In the humanities and social sciences, there were lots of women.

Zvika: OK.

Gershon: Ze'ev said that there weren't a lot of women.

Zvika: In his department.

Ze'ev: But when I'd come to the liberal arts building at Tel Aviv University, their presence was massive.

Jorje: I have a feeling it's 50–50 between Arabs and Jews.

Zvika: No. That's the finale, the finale of "The Next Star" [the Israeli version American Idol]. Now it's like this, I claim it's Mizrahim.

Yair: I claim it's Arabs according to a study I read by Swirski. The Arab sector is the sector that gets screwed the most.

Gershon: In higher education? In university?

Yair: Yes. I have the book; I can't remember what it's called.

The silence greeting Zvika's first comment indicates widespread agreement that Ashkenazim are the group on the highest level and there is therefore no possibility that they would constitute the group with the lowest chances. The members of the group used their experiences as university students, agreeing that proportionately large numbers of Ashkenazi women could be found on campus. The members of the group agreed with these means of elimination, which left the Mizrahim and the Arabs as the remaining possibilities. Yair shared his knowledge of the professional literature with the group, basing his position on work by Swirski who, Yair argued, defined Arabs as the most excluded group.

Zvika: And how did they check that? In retrospect, who was admitted.

Nathan: So Mizrahim barely had a chance. The Mizrahi population was much larger than the Arab.

Zvika: No, that's in comparison to the population [in general].

Nathan: I'm saying, in comparison to the population [in general]. I'm saying that the Mizrahi population was much larger than the Arab population, and I get the sense that the number of Mizrahim that studied in universities was not much bigger than the number of Arabs. Was it larger? Possibly, but not compared to the rest.

Jorje: If I don't ring the bell, you don't open the door. Right? So that's the thing. Mizrahim didn't even make it to the door.

Nathan: But what does that matter? Maybe Arabs didn't either.

Zvika: I still don't understand what the data is really. How many people out of a thousand Mizrahim or Arabs were accepted to do a BA, that's one thing. Or did they examine how many people were accepted out of those who applied.

Nathan: He said in comparison to the general population.

Zvika: The first part.

Nathan: Saw who was accepted, say 10 percent Arabs, 5 percent Mizrahim.

Zvika: I'm telling you loud and clear, I mean in my opinion, Mizrahim were in the last place.

Nathan: Mizrahim.

Ze'ev: I suppose it was actually the Arabs. Because you need to take into account which population had the most high school graduates. A high school diploma is the minimum requirement to be admitted. That's number one.

Zvika's strongly articulated position does not accord with the statistical findings. However, there was no sense of guilt (as members of the hegemonic group) during the discussion regarding the chances of the various groups in terms of probability or regarding awareness of the ethnic hierarchy of possibilities. Nor was the state blamed in any way.

The hierarchy was viewed as natural. Furthermore, the tone of the discussion gave the impression that they were not emotionally invested in the topic. In other words, the discussion was calm, in contrast to the stormy sessions when the Mizrahim discussed the same question. Facilitator B shared his impressions about the calm atmosphere in the room.

Facilitator B: What stands out for me, speaking of feelings, [is that] this discussion is very relaxed. I mean, even though the claims are based on hunches,

Zvika: We don't have a clue.

Nathan: I'll tell you why. . . most of the people in this group feel like they are part of those who weren't discriminated against. So, we aren't getting emotional.

Zvika: Population that represents the study.

Ze'ev: It doesn't represent educated people, the scholars.

Nathan: They weren't discriminated against, so why get excited?

Zvika: 20 percent of the population is Arab and there isn't a single Arab here. I don't know how many Mizrahim [are here].

Facilitator B: We never said this group was a representative sample.

Nathan: No, but the emotions in this group. There isn't any emotional turmoil because there isn't a single person in this group that can say I was discriminated against. I can feel it.

Arab Men with a College Education

Arab men college graduates: Samir, 31, social worker; Zuheir, 51, construction engineer; Ziad, 47, holds an MA in geography and urban planning and owns his own company; and Ibrahim, 38, physicist.

To the facilitators' question regarding the opportunities of Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Arab, and female children in the 1950s, the members of the group responded:

Zuheir: I rank the Arabs first, and after that the Jews.

Ziad: You mean that they are first, because you need the least.

Zuheir: Less possibilities.

Ziad: Less possibilities.

Zuheir: Less possibilities, first of all, the Arabs.

Ziad: One, yes, the Arabs.

Zuheir: The Mizrahi Jews.

Ziad: Second.

Zuheir: Second.

Ziad: We agree about this.

Zuheir: Yes.

Ziad: So?

Zuheir: And Ashkenazi Jews and women.

Ziad: Together?

Zuheir: No, the women . . . the women at the end.

- Ziad:* So.
- Zuheir:* Three, four, two, one—women will always have more opportunities.
- Ziad:* So we're three, we will have elections (laughs).
- Zuheir:* The Jews.
- Samir:* Three, one, four, two.
- Ziad:* Three, four, one, two. I say the same thing.
- Zuheir:* Those two—
- Ziad:* Three, four, one, two. What Samir says.
[. . .]
- Ziad:* We disagree on number three and number four.
- Zuheir:* Who has more opportunity [to get into university] . . . it's the women. Then, they were mostly Jewish women.
- Ziad:* We disagree about numbers three and four.
- Zuheir:* Yes . . . in my opinion, women were the ones who had a greater chance.

The members of the group drew a clear distinction between Jews and Arabs. The Jews are divided into Ashkenazim in the leadership position, with Mizrahim after them. The argument was about where to rank women (in general, with regard to all the other sectors) and Arabs in the last places—"three or four." Facilitator C wanted to move the conversation forward:

- Facilitator C:* Exactly. Let's focus on the group that has the least chances, you all agree that it is the Arabs.
- Zuheir:* Yes, that's right.
- Facilitator C:* And the group after that—you all agree that they are the Mizrahi Jews, right? Now the question is, let's put aside the Ashkenazi Jews and the women, or should we put the women, like you say, one rung up. . . . We don't want . . .
[. . .]
- Facilitator D:* Because you said that several times, right? So why do you think that the Arab group had less opportunities?
- Samir:* First of all, I think that this group has less opportunities, less chances because it's true today, too, in my opinion, and not just for those who were born in the 50s or the 70s
- Facilitator D:* Why?
- Samir:* Why? there are a number of reasons, first . . .
- Facilitator C:* Are you using sources of information, or are you speaking only from . . . that is, is this knowledge . . .
- Zuheir:* First, I'll start with my personal experience, let's say, personal experiences, which is the psychometric test that they give us, the matriculation exams, for example, actually, in any case, if you study more you succeed more, but the psychometric exam is like a fence . . .
[. . .]

Samir: In my honest opinion, the preparation for an Arab student for the process of getting into the university and the acceptance to the universities, and the emotional preparation, first of all—this almost doesn't exist, that is, I could blame the victim and society in general, put us in a situation that we can barely . . .

Facilitator C: The question that I want to ask, and we have to move on another stage, could it be that from what Samir said with regard to the Arabs, the question is why you see additional reasons: You see this complexity between the Ashkenazi and the Mizrahi Jews?

[. . .]

Zuheir: In my opinion, that's their mentality.

Facilitator D: What do you mean?

Zuheir: The mentality of the Ashkenazim is higher than that of the Mizrahi Jews.

Facilitator C: How do you explain this mentality, Zuheir?

Zuheir: Mentality is maybe the understanding and education and studies.

Ibrahim agreed with Zuheir's position, and explained the reasons for Ashkenazi superiority.

Ibrahim: They [the Ashkenazim] have the foundation for their studies, and so it was easy to accept them and easy for them to be accepted. That is, they want them to raise the level of studies in Israel and so it's easy for them to get accepted, but the Mizrahi Jews came from Arab countries . . .

[. . .]

Ibrahim: Fewer chances for more opportunities, the fewer chances will be for the Arabs.

[. . .]

Ibrahim: The Mizrahi Jews came from Arab countries, let's say, not well-educated countries at that time, that is, in previous years, and even now, not just then in the . . .

[. . .]

Ibrahim: Some of that time period was under military administration, and after that, the military administration had just ended and the question of higher education was something new for them, that is, they were still looking for food for everyday life, and education was secondary, at that time, because the number of well-educated was small. And if we feel, for example, the areas that are close to the center during that time are better-educated than those in the north, they are the ones who are close to the universities.

Facilitator D: Ah, ok.

Ibrahim: Because the traveling was difficult, too.

Facilitator C: [nods]

Ibrahim: For example, look in this region, for example, people who were born in the Triangle Region at that time are more educated than people in the north, because they were closer to the educational institutions.

As noted, overall, the group of educated Arab men identified the ethnic ranking in the structure of educational possibilities, even if they did tend to rank the Arabs lower than the Mizrahim with regard to a question taken from research by Shavit. Their explanations for the differences between the groups focused on cultural (mentality and education) and circumstantial (area of residence) reasons. Their explanations indicated no anger towards the state, nor did they imbue the discussion with political significance. The political dimension was not central to their understanding of ethnic ranking or to the attempt to explain the low position of Mizrahim and Arabs alike vis-à-vis the Ashkenazi population. This position also came up consistently when they were asked to explain the thesis of the identity of the Arab Jew and to deal directly with their relationship with Mizrahi Jews (see chapter 5). It is important to note that these discussions took place in Arabic and were conducted by two critical Palestinians who have been exposed to the thesis of the “Arab Jew,” in an open atmosphere on the campus of Tel Aviv University, which is largely seen as an open progressive space and the bastion of the liberal left in the academe.

1C. ETHNIC JEWISH POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE POLITICAL LEFT AND RIGHT

Ashkenazi Men with a College Education

Facilitator B: OK, so look, there was a question, who is the majority in the leadership of Peace Now and the leadership of the Yesha Council?
[. . .]

Nathan: First of all, all the Ashkenazim have the leadership, they have more self-importance. They think more of themselves. And so among the Ashkenazim, the entire leadership is Ashkenazi. . . . The entire left side is Ashkenazi. That’s clear, since most of the Mizrahim are more nationalist. So in Peace Now, it’s clear it’s the Ashkenazim. In the Yesha Council, it’s natural that there would be Mizrahim there, but there are Ashkenazim, too.

Gidi: I think it’s because of the political disagreement, the way those who responded see it.

Facilitator B: I didn’t understand.

Gidi: The political division that there are Mizrahim and Ashkenazim on the right. Ashkenazim think of themselves as a big part, maybe bigger, than the Yesha Council or Peace Now. I think that influenced their answers.
[. . .]

Facilitator B: And why wouldn’t the Ashkenazim say half-and-half?

Zeev: Why wouldn’t the Ashkenazim say that? I accept that. Management, of course.

Facilitator B: Because of management?

Zeev: Yes, the leadership
[. . .]

Facilitator B: Yes, you say that that that's the way it was in the past, if I understand. The Ashkenazim took the leadership positions.

Nathan: That's the way it was. Yes.

Facilitator B: And today?

Nathan: Today, less so. I don't know how to tell you in numbers.

Facilitator B: But less, a little?

Nathan: Significantly less.

Zvika: The tone of our answers . . . it's like a tone of apathy. The question is not very relevant to us. It didn't get us excited, like the previous questions.

Facilitator B: How do you explain that?

Zvika: They gave an answer like that, and then—let's just move on.

Facilitator B: How do you explain that?

Zvika: I don't know. It's not so interesting. It's not so important and it's not so interesting.

Arab Men without a College Education

The participants are Tariq, 50, merchant; Mustafa, 64, who previously owned a small business and is now living on disability benefits; and Fahmi, 54, who works in the janitorial department of a school.

Earlier, Facilitator C had reminded the group of the crude racist jeers heard at soccer matches and directed at Bnei Sakhnin, a rival Arab team, especially by fans of the Beitar Jerusalem team, who are predominantly Mizrahim. He demonstrated that Israeli Jews differ considerably with respect to racism, with Peace Now at one extreme and Kahanists at the other. It is also common knowledge among Israeli Jews that Beitar Jerusalem fans are Mizrahim and that Peace Now supporters belong to the Ashkenazi elite. Later in the discussion, Facilitator C asked the group about the ethnic profiles of both groups.

Facilitator C: Where? Where do you think the Mizrahim are . . . ?

Fahmi: Everybody (unclear) . . .

Facilitator C: They're more?

Fahmi: What? Where?

Facilitator C: Where can you find more Mizrahim?

Fahmi: [You mean] where can I find more Mizrahim?

Facilitator C: Ahh.

Fahmi: I can't . . . I can't tell you . . .

Facilitator C: Beitar's fans . . . those who are for Beitar . . .

Mustafa: (Unclear. Everyone's talking at once.)

Facilitator C: Do you watch sports?

Fahmi: Ah . . . a little . . . a very little.

Facilitator C: Yes . . . I mean that you watch the news on television; they bring it up [rabid expressions of racism—NR] even if . . .

Fahmi: Yes, yes, yes . . .

Facilitator C: Those who cheer Beitar Jerusalem . . .

Fahmi: Yes.

Facilitator C: Those who curse the Arabs and . . .

Tariq: Those are the Mizrahim . . .

Facilitator C: Ah . . . [unclear] of the Arabs . . .

Fahmi: Maybe they're not Mizrahim . . .

The hostility felt by Beitar Jerusalem fans toward Arabs, together with the violent competition between Beitar and Bnei Sakhnin, a team belonging to the same league, has been broadcast in news reports and become an integral part of the public discourse.² The fans' identity as Mizrahim has also become clear to the general public as well as the subject of debate within the critical discourse. Nonetheless, working-class Palestinians do not identify Mizrahim (Israelis of Middle Eastern origin) as belonging to the same class and appear to be unaware of everything related to the ethno-class classification system operating in the political sphere. They are especially ignorant of their Mizrahi counterparts in ethnic and cultural terms, even in volatile political situations.

APPENDIX 2

Relative Representation of Mizrahim in Political Institutions

Survey Questions and Answer Distribution

As explained in chapter 4, our survey asked respondents about the ratio of Mizrahim to Ashkenazim in the leadership of two iconic and ideologically contrasting Israeli political organizations, Peace Now and the Yesha Council. Table 1 provided a schematic summary of statistical significance in the responses, which are here reproduced in full.

To the best of your knowledge, what is the ratio between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in the leadership of Peace Now?

Shading indicates the correct answer. An asterisk (*) indicates statistically significant difference in answers; $P < 0.01$.

Answer	Answer Distribution by Group (%)	
	Arab	Jewish
1. Clear majority of Mizrahim	16.4	4.3
2. 50%/50%	16.1	14.2
3. Clear majority of Ashkenazim*	27.4	53.2
4. Don't know	40.1	28.4

Answer	Answer Distribution by Group (%)	
	Mizrahi	Ashkenazi
1. Clear majority of Mizrahim	4.9	3.1
2. 50%/50%	16.6	10.3
3. Clear majority of Ashkenazim	55.8	62.4
4. Don't know	22.6	24.2

To the best of your knowledge, what is the ratio between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in the leadership of the Yesha (Judea, Samaria, and Gaza) Council?

Shading indicates the correct answer. An asterisk (*) indicates statistically significant difference in answers; $P < 0.01$.

Answer	Answer Distribution by Group (%)	
	Arab	Jewish
1. Clear majority of Mizrahim	13.9	7.0
2. 50%/50%	11.4	21.1
3. Clear majority of Ashkenazim*	20.8	41.6
4. Don't know	53.9	30.4

Answer	Answer Distribution by Group (%)	
	Mizrahi	Ashkenazi
1. Clear majority of Mizrahim	9.1	2.1
2. 50%/50%	25.3	21.1
3. Clear majority of Ashkenazim*	40	54.1
4. Don't know	25.7	22.7

APPENDIX 3

Vignettes

VIGNETTE 1: SHMUEL

My name is Shmuel Farhi. I am a geography teacher in a high school in Sderot [a town in the southern periphery]. I come from a traditionally observant family who emigrated from Iraq in the 1950s. My wife's name is Naomi, and I have three children—Yiftach, 4; Yael, 6; and Sara, 8. I really enjoy my job, which I think expresses a social mission by helping children from different backgrounds to become capable of making it in society and being good citizens. Social issues are very close to my heart, and I'm very worried about the state of human rights in Israel and intolerance towards those who are different. When I'm called up for [military] reserve duty, I also often see how the conflict with the Palestinians is corrupting us. In my opinion, we have no choice but to recognize the fact that we have to establish two states for two peoples. Because these issues bother me, I'm active in the Association for Civil Rights in Israel [a leading NGO] during the little spare time I have. I fight for the rights of foreign workers, homosexuals, women, and others.

VIGNETTE 2: SHAUL

My name is Shaul David. I'm an economist at the Ministry of Finance in Jerusalem. I live with my partner Yaron and our son Gil, 4, whom we adopted in Ukraine. My mother is from Saloniki, and my father is from Iran. We grew up in Lod [a lower-middle-class city in central Israel where both Arabs and Jews live], where my parents still live. I worked very hard to get an education despite my family's financial condition, and I've earned considerable respect from my colleagues and superiors. My five brothers also went to university, thanks to my parents' uncompromising encouragement. I'm very unhappy with what's happening in the country; people are too willing to just give up. Most politicians are willing to concede resources; they're unbearably irresponsible about surrendering national assets. You can't

believe what they [politicians] promised before the elections. I'm not sure that there will be a Jewish state for our son to grow up in.

VIGNETTE 3: REUVEN

My name is Reuven Ben-Moshe. I am a maintenance man at Maintenance for All, a private company, and I work as a contract worker at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. I'd prefer to be a direct employee of the Institute itself but that didn't work out, so I stayed on as a contract worker. I live in Nes Ziyonna with my wife Reut and my two twin daughters, Yifat and Shirli, 7. I don't have much to complain about. Although the state of the country isn't great, I'm personally doing all right. I don't earn much as a gardener but I'm lucky that my wife is a sharp businesswoman and she's able to bring home enough money to meet our needs and more. In my spare time I volunteer in an organization that prepares teenagers for recruitment into the army so that they'll be able and want to serve in active duty.

VIGNETTE 4: YOSSE

My name is Yossi Abukasis. I was born in Moshav Chisalon, in the Judean Hills, but have lived in Herzliya for the last ten years. When I was released from the army I wanted to go to college but couldn't. I had to devote myself to supporting my family. I eventually took a course in salesmanship. I worked in a company for household goods; it took a lot of guts and hard work, but I managed to set up my own electrical appliances company. The company is very successful. I'm proof of the fact that whoever wants to [succeed], can. People want to get me involved in social and political issues. The truth is, they don't interest me. Every once in a while I contribute a bit of money to the neighborhood synagogue, which I try but don't always succeed to attend on Sabbath. In addition, I also try to give to charity and support the needy.

NOTES

1. BEYOND THE SOCIOLOGY OF SUSPICION

1. I use the adjective “non-liberal” to describe subjects whose voice, behavior, utterances, narratives, values, attitudes, and beliefs are at odds with those of the liberal. To be sure, the adjective “non-liberal” does not represent an essential entity that defines the “nature” of the subject (whatever that means).

2. The study also includes shadow cases of Palestinian citizens of Israel and Ashkenazi Jews, on which I elaborate below.

3. The terms by which Arab citizens of Israel defined themselves around the time of this study varied, reflecting complex and often conflicted identities. According to Smooha (2014), in 2013, 42.5 percent of Arabs in Israel preferred the term Israeli-Arab to Palestinian; 39 percent preferred to identify as Palestinian qualified by Israeli; and 17.6 percent preferred Palestinian without the Israeli qualification. In a 2013 survey, 33.9 percent of the Arab population of Israel chose the Palestinian people as their most important affiliation, over religion and citizenship.

4. In the Bennett-Lapid government, an Arab party participated in the ruling coalition (although not in the government). This was the thirty-sixth government of Israel, formed on June 13, 2021; the Arab party was the Islamist Ra’am party, led by Mansour Abbas.

5. We should note that the religious boundaries among Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel are almost impermeable. In a recent study, the percentage of Muslim men who married non-Muslim women was 0.6, while the percentage of Muslim women who married non-Muslims was 0.2 (DellaPergola, 2017). Muslims are the vast majority of Arab citizens of Israel (82.9 percent); Druze and Christian are small minorities (9.2 percent and 7.9 percent, respectively) (see Haj-Yayah et al., 2022).

6. For further discussion on the position of Mizrahim and Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel vis-à-vis the State, see Mizrahi and Herzog, 2012.

7. The terms *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardi* refer to the two major Jewish geographically-linked cultural traditions. Ashkenazi refers to those who observe the halachic and other traditions associated with Jews originally from or still residing in central and eastern Europe and North America. The term Sephardi refers primarily to the liturgical tradition originally followed by the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, and who spread throughout the Mediterranean region (Westreich, 2012). The term *Mizrahi* refers to the Jewish ethnic groups who formerly lived in Middle Eastern and North African Muslim countries. In the context of contemporary Israel, Mizrahi is applied primarily to those originating from Arabic and Muslim countries and not to, for example, Sephardic Jews from Greece or Bulgaria. Colloquially, the term “Sephardic” carries fewer stigmatized connotations than does “Mizrahi.” Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Ultra- Orthodox politicians from Shas, for example have often used the term Sephardim when they referred to Mizrahim.

8. In line with Brubaker (2004) I refer to the term *group* as the prevailing ethnic category in the public and academic discourse and not as a stable “entity.”

9. In this sense, the political behavior of the Mizrahi working class can be viewed as equivalent to that of the behavior of the white working class in Middle America who are at the center of the “great paradox” (Hochschild, 2016; Wuthnow, 2018).

10. The demographic composition of the Israeli population has also been influenced by two other immigrations: nearly 1,000,000 Jews, who are classified as Ashkenazi, arrived from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the 1970 and 1980s; and approximately 100,000 Jews from Ethiopia arrived in two waves in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (Lamont et al., 2016, p. 194).

11. Official statistics on Mizrahim are compiled by grouping together individuals who immigrated from, or whose parents immigrated from, Arab and North African countries. However, the category “Mizrahim” does not exist in the official legal discourse despite its *de facto* presence. Bitton (2011) points out that this lacuna has enabled the legal system to deny compensation to Mizrahi victims of ethnic discrimination (such as exclusion from nightclubs), despite legal prohibition of such acts. Bitton further argues that by rejecting use of the category “Mizrahim” in court, discrimination against Mizrahim outside the court is reinforced.

12. These categories are based on the convention of defining Ashkenazim as born in Europe, America, or Oceania and having no parent born in Asia or Africa. Mizrahi Jews are defined as born in Africa/Asia or in Israel to at least one parent born in Asia/Africa and no parent born in Europe/America/Oceania. The category of third-generation Jewish and mixed Israeli is defined as born in Israel to Israeli-born parents or one parent born in Asia/Africa and the other in Europe/America. New immigrants are defined as foreign-born persons who arrived in Israel after 1989.

13. The wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union has had far-reaching effects on the ethnic division of Israel’s population, the consequences of which are still being felt. The majority of these immigrants came from the same regions as did the early Zionist pioneers and so, on the face of it, they strengthened the Ashkenazi population. Yet this wave consisted of diversified populations from different geographic and ethnic origins whose ideological affiliation with Zionism also varied. From a formal, statistical perspective, Russian immigrants are relegated to the category of new immigrants rather than Ashkenazim. In addition, the timing of their arrival was crucial for understanding the ensuing change in ethnic dynamics with respect to social structure.

14. Some parallels can be found between the use of the term “Mizrahi” with the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” in the United States as labels designating sub-groups of people with different national origin or ancestry (Mora, 2014; Rumbaut, 2009).

15. See, for example, Hillel Cohen’s (2015) description of the attitude of the socialist Zionist pioneers at the beginning of the twentieth century toward the Sephardic Jews living in Palestine and the local Arabs. These pioneers, who came from Eastern Europe, were imbued with universalist ideologies to repair the world and conquer the desert, and viewed the local Jews and Arabs as the vestiges of the old, primitive world. Immigrants from Islamic countries received a similar welcome by the kibbutz movement in the 1950s.

16. It is worth noting that S. N. Eisenstadt, whose name is closely associated with modernization theory, substantially revised his early work by offering in his book *Multiple Modernities* (2002) a much less linear and hierarchical view of modernity.

17. See my discussion on Karl Frankenstein (Mizrachi, 2014).

18. In point of fact, however, this turnover was actually preceded by the Wadi as-Salib rebellion in Haifa in 1959 and the uprising of the “Black Panthers” in Jerusalem in the early 1970 (Shalom Chetrit 2009).

19. Current Ashkenazi average monthly income equals NIS 11,879, whereas Mizrahi average income amounts to NIS 10,033 (Swirski et al., 2014).

20. See Madlan, 2009. This trend has not changed. See the 2021 map (Mako News, 2021).

21. My dissertation focused on how mind-body dualism was handled with the emergence of psychosomatic medicine in the United States at the turn of twentieth century; my early publications centered on the interrelations between epistemology and social practice in the field of medicine.

22. ISEF’s website can be found at <https://www.iseffoundation.org>. The foundation originally focused on gaps in Israel’s Jewish population, especially those between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. They later expanded their support to Ethiopian Jews, Russian immigrants, and Ashkenazim from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as non-Jews such as those Druze students who had completed their military service (a mandatory requirement for scholarship recipients).

23. See the archived Hakeshet Hademocratit Hamizrahit website at https://web.archive.org/web/20060718023434/http://www.ha-keshet.org.il/english/english_index.html. Although this was the dominant voice, other members of the Rainbow leaned toward a more nationalistic and traditionalist Jewish rather than purely secular-universalistic agenda.

24. The first use of the term *identity politics* appears in Anspach (1979).

25. Anat Rimón Or (2002) reads the jeers (“Death to Arabs”) shouted by Mizrahi fans of Beitar Jerusalem (a Jewish soccer team) in the same vein. For Rimón Or, the Mizrahi voice conceals the “real message” heard by the critical researcher yet hidden from the subjects themselves. According to Rimón Or, the fans’ catcalls are in fact directed at Zionist-Ashkenazi hegemony rather than the Arabs. In sum, Shohat and Rimón Or explain Mizrahi hostility toward the Arabs as a response to their own marginalization and suppressed Mizrahiness.

26. The 2019 statement theme, which I quote from the American Sociological Association website (<https://www.asanet.org/annual-meeting-2019/2019-theme>), reads:

Embracing a sociology that challenges social injustices and sustains scholar activists is pivotal in this time of increasing social inequalities. Sociologists possess

the analytical tools and empirical data necessary to support communities fighting against injustices in many realms. These areas include: racial inequality, environmental degradation, immigration restrictions and law enforcement violence, housing segregation, unequal educational opportunities, disparate health outcomes, mass incarceration, and precarious violence against women and LGBTQ. Sociologists who partner with community groups, human rights organizations, civil rights lawyers, and other social justice advocates can make significant contributions to promote scholarship that can facilitate progressive social change.

Christine Williams, then president of ASA, stated that “Sociology is an academic discipline devoted to documenting and analyzing social oppression” (Texas Liberal Arts, 2019).

The 2021 statement, likewise available on the ASA website (<https://www.asanet.org/annual-meeting-2021/theme>), reads:

Sociological scholarship has repeatedly shown that systems of domination—patriarchy, race, class, and sexual orientation—have been endemic features of societies, especially given their propensities to intersect and mutually reinforce each other. The 2021 program committee is committed to organizing the conference to push the limits of knowledge to point us toward relief from gender discrimination and sexual harassment, racism, ableism, heteronormativity, devastating class inequalities and epistemological and methodological blindness. In these troubling times, a sociology of liberation rooted in empirical observation and theorizing from data rather than ideology is overdue. This sociology is realizable through systematic study and rigorous reasoning in the scholarly tradition pioneered by W. E. B. Du Bois.

The same pattern appears in the conferences of regional sociology associations, as well as in those of such organizations as the Society for the Study of Social Problems, Sociologists for Women in Society, and the Association of Humanist Sociologists; see Ariansen (2021) for a table of the titles of presidential addresses in ASA, SSSP, SWS, and AHS from 2000 to 2020.

27. I draw on Peter Berger’s notion of *methodological atheism* (see Berger, 1967, 1979).

28. According to Abbott (2016, p. 350), “[t]he contractarian ontology divided the world into nations or, to use Durkheim’s word, ‘societies.’ A nation or society was a community of political equals implicitly linked by a social contract. Public life was a realm of absolute equality in both rights and responsibilities. Public (or ‘political’) individuals were thus equivalent to one another and almost without content. But beside this public life, contractarianism envisioned a private sphere, which was by contrast a realm of substantive differences between persons.”

29. This component contorts our view of individuals whose identities are embedded in interdependence or “thick kinship,” that is, communities in which the individual’s moral experience is derived from their fixed identity and moral duties, tightly linked with their position (Berger et al., 1973; see also Lamont, 2000; Swidler and Watkins, 2017).

30. For a cultural view of hierarchy as virtue, see for example, Dumont, 1980; Douglas, 2002; and more recently, Piliavsky 2018a, 2018b.

31. It is important to note that communitarian approaches to political philosophy challenge the notion of the atomistic individual yet remain for the most part within the liberal tradition. For a survey, see, for example, Avineri and De-Shalit, 1992; Mulhall and Swift, 1996.

32. See, for example, the works of George Simmel (Podoksik, 2010; Simmel, 2007) or George Herbert Mead (2015). The work of Bellah (1985) provides a striking example from twentieth century American sociology. Bellah argues that the modernist sanctification of the individual, which gives priority to personal rights and autonomy in almost all spheres of life, conflicts with the traditional worlds of meaning, which are predicated on entirely different basic assumptions. Strathern (2018), a veteran and influential critic of the concept of the individual in anthropology, provides an example of this. Based on her work in Melanesia in the Pacific Ocean, Strathern shows that in the Melanesian view, humans cannot be divided, and it is therefore better to refer to them as *dividual*, rather than *individual* (Yan, 2017). In this regard, it is also important to cite the work of Elias (2012), another iconic figure in the history of sociological research, who is also overtly critical of the concept of the individual as separate, bounded and autonomous, in his term “*homo clausus*.” Instead, he views the individual as inherently connected to social networks, within which their identity and activity is formed in relational means and processes. Furthermore, Elias also identifies the connection between the system of relationships within which the individual acts (which he refers to as “figuration”) with their ability to act.

More recently, sociologists of culture have drawn attention to the limits of the Western assumption of the individual’s autonomy. For example, Michele Lamont (2002) shows that her North African informants view the individualist approach of white French citizens to be less moral than their sense of moral duty to their families and elderly parents. In a similar vein, Ann Swidler and Susan Watkins (2017) show how Western assumptions such as individualism, independence, and autonomous decision-making hinder their ability to effectively reach their altruistic goals, such as the eradication of HIV in Malawi.

33. Karl Marx is the father of this vision, but he was followed by later streams of Marxism, including Gramsci (1971); Althusser (1971); Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) from the Frankfurt School; post-colonial scholars such as Said (1978), Shohat (1988), Shenhav (2006) and others; critical race theorists such as Bonilla-Silva (2006), feminism, and many others. We should also mention Foucault’s (1978) notion of a power-knowledge nexus, which determines that any resistance to a given nexus imposes a new nexus and the subject has no way to escape. Only in his latest work (1977) does Foucault draw a line between domination and power, referring to the former as a restriction that prevents the subject from participating in the power-knowledge nexus.

34. Ricoeur, 1970. This inquiry began over a decade ago, when I became aware of the interpretive risk of being overly suspicious. In my earlier work in the field of education, I sought to free my critical gaze from the shackles of liberal grammar and explore the meaning my subjects in the field of education attached to the ethno-class tracking process at school (see Mizrachi et al., 2009).

35. I should stress one major qualification to this description. Some post-secular approaches accept neither *moralistic methodological atheism* nor *methodological atheism*. Yet, they may contain other components of the liberal grammar. For instance, some contemporary post-secular scholars question the secular nature of critique itself and ask, “is critique secular?” (see Asad et al., 2009). Not all of the approaches that can be viewed under the post-secular umbrella, however, necessarily undermine the validity of the liberal grammar’s other components. In a different vein, John Milbank (1990) offers a diametric view of the relationship between social theory and theology by looking at social theory from a

theological perspective. Similarly, Saba Mahmood (2005) offers a post-liberal reading of liberal feminism by particularizing its liberal grammar. These two moves may invite a reverse act of bracketing, this time by placing secular liberalism within brackets as an object for religious or theological inquiry. In the Israeli context, Yehouda Shenhav offers a post-secular reading of Israeli sociology (2008) and explores the Protestant roots of the progressive liberal camp in Israel (2018).

36. For reviews of the term *motivated reasoning* see Epley and Gilovich (2016); R. Herrmann (2017); Kraft et al. (2015).

37. He borrowed the term *cultural dopes* from Harold Garfinkel (1967), who sought to use the term to describe the way in which structuralist functionalist approaches to sociology treated the people they study. From Durkheim to Parsons, Garfinkel argued, the objects of study are thought of as products of socialization, as empty vessels to be filled by sociality (values, norms, beliefs, symbols, and so on), and as puppets activated by structural and systemic forces.

38. The term, first mentioned in Friedrich Engels's famous letter to Franz Mehring, has undergone cycles of mutation in the Marxist tradition, from Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony to Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, through the Frankfurt school, and especially in Horkheimer's and Adorno's (1973) pessimistic view of modern post-industrial forms of slavery. All of these, among those belonging to the same school of thought, rely on clearly reasoned presumptions regarding the nature of social life and the prevailing power structure. In the same vein, George Lukács (1971), who brought Hegelian analysis back to the Marxist tradition, has a clear historiosophical stance regarding people's state of consciousness, the essential direction of history, and how these two (consciousness and history) are related. He contends that the truth value of peoples' consciousness (false vs. class consciousness) stems from their awareness of their "true" historical position and role (see also Meyers, 2006).

39. See, for example, the attempt by Rimón Or (2002) to defend Mizrahi soccer fans who scream "Death to the Arabs," from being tagged as racist by the liberal left. Rimón Or suggest a post-colonial reading to challenge the liberal white interpretation; that is, from a critical point of view, Rimón Or suggest viewing their behavior as the result of their position in the structure as victims, rather than as victimizers. Yet, in Rimón Or's advocating account, their attitude remained merely a reaction to their structural inferior position. In this regard, her text serves as a paradigmatic example of a reading infused with suspicion and is tainted with structural paternalism.

40. "Bibi" is Netanyahu's nickname, and it is commonly used in politics and the media.

41. From the thirty-second Knesset in 2009 to the current political crisis, the Likud headed by Benjamin Netanyahu has formed the government, with the exception of less than a year during 2022, when a patchwork coalition, made up of center-left and Republican right parties without the Likud, was formed. This included, for the first time, an Arab party, which represented the southern, more moderate branch of the Islamic movement. This government was disbanded in less than a year because coalition members from the right defected and returned to the Netanyahu bloc. Between 2019 and 2022, there were five election campaigns, the result of the inability of any political leader to establish a long-term, stable government.

42. In the 2023 elections, Netanyahu, strongly supported by Mizrahi voters from the Likud and Shas, was able to form a government composed of the Likud, the ultra-Orthodox, and the Religious Zionists. Four months later, as I am writing these words, Israel is in a deep

constitutional crisis spurred by attempts by the right-wing parties to enact legislation that would limit the power of the Supreme Court, which I will discuss later.

43. Following the 2015 elections, electronic maps of the votes clearly identified the disadvantaged neighborhoods and towns, populated primarily by Mizrahim, that voted for right-wing/religious parties in contrast with the more upscale areas, populated primarily by Ashkenazim, which voted for leftist-liberal parties (Mizrachi, 2016, p. 40).

For an interactive map of the 2015 elections results see Jewschool, "Israel Votes 2015," <https://jewschool.com/israel-votes-2015-an-interactive-map-of-election-results-36491>; for information on the elections to the twenty-second Knesset (September 2019), see The Central Elections Committee, <https://elections.kaplanopensource.co.il/2019b>; for information on the elections to the twenty-third Knesset (2020), see The Central Elections Committee, <https://elections.kaplanopensource.co.il/2020>; for information on the elections to the twenty-fourth Knesset (2021), see The Central Elections Committee, <https://elections.kaplanopensource.co.il/2021>; and for information on the twenty-fifth Knesset (2022), see The Central Elections Committee, <https://elections.kaplanopensource.co.il/2022>, and Ynet, <https://elections.kaplanopensource.co.il/2022/ynet>.

44. In fact, marginalized Mizrahis' adherence to a charismatic leader is not new, and has been denounced by the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi academic and social elites within the left.

45. Laclau (2005) provides a striking exception to this and views the populist act as one through which the people turns itself into a political subject, which he refers to as the chain of equivalence. This refers to the relationship between the various demands of the people against the hegemony, for example, the right to housing, work, etc., which effectively draws a line between the people and the hegemonic regime. Laclau's view is based on a conflictual assumption, according to which social reality is predicated on vertical and material power relationships. It is unclear, however, what the boundaries of equivalence are. What are the boundaries for the creation of a chain of equivalence? What is the meaning of group identity as a source that enables or inhibits the process of creation of a chain of equivalence and in understanding the conditions of possibility for connections between these struggles? Laclau's theory does not provide an adequate answer to these and other questions.

46. Sociologist Michele Lamont and her colleagues (2017), for example, have offered a discourse analysis of Trump's speeches and their potential appeal to the white American working class. Based on qualitative analysis of Trump's seventy-three political speeches, their study seeks to explore the impact of boundary work on social change. However, unlike Lamont's previous use of the term (Lamont, 2000), this study examines the rhetoric of the message rather than its actual meaning for the its recipients.

47. Bonikowski and Zhang (2023) have shown that the form and content of populist rhetoric have influenced its efficacy, and the discursive bundling of anti-elite talk with ethno-nationalism on the political right turned populism into a form of dog-whistle politics among Republicans, and among Trump supporters in particular. Since dog whistles are inaudible to humans, this is a reference to a subtle political message which is intended for, and can only be understood by, a particular group.

48. In the group of women with a college education, two out of the four women were neither born nor educated in Israel. The group of less-educated Ashkenazi men was composed of religious Ashkenazi-Mizrahim. As a result, my impression, shared by the research group, was that these two groups were too small, too eclectic, and too unrepresentative, and that their contribution to the overall picture was therefore doubtful.

49. In this regard, we make reference to the hypothesis presented more than six decades ago by social psychologist Leon Festinger (1954), who posited that the tendency to compare one's positions to those of others increases with the sense of closeness among them; stated in reverse, when the distance between the members is too great, they see no reason to make any comparison. Furthermore, Festinger's argument is consistent with one of my assumptions, which I will expand upon further below, that the social network of meaning in which we are embedded serves as the echo system within which we examine our moral and political position, make that position heard, and channel it through the relevant opinions within the networks that are close to ours. I therefore assumed that the cultural and political proximity would enable each member of this random group that we had created to feel that his/her positions were relevant enough and close enough to those of the others, and that the group would serve as an echo chamber for the positions of the members, encouraging each of them to actively participate and to examine their positions with regard to those of others, while sharpening differences and perhaps also leading to some unity of opinion.

2. FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS: TRUE OR FALSE?

1. The Arab education system, operating public schools in Arab towns and villages, has significant but not total discretion in its policies and curriculum.

2. The "common knowledge" regarding Ashkenazi supremacy among Israeli Jews was also present in responses to other survey questions about the stratification structure.

3. Keep in mind that "Mizrahim," as a group, cannot always be identified by phenotype, in contrast to other such groups, such as African Americans, women versus men, or in the Israeli context, Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are marked by external signifiers, including language, accent, or dress (Jenkins, 1994; Lamont et al., 2016; Lamont and Mizrahi, 2012). Furthermore, as previous studies indicate, the level of Mizrahi group identity is especially weak. In today's Israel, the qualifier "Mizrahihood" often signals class more than phenotypical traits (race) or straightforward ethnicity. It is identified primarily with the habitus typical of Mizrahi working-class behavior, as colored by orientalism.

4. The fedayeen ("one who sacrifices himself"), or Arab terrorists, were trained and equipped by Egyptian Intelligence to commit hostile acts against Israel (Yaari, 1975).

5. Until the 1990s, Israeli higher education was delivered primarily by a small number of universities. During the 1990s, dozens of colleges and foreign university extensions were established. Higher education has since become much more available to Mizrahim from the periphery (Ayalon & Yogeve, 2006; Feniger et al., 2014).

6. See the review of critical explanations for the deep adherence by Mizrahim to the national and religious discourse presented in chapter 1.

7. Once again, it is important to emphasize that not every approach that is termed "critical" accepts these assumption. It is important, for example, to cite here Foucault's approach, as well as others, to which we will return later. However, as noted, I will take a chance here and note that inequality as a "problem" has been granted the position of doxa in the critical discourse and automatically and completely generates suspicion among most of today's critical researchers.

8. Only a few naïve critical researchers assume that it is possible to instantly change the political consciousness of their subjects. Feminist research regarding consciousness raising,

which was prevalent in the 1970s, includes numerous testimonies regarding the distance between recognition of an injustice and change in political consciousness. The term *conscientization* reflects the processes of “liberation” as described by social psychologists who deal with this topic (see Montero and Sonn, 2009).

9. I prefer to use “self-worth” because “dignity” is associated with the liberal vocabulary of the human rights discourse (Mizrachi, 2016b), which is not part of the world of meaning of the informants who do not have a college education.

3. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME: WHEN THE “SUBALTERN” EMBRACES THE “HISTORY OF THE VICTORIOUS”

1. In Israel, Jewish students begin university later than their peers abroad, due to compulsory military service after high school (a minimum of two years for women and three years for men), which is often followed by a lengthy trip abroad that is meant to serve as a post-army “release and breathing spell.” In contrast to most other Western countries, however, the first law degree is given at the bachelors’ level, rather than as a graduate degree. Thus, Riki was entering into higher education at age 22.

2. Having children and large families is an essential value as well as a religiously oriented good deed (*mitzvah*) for Mizrahim and religious Jews of whatever ethnicity. In Mizrahi vernacular, the preference of dogs over children points to the stereotypical Ashkenazi, who is seen as secular, bourgeois, and cold.

3. Youth Aliyah was a Jewish organization that rescued thousands of Jewish children from the Nazis during the Third Reich. The organization arranged for their resettlement in Palestine’s kibbutzim and youth villages, which served as both home and school. From the 1950s on, as a result of the waves of immigration from the Arab states, most of the children in the Youth Aliyah schools and institutions were Mizrahim.

4. Agricultural settlements, many of which were populated solely by poor Mizrahim and located in the periphery. These *moshavim* were never considered to be elite settlements, in contrast to the Ashkenazi *kibbutzim*.

5. Being a pilot in the Israeli military is considered a symbol of very high status, requiring exceptional bravery and cognitive and physical abilities. Pilots used to be identified with the prototype of the successful Israeli Ashkenazi male.

6. An ontological narrative, in Margaret Somers’s (1994) words.

7. The first prime minister and the founder father of the State of Israel.

8. The 1977 elections initiated an upheaval in Israeli politics. After almost three decades of rule by the left-wing Labor Party, the right-wing Likud came to power, with the strong support of Mizrahi voters. Sociologists and other analysts commonly hold the view that this upheaval partly represented Mizrahi retribution against the discriminatory Ashkenazi establishment.

9. The history of “consciousness raising” is associated primarily with feminist therapists working in New York (Firestone, 2003; Hanisch, 1970; Mainardi, 1968; Millett, 1990; Sara-child, 1975). In the educational field, the most prominent case is that of Paulo Freire’s (1970) “critical pedagogy.”

10. Reverse discrimination, one of several available destigmatization strategies (Lamont and Mizrachi, 2012; Mizrachi and Herzog, 2012), posits the bidirectional nature of discrimination by suggesting a possible alternative scenario in which the stigmatized and the

stigmatizer switch positions so that the hierarchy of group positions becomes blurred or even undermined. In this case, reverse discrimination would mean that Ashkenazim can also face discrimination by Mizrahim.

11. For clarification of Haim's use of the term "Sephardim," rather than Mizrahim, see note 7 in chapter 1.

12. In the present context, "second-generation Ashkenazim" refers to immigrants who arrived after 1950. These included Holocaust survivors and communities formerly living in Poland, for example.

13. It is worth noting that Adva's report focuses on households and does not compare individuals. The data is also limited because the Israeli census does not allow for easy follow up of ethnicity, as third-generation Ashkenazim and Mizrahim are categorized automatically as "Israelis." A study by Cohen et al. (2007) indicates almost unbridgeable gaps in education between second- and third-generation Israeli Jews aged 25–34 in 1995. Importantly, the latter study focused on the first years of the Mizrahi upswing.

14. With few exceptions, the standards for admission to the colleges are lower than for universities, and many of the colleges are located in peripheral areas.

4. "IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO THE MAJORITY IS": REPRESENTATION, RECOGNITION, AND ROOTEDNESS

1. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003) disagree with regard to the nature and the relationship between distributive justice, politics of recognition, and representation. Honneth goes so far as to contend that politics of recognition is the fundamental category and views distributive justice as derivative and a category that is secondary to recognition, while Fraser denies that distributive justice can be subsumed under recognition. Thus she proposes a "perspectival dualist" analysis that casts the two categories as co-fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice. Yet both agree that the politics of recognition is irreducible to distributive justice and stands by itself as an independent moral category that has a tremendous impact on our attitude to the other and our experience as moral agents in the world.

2. This is in contrast to the situation of Palestinian citizens of Israel, who, as discussed above, are formally citizens of the state, but in reality participate in only limited spheres of public life. Of course, this discussion does not attend to the status of migrants and asylum seekers, or of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, whose situation is closer to Fraser's analysis.

3. See the work of Uri Cohen and Nissim Leon (2014) on the Likud Central Committee.

4. I have borrowed the phrase from Pierre Bourdieu (2007).

5. The role of the Holocaust in the formation of the political consciousness of the Jews in Israel has been the subject of frequent criticism (see for example Elkanah, 2012).

6. The Israel Prize is the most important and prestigious award given in the State of Israel. It is awarded to Israeli citizens, or, in unusual cases, to organizations or collaborations, who have demonstrated particular excellence and achieved breakthroughs in their fields or made an exceptional contribution to Israeli society in a variety of areas. The official and formal annual awards ceremony is conducted at the conclusion of Israeli Independence Day, in the presence of the heads of state, including the President, the Prime Minister, the Knesset Chair, the President of the Supreme Court, the Mayor of Jerusalem, and the Minister of Education, who is responsible for the prize in the name of the government. The primary

fields in which the Israel Prize is awarded are: philosophy and religious studies; life sciences; Hebrew and general linguistics; the study of the Middle East; chemistry and physics; geography, Israeli geography, and archaeology; Hebrew songs and folk art; and lifetime awards for an outstanding contribution to society and the State (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

7. My father was born in Palestine, before the establishment of the State of Israel. Both of my parents were blind; my father was educated in the School for the Blind in Jerusalem, established by European Jews, which provided an Ashkenazi religious education, modern Hebrew literature, classical musical instruction, and training for independent life skills. He spoke fluent Hebrew, but almost no Arabic. My mother came to Israel from Iraq as a teenager. She did not attend school in Iraq, and spoke no Hebrew when she migrated to Israel.

8. A slang term for Ashkenazim used by Mizrahim.

9. Dr. Vicki Shiran was a criminologist and feminist scholar, and one of the founders of the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow. She was on the board of directors of the Israel Broadcasting Authority (2000–2004), a member of the Second Authority for Television and Radio and a director of the Channel 2 News Company (2000–2004) and a member of the board of directors of Am Oved Publishers (2001–2004). She promoted a campaign, “Present Absentees in Prime Time,” which attended to the social groups excluded from the screen and initiated a study on underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Mizrahim and other on prime time TV (Avraham et al., 2004). Two additional studies, published after her untimely death, advanced this direction of research further.

10. For example, Shenhav (1999) wrote a position paper as part of his activities in the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow on the topic of the inadequate and distorted representation of Mizrahim in Jewish history textbooks.

11. “Erez Bitton was born in 1942 to Moroccan parents in Oran, Algeria and emigrated to Israel in 1948. His poetry revolutionized Hebrew literature, establishing him as the founding father of Mizrahi poetry” (Poetry Foundation, n.d.).

12. The Biton Commission was established after the completion of this research.

13. Peace Now was founded in March 1978 by an ad hoc group of officers in the military reserves, who warned then–Prime Minister Menachem Begin that a failure to take advantage of the opportunities for peace with Egypt could undermine their ability to continue to serve in the armed forces. It is the largest and longest-standing Israeli peace movement. At the time of this research, almost all members of its leadership were Ashkenazim, according to its website, <https://peacenow.org.il/en/about-us/who-are-we>.

14. The Yesha Council, according to its website, “is the umbrella organization of all the local authorities in Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley,” that is, the West Bank. The Council “was founded in the 1980s as an organization formed to promote Israeli communities in Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley as the heart of the Bible Land and the birthplace of the Jewish people and its heritage;” see <https://myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=419>. At the time of this research, only two out of fourteen members of its leadership were Mizrahim; for the current board of directors, see <https://myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=430>.

15. Literally, Land of Israel. In this context, the reference is to the political view favoring continued Israeli control of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and expanding the Jewish settlements there.

16. This is a reference to the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in August 2005. Gush Katif was a group of seventeen settlements in the southern part of the Strip; the settlers were forcibly removed, and the settlements were destroyed.

17. Both are *moshavim*, or cooperative settlements, founded in the 1950s near the Lebanese border. In 1970, an attack by terrorists who infiltrated from Lebanon on a school bus from Avivim killed twelve civilians, nine of them children, and wounded twenty-five.

18. Members of the Palmach, an elite strike force of the pre-State military; it was established in 1941.

19. The mention of these particular cities is a reference to what is popularly known as “The Old Yishuv,” which included all the Jews who lived in the area before the first waves of Zionist immigration in the 1880s. Most were Sephardim, many of whom, like the Mizrahim from the Arab-speaking regions, traced their origins to the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain in 1492. They spoke Ladino, also known as Judeo-Spanish. As noted in the introduction, in today’s usage, the term “Sephardic” refers primarily to the liturgical tradition followed at the time and today by the Mizrahim, while the term “Mizrahi” refers to the Jewish ethnic groups who formerly lived in Middle Eastern Muslim countries. However, it is important to note that in the state-building narrative, the Old Yishuv was not a leading force.

20. A wealthy Syrian-Jewish family.

21. Nili was a small Jewish organization that spied for the British to help them take Palestine from the Ottomans during World War I, well before the Holocaust. The Palmach, as noted above, was established in 1941—therefore, during the Holocaust and certainly not by Holocaust survivors.

22. A Palestinian village in the West Bank whose agricultural land is cut off by Israel’s Separation Barrier, frequently the site of protests by left-wing Israeli Jews in coordination with residents of the village.

23. Arian and Keissar-Sugarmen (2012, p. 30) found differences in levels of traditionalism according to ethnic background. Moreover, according to their findings, patterns of religious self-definition and the extent of traditional observance of “mixed” (combined Ashkenazi and Mizrahi background) are more similar to those of the Ashkenazim than to those of the Mizrahim. Most of the Ashkenazi and the “mixed” populations are “secular” (not anti-religious) (67 percent and 62 percent, respectively), while a small proportion are anti-religious. In contrast, most of the Mizrahi population is traditionally observant, religious, or ultra-Orthodox. A higher percentage of Mizrahim (44 percent) defined themselves as traditionalist, in contrast to “mixed” and Ashkenazim (23 percent and 18 percent, respectively). In addition, a higher percentage of Mizrahim defined themselves as religious and ultra-Orthodox, in contrast to “mixed” and “Ashkenazim” (29 percent in contrast to 15 percent and 17 percent, respectively).

24. Emuna Elon is an Israeli author, journalist, and women’s rights activist. She is the daughter of a highly regarded religious and intellectual Ashkenazi family. Her late husband, also the scion of a prominent family, was a member of Knesset.

25. Precise numbers are impossible to obtain, due to categorizations provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which lists those born in Israel as Israelis. According to Gillis (2016), based on data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 30 percent of settlers were Mizrahim; 36 percent were Ashkenazim; and 34 percent were identified as Israelis. Others, such as Swirski (2005) provide different, although similar, statistics, for different time periods. Daniel Gutwein (2004b) provides a typical economic class analysis that belongs to the critical genre by suggesting that lower socioeconomic levels (which are

primarily Mizrahim) were enlisted into the settlement enterprise as part of Israel's social welfare policies. Again, in this view, the Mizrahi stance derives directly from structural constraints and Mizrahi behavior is portrayed as purely reactive, rather than an expression of an independent stance.

26. Sharon was incapacitated by a stroke a few months after evacuating the Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip and died in 2014 after eight years in a coma.

27. All chairpersons of the Yesha Council up to the time of the research had been Ashkenazim. From 2007–2013, which includes the period of the research, the Council was headed by Danny Dayan, who was born in Argentina. Jews from Argentina can be divided into two groups: those of Eastern European extraction (Ashkenazim) and Jews descended from Halab (Syria), who are Sephardim/Mizrahim. However, the Jews of Sephardi origin in Argentina are not usually identified as Mizrahim due to their culture and South American identity. In any case, the three heads of the Yesha Council following Dayan were all Mizrahim: Avi Roeh (born in Tunis) from 2013–2017; Hananel Dorani (2017–2019); and David Elhayani (2019–present). The change in the ethnic origin of the heads of the Yesha Council does indeed reflect a significant change in the representation of Mizrahim in the leadership of the ideological right.

28. While this may also apply to many other deeply divided societies across the group, here I remain focused on the Mizrahi case.

29. Accepted educational programs in Israel and throughout the world intended to “re-educate” populations have entailed transferring adolescents to boarding schools in a different city or province. With regard to adolescents from disadvantaged populations, separating them from their natural and organic social surroundings was considered necessary in order to reshape them in different surroundings (see Avihu, 2016; Mizrahi, 2004).

30. In the Israeli context, see Yonah, 2005.

31. The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow is perhaps the best example of the adoption of liberal isomorphism as an ideal type of activist Mizrahi activity. Along with its promotion of identity politics, the Rainbow also promoted distributive justice (which is a complementary part of liberal justice). It is important to note that although the Rainbow was characterized by a wide spectrum of views, including, for example, the traditionalist approach presented by Professor Meir Buzaglo, the predominant approach in the 1990s was that of the liberal left, which strove to articulate a Mizrahi agenda in universal terms (Yonah et al., 2007).

32. This is not to say that the critical Mizrahi discourse was always welcomed in these circles or that it was always widely supported.

33. For further discussion, with regard to the critical discourse of disabilities, see Mizrahi, 2016a.

34. It is important to note that in addition to Mizrahi activism of the left-liberal kind, there were other types of activism based on a more traditional and nationalist orientation. Such, for example, are the activisms of movements such as “Mimizrah Shemesh” and Tik-kun, which took root as early as the 1990s. In the early days of the Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow, Professor Meir Buzaglo sought to present an approach that combined Mizrahi and Jewish identities, in contrast to those that sought to combine the Jewish identity with the Arab identity and/or to adopt a universalist/secular-liberal approach. There have also been more recent approaches, such as the “Tor Hazahav,” led by third-generation Mizrahi activists who seek to combine Mizrahiness with nationalism.

5. THE ARAB JEW: THE ONTOLOGICAL NARRATIVE UNDER ATTACK

1. For further reading regarding the complex and contradictory history of the relationships between Arabs and Jews, see the work of historian Hillel Cohen (2023). Cohen offers a fascinating description of the actual conditions of possibility for a Jewish-Arab identity throughout history. His work provides a nuanced analysis of these conditions, the circumstances, and the specific contexts in which relationships between Jews and Arabs were both close and distant, affectionate and hostile.

2. This version of the definition is taken from Talcott Parsons's translation of Weber from German into English, and appears in Turner and Factor (1981).

3. "Negation of the Diaspora" is a central tenet of Zionism, which views the Diaspora as an unnatural and pathological existence for the Jewish people, which can heal itself in a nation-state on its historical national land.

4. Moshe Behar (2007) reaches a similar conclusion in a programmatic article that is not based on independent historiographic research.

5. See, for example, Snir (2020). Similar to Snir's conviction, professor Sasson Somekh, who was born in Iraq and is considered to be among the foremost researchers of Arabic and Islam, noted:

The tendency of senior Mizrahi intellectuals . . . to speak about themselves as Arab-Jews is first and foremost a result of a political stance, that is, their desire to strongly protest against the sense of the discrimination that has been, they feel, directed against Mizrahim. In essence, they are attempting to emphasize that they do not want to be part of the Zionist experience of the State. I have no problem with these positions, although for me, this is not the definition of Arab-Jewish identity. In my opinion, in order to be an Arab-Jew, a person must meet four criteria: their mother tongue must be Arabic, in any of its dialects; they must have been born and raised in an Arabic-speaking Jewish community; in an Arabic-speaking country; and most of their basic education must have been acquired through Arabic culture. In this regard, to be extreme for a moment, I would say that in order to be an Arab-Jew, the first poet that a person read would have to have been Al-Mutanabbi, the greatest poet of the Middle Ages. In that sense, an adult who has already read poetry cannot decide retroactively to be an Arab-Jew (cited in A. Behar, 2008).

The lack of command of Arabic is not unique to critical Mizrahi scholars in Israeli Jewish society. A survey that we conducted in 2015 points to a poor command of Arabic, especially among the second and third generations of immigrants (Shenhav et al., 2015).

6. Snir (2020) doubts the motives and professional capacity of his detractors to understand Arabic culture and language and says that most of the current critical scholars are incapable of doing so (although he does qualify this assertion with regard to Shenhav, who has studied the language thoroughly and has become one of the most prolific translators in Israel of Arabic literature into Hebrew.) He harbors suspicion that identification with and commitment to critical theories influence critical scholars, who attempt to infuse empirical content into Arab Jewish culture as if it were a living phenomenon in our time. In his opinion, these attempts are feeble, forced, unpersuasive, and lacking in any empirical basis.

7. Here I use the term *peoplehood* not in its post-modern, contemporary sense (see, for example Kopelowitz et al., 2008; Kopelowitz and Engelberg, 2007) but rather as a primordial sense of belonging to a greater or larger group.

8. The percentage of Israeli Muslims who marry non-Muslims (Christian Arabs or Jews) is negligible (DellaPergola, 2017, p. 154–55).

9. Peoplehood is not intended to distinguish between nationhood and community, in the sense of the Kaplan Reconstructionist school, nor in the sense of the revival of the term as a post-modern belonging to a community or network that transcends statehood (Kopelowitz et al., 2008; Kopelowitz and Engelberg, 2007). Indeed, the meaning of Mizrahi rootedness in this form of peoplehood is the close connection between religiosity and nationalism and between the two temporal forms, the ancient mythic and the modern Zionist.

10. According to a Pew Research Center study (Theodorou, 2016),

like a number of other ethnic groups in the Middle East, such as the Kurds, the Druze live in several different countries, separated by borders drawn after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire in the early 1920s. But unlike the Kurds, who are largely Muslim, the Druze are a unique religious and ethnic group. Their tradition dates back to the 11th century and incorporates elements of Islam, Hinduism and even classical Greek philosophy. Today, 1 million-plus members of this community live primarily in Syria and Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, in Israel and Jordan. In Israel, the Druze are a close-knit community active in public life. They make up roughly 2% of the country's population and most live in the northern regions of the Galilee, Carmel and the Golan Heights (CBS, 2022) [. . .] Nine-in-ten Israeli Druze say they have a strong sense of belonging to the Druze community and about the same number (93%) say they are proud to be Druze [. . .] In Israel, the Druze are subject to the military draft. In fact, for more than four decades, the Israeli military had a primarily Druze infantry unit called the Herev, or sword battalion (G. Cohen, 2015). This is in contrast with Israeli Arabs, who are exempt from military service. About six-in-ten Druze men included in our survey say they have served (45%) or currently are serving (15%) in the Israeli military. Druze women are not required to serve. Among Israeli Jews, 75% of men and 57% of women currently serve in the military or have served in the past (Israeli Jewish men and women are required to serve, with some exemptions).

11. David was an additional participant who expressed his displeasure over even a discussion of the possibility of the existence of a Jewish-Arab identity; the comments were cut off and I did not recount them in the main text in order to maintain the flow and the sequence.

12. In the year 2008 (one year before we began collecting the data for this project) the percentage of Muslims (men and women) who married a non-Muslim was miniscule. The percentage of Muslim men who married non-Muslim women was 0.6 percent, while the percentage of Muslim women who married non-Muslims was 0.2 percent. We find a similar picture among Jews, although the percentage of inter-religious marriage was slightly higher (3.8 percent for men and 2.7 percent for women). The highest rate of inter-religious marriage could be found among Christian (13.4 percent for men and 17.2 percent for women). Furthermore, the percentage of marriages between Jews and Muslims is the lowest, in comparison with the two other religions. The percentage of marriages between Jews and Christians is the highest of all inter-religious marriages among the three religions, in comparison with Muslim-Christian and Muslim-Jewish. It is important to remember that the fact that there is no civil marriage in Israel does not encourage inter-religious marriage; however, it is possible to overcome this bureaucratic obstacle by marrying abroad and, by

itself, it does not have the power to explain this significant cultural-political phenomenon (DellaPergola, 2017).

According to the Pew survey (Theodorou, 2016), Jews are nearly universally uncomfortable with the idea of their child someday marrying a Muslim (97 percent), and a very large proportion (89 percent) feel the same way about a hypothetical intermarriage with a Christian. The difference is driven by secular Jews, who are slightly less opposed (but still 80 percent) to intermarriage with a Christian compared with other Jewish groups; in contrast, virtually all in the other Jewish groups (ultra-Orthodox, religious, and traditional) say they would be uncomfortable with a Christian marrying into their family. Ninety-six percent of seculars say they are uncomfortable with the idea of a child marrying a Muslim. Israeli Jews who speak primarily Russian at home are less likely than those who speak Hebrew to oppose their child marrying a Christian (65 percent vs. 92 percent), but they are just as likely as Hebrew speakers to be uncomfortable with a Muslim marrying into their family (96 percent vs. 97 percent) (p. 213–16).

13. From the area of Halab, in Syria, where the city of Aleppo is located.

6. ROOTEDNESS AND DEFIANCE: VISIONS OF MORALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

1. See Rogers Brubaker's justified warning about groupism as a categorical error in the social science (2004, ch. 1).

2. Here I deliberately performed an act of groupism (see the above note) while putting the very act to the test of the informants. The stability of meaning within these groups is not particularly surprising, given the fact that it is at the center of the "great paradox" that led to our research journey. That is, the statistical correlation between a population with a low socioeconomic background among Jews in Israel and other populations in the world (Hochschild, 2016) and the tendency to vote for the political right formed the starting point for this research.

3. See discussion of liberal isomorphism in chapter 3.

4. Buzaglo expressed this position in a podcast with religious-Zionist Rabbi Haim Navon (Let's Think, 2021).

5. A largely Mizrahi development town in Israel's southern periphery, near the Gaza Strip.

6. From the distance of a decade from this discussion, we see that the views of young Eliran and the women represent a broader general trend among right-wing Mizrahim. MK Amir Ohana, who is an openly gay Mizrahi man (of Moroccan descent) has been popular in the Likud (the largest right-wing party, which is supported by Mizrahim from the periphery) since he was elected to the Knesset in 2015. At his swearing-in ceremony, he declared, "I am a Jew, an Israeli, a Mizrahi, a gay man, a member of the Likud, a hawk, a Liberal who supports a free economy." He was later appointed to a senior ministerial position and became a central figure among members of the Likud. He lives in Tel Aviv with his partner and their twin sons, who were born in August 2015 through surrogacy in the United States.

7. "In 1969, Sa'adia Marciano and Charlie Biton—along with four other Moroccan-Jewish youth living in the poor Moroccan-Jewish section of Jerusalem, Israel—started meeting to discuss North African Jews' experiences of joblessness, police beatings, housing and

education discrimination, and exclusion from government political offices and positions. When they read about anti-racist liberation movements in other countries, they decided in 1971 to name their group the Israeli Black Panther Party (IBPP). They used the Panthers' well-recognized name to 'make the government take this group seriously,' and to draw national attention to the fact that Israeli discrimination against them was similar to the experiences of African Americans. They adopted the Black Panthers as their model for protesting and organizing" (Pien, 2018).

8. A common left-wing slogan in Israel, often used in the context of Palestinian-Arab rights in contradistinction to the Jewish State.

9. See for example, Carol Gilligan's (1982) foundational work on the stages of women's moral development, in which she argues that morality is influenced by relationships and that women form their moral and ethical foundation based on how their decisions will affect others. Gilligan contrasts this relational development with Lawrence Kohlberg's theories of moral development, which argue that human beings make decisions on the basis of universal, abstract principles of justice, duty, logic, and impartial reasoning (see Kohlberg and Hersh, 1977). Gilligan points to the relational nature of morality in order to reveal the long-term impact of gender inequality.

While acknowledging this possible effect, I expand the meaning of relationality to the Durkheimian sense which views all moral forms as embedded in the social fabric within which they live and breathe: "Morality consists in solidarity with the group, and varies according to that solidarity. Cause all social life to vanish, and moral life would vanish at the same time, having no object to cling to" (Durkheim, 1997, p. 331).

10. In 2008 (at the time I began this research), Mizrahim constituted 37.9 percent of the Jewish population, compared to 20.7 percent of Ashkenazim; 20.7 percent are third-generation Israeli born and/or mixed groups, and 21.1 percent of them are new immigrants (Y. Cohen, 2015).

11. See, for example, the position of the Banai family, and especially musician Ehud Banai, who combines rock and blues with Arab music, as well as musicians such as ShemTov Levi and Micky Gabrielov, who combine east and west. Also worth noting is the appreciation of Andalusian music, the use that popular rock artists such as Barry Sacharov make of Mizrahi *piyutim* (liturgical music), the return to the Mizrahi-Arabic roots of music by artists such as Dudu Tassa (whose grandfather was a famous musician in Iraq), and the popularity of Mizrahi musicians such as Ahuva Ozeri and Amir Benayoun among both the Ashkenazi and the Mizrahi middle class. To this non-comprehensive list, we can also add pop stars such as Statick, Ben Or, and Omer Adam. See also Regev and Seroussi, 2004.

12. In 2009 18 percent of Ashkenazim, compared to 44 percent of Mizrahim defined themselves as traditional (Arian and Sugarmen, 2009, p. 33–34). However, it is important to clarify that self-definition as "traditionalists" does not necessarily reflect a "non-liberal" position or a worldview that accords with the description of the "traditional Mizrahi" as an ideal type.

13. See for example, the lyrics of the song "Tradition" from *Fiddler on the Roof*: "Because of our tradition, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka, we have tradition for everything. How to sleep, how to eat, how to work. How to wear clothes. . . . Because of our tradition, every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do."

14. See Memizrach Shemesh, "About Us" [English], <https://www.mizrach.org.il/english>, accessed November 1, 2023.

7. THE NEED FOR BELONGING: THE CONNECTIVE POWER OF ROOTEDNESS

1. See, for example, Hillel Cohen's (2015) description of the attitude of the socialist Zionist pioneers at the beginning of the twentieth century towards the Sephardi Jews living in Palestine and the local Arabs. These pioneers, who came from Eastern Europe, were imbued with universalist ideologies to repair the world and conquer the desert and viewed the local Jews and Arabs as the vestiges of the old, primitive world. The immigrants from the Islamic countries received a similar welcome by the kibbutz movement in the 1950s.

2. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed, "the ideal of liberty and equality follows immediately from the conception of man [sic] as an individual" (in Dumont, 1980, p. 11).

3. This discussion on the work of Jeffrey Alexander is based on an unpublished paper by Kineret Sadeh, "The Cultural Boundaries of Beyond the Liberal Imagination" (Hebrew), which was presented at a workshop in the framework of the Minerva Institute on July 7, 2020, at Tel Aviv University and at the Intellectual Forum of the "Challenge of Living Together" Cluster at the Van Leer Institute on June 17.

4. Renowned artist Yair Garbuz's famous speech, which created a public storm, is one example. Garbuz, as a prototype figure from the secular Ashkenazi left, claimed, in reference to rooted traditionalist Mizrahim, that Israel is being controlled by "amulet-kissers, idol-worshippers" (see Noy, 2015).

5. In this context, it is important to distinguish between scholars and social activists who speak in the name of traditionalism and the traditionalists themselves. See the discussion in chapter 4 regarding the connection between the discourse of traditionalism and the liberal discourse of identity politics.

6. Once again, I use the term *peoplehood* not in its post-modern, contemporary sense.

7. In "The Practice of Everyday Life" (1984), Michel de Certeau attempts to create a theory of daily life to capture reality, which is the flow of practices that never give themselves over to attempts to conceptualize them. De Certeau compares the attempt to overcome the gap between "a map" and "reality." However, unlike the constant movement of de Certeau's text, as he follows his subjects and their creative use of space and cultural images, power structures are present in his text as fairly stable entities. These are a form of boundaries of the maze in which lab mice move about, serving as the foundation against which the "tricks" and creative uses that stray from the "intent" and even make that intent appear to be absurd. His descriptions of the work of Foucault and Bourdieu give the impression that de Certeau came in through a "small opening" in their all-knowing theories. Through that opening, he is able to reach real people who have the power to change the plot and to cause the theoretical categories of both Foucault and Bourdieu to fail. Thus, for example, when he relates to Foucault's power-knowledge nexus, he points to the dominated "ways of operating" as real power that cannot be seen through the Foucauldian lens. According to de Certeau, these ways of operating are "the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production. They pose questions at once analogous and contrary to those dealt with in Foucault's book: analogous, in that the goal is to perceive and analyse the microbe-like operations proliferating within technocratic structures and deflecting their functioning by means of a multitude of 'tactics' articulated in the details of everyday life" (p. xiv). By turning his observation from the structures of power—that is, the walls of the maze—to the bacteria-like social agents, he

also changes the purpose of the research, which changes from an attempt to expose the ways power develops into disciplinary technology to an examination of the tactics and creative actions of groups and individuals against the power that is imposed on them.

8. Similarly, anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005) bases her work on four components of Foucauldian ethics in order to analyze women's political-ethical activities in mosques in Cairo (p. 30–31). The first component she uses is the essence of ethics, those parts of the self that are the target of ethical judgment and praxis. Mahmood describes these women as moral agents whose behavior is embedded in a religious, non-liberal, cosmological logic. Their experience of agency is thus completely different from the experience of liberal agency. Their experience is nurtured by the connection to the traditions of the past, rather than by defiance of that past; from fulfillment of their duties instead of from the fulfillment of their rights; and from the sanctification of the existing order rather than from its disestablishment. This interpretive process enables her to return her gaze to the ontological position of liberal feminism and its assumption of a necessary link between individual autonomy and self-fulfillment and to point to the limitations that this assumption imposes on the interpretive and political stance.

9. An ethnographic analysis of the cultural limits of liberal identity politics in the context of deep difference in Australia can be found in Povinelli (2002).

10. See for example the Tikkun Movement, headed by Prof. Meir Buzaglo.

11. It seems that the profound challenge of the traditionalist stream is what Hans-Georg Gadamer termed a "fusion of horizons." This is the representation of past or present tradition from an outside horizon: "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (2004, p. 302). Fusion of horizons entails, according to Gadamer, not only close reading of the meaning of things outside of the interpreter's own horizon, but rather merging their horizon with the observed one in a way that transforms the interpreter's horizon.

12. "Judea and Samaria" is the term used by the Jewish participants in this project.

13. See Roots website at <https://www.friendsofroots.net/>

14. For Yassin see JustVision's website, <https://justvision.org/glossary/sheikh-ahmed-yassin>. For Froman and this quotation see the Tanenbaum Foundation website, <https://tanenbaum.org/about-us/what-we-do/peacebuilding/meet-the-peacemakers/rabbi-men-achem-froman>.

15. See the Gruber Foundation, <https://gruber.yale.edu/justice/association-civil-rights-israel-acri>.

16. See Shahrar's website at <https://www.shaharit.org.il/?lang=en>.

17. For a general discussion on the tension between human rights and the need for belonging context, see Seligman et al., 2015.

APPENDIX 1. SHADOW CASES

1. A slang term for Jews in Israel who came from Germany.

2. For an example of media coverage see Wollaston, 2016. The topic has also been documented in the UK-Israel film *Forever Pure* (2016) by Maya Zinshtein. For a discussion of this behavior as it appears in Israel's critical discourse, see Rimon Or, 2002.

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