The Hermeneutics of Love in Mizrahi Diaspora

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Abstract

This paper investigates the discursive shifts necessary to establishing an anti-Zionist Jewish diaspora formed in part by Mizrahi reality. Using what Chela Sandoval calls the "praxis stage of the hermeneutics of love," I consider what formal tasks Jewish communities are responsible for in a decolonizing Palestine. This work entails the contextualization of race within Israel's formation of Jewish identity and the ongoing metabolization of Arabness to do so. Ultimately, I pose an advanced question for diaspora studies: How can a nation-state be rejected and subsequently disbanded without its most subjugated populations increasingly harmed in the "liberatory" process?

Introduction

Jean Paul Sartre wrote that to be a Jew is to be "responsible in and through one's person for the destiny and the very nature of the Jewish People" (Sartre 1948, 70). As an Ashkenazi Israeli Jew, my work is premised on an ethical responsibility to other Jews, and to Palestinians. With the Israeli state weaponizing anti-semitism to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Jews in diaspora are made more urgently aware of the need to reclaim their peoplehood from 75 years of Israeli occupation and ethnic cleansing. British colonialism, U.S. military imperialism, and Jewish and Christian Zionism all collude in the idea that Judaism is a monolith under Israel to advance their own hegemonic agendas. The contributions of global decolonial scholars, Palestinian academics, and Mizrahi writers complicate Zionist history and undo its alliances.

Crucial to this endeavor is a divulging of the violent history of European Jews (Ashkenazim) baiting Arab Jews (Mizrahim) from Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) to immigrate to the newly forming state of Israel. This agenda created a secondary class of citizens who

would serve as cheap labor for the newly established state. Although Zionism necessitates a deep dissociation with Arabness to produce a pure Israeli identity, Israel has *relied* on Mizrahi people's Arabness precisely to delineate a settling buffer between elite Israelis and Palestinians fighting to return to their land. We can recognize this as a peak cognitive dissonance, where Israeli refusal of Arabness has constructed Mizrahi self-hatred and racism towards Palestinians.

A decolonial love is the only thing that can break through this dissociation. But it will not likely be the morally implored love towards Palestinians, that so many peace processes have attempted (and failed) to negotiate. Instead, love must be part of a larger abolitionist project – one where, a global Jewry turns back to 2000 years of diasporic tradition before the state of Israel was established. In the Torah, "Israel" is not a name given to locate an immovable position– it is the name given to Jacob only after he begins *to wrestle with God*. Thus, there is a wrestling with existence central to Jewishness that does not precipitate a nation-state but an activity. Jewish communities can return this call to wrestle by loosening their attachments to a stable bureaucratic and racial identity. By doing so, the contradictions held by Mizrahi Israelis can be engaged through an imagination of a global Jewish diaspora that makes reparations for *Zionism*'s idolatrous ills.

By reflecting on the biblical definitions of the word Israel, we can detach it from the colonial implications of the co-opted nation-state's name. We must confront the imperial and anti-semitic origins of the s*tate* of Israel if we are to reclaim and repair a liberation-based Judaism. In order to shed light on the struggles of a future Jewish diaspora, I will primarily engage the scholarship of Chela Sandoval, Frantz Fanon, Ella Shohat, and Daniel Boyarin. The connections between Mizrahi and Palestinian displacement, while not directly comparable, will provide the liminal terrain to consider movements for solidarity against all anti-Arab racism.

I will ask the reader to grasp two vital concepts: First, how the notion of love, here understood as a pre-discursive approach to an "other" that aims to heal the inner- and inter-personal marks left and made by collective trauma, allows us to break the Zionist colonial structure of subjugation; and second that, Mizrahim, having a doubled consciousness due to the internalization of Zionist anti-Arab sentiments, show a vector by which collective Jewish thought can reach that love, through the crisis of self-loathing and self-destruction. For anti-Zionist Jews to consider the abolitionist project of leaving Israel, the historical oppression of

Mizrahim and the outcomes of hybrid Israeli identities must be centered.

Semiotics of "Mizrahi"

Critical to this work is an analysis of the meaning-making by predominant forces within the ongoing history of elusive, shifting and unstable identifiers "Mizrahi" and "Arab Jew." Sandoval gives a decolonial reading of Roland Barthes' "Mythologies" to articulate her own theory of the "Methodology of the Oppressed." The first step to undoing a dominant language, according to Barthes, is creating an "oppositional consciousness" that reveals the patterns of ideology steeped in Western colonial meaning (Sandoval 2000, 109). In early 90's Israel, a curious hybridity formed within Zionism's invention of the Jewish nation: the term Mizrahi to identify Israelis from SWANA. While the term contains "racialized tropes and Orientalist fantasies," it also complicates Israel's Eurocentric framework (Shohat 2017, 13). One may conclude that Mizrahi functions as an *empty signifier* – full of potential meaning and devoid of a succinct referent. Thus, the project of historicizing Mizrahi identity, especially as it emerges discursively from the Arab world, entails a complicated interpretation of what exactly we are working with when we work with Mizrahi identity.

To some, to be Mizrahi signifies a second-class background that is associated with deep hatred and brutality towards Palestinians. In this definition, Mizrahim seek to assimilate into white Jewishness by forgetting a history of dispossession and claiming full Israeliness. However, there has also been a large shift in reclaiming Mizrahi identity precisely to make visible the violent histories towards indigenous communities and name the continuous discrimination they experience. In the 1970's, inspired by the Black Panthers movement for Black liberation in the U.S., Moroccan Israelis protested the Ashkenazi Israeli government's racist and violent policies towards Mizrahim (Reiff 2024). They pointed to the irony of segregation and impoverishment while Israel professed the socialist ethics of its new state. Mizrahi Black Panthers also worked with the binational communist party to develop a notion of joint liberation and Palestinian freedom (Shalom Chetrit 2010, 213). Though most rebellions were quickly squashed by Zionist propaganda that denied any discrimination, it is interesting to note how the nominal identifier was chosen from American Black Panthers who also publicly denounced Israel's treatment of Palestinians as imperialism.

We can turn to an analysis of the incorporation of slavery into American bureaucratic forms to understand how systems of carceral segregation persist as racially dependent subject

positions within capitalism and democracy (Wilkerson 2023, 20). Zionism can be considered a prime example of an ideological system by which "the conversion of human beings into currency" succeeds through racialization (44). Although Wilkerson is writing in a different context from Arab Jews, her analysis of caste helps illuminate conditions of domination beyond the African American experience.

The Mizrahi Caste

While the exact number of Mizrahim in Israel is difficult to estimate due to years of mixing heritage, Mizrahim represent a majority of the population that experiences disproportionate levels of poverty and discrimination (Nagar-Ron 2021, 9). A turn to the history of the creation of Israel helps us understand the origin and evolution of the Israeli state's neglect towards Mizrahim. At Israel's inception, Ashkenazi Zionists held a European-flavored disdain for Arab Jews considered less civilized or barbaric, but nevertheless needed "cheap labor" to successfully populate Palestine with mostly Jews (Shohat 2017, 108). Like all nationalist caste systems, some lives in Israel are more valuable than others to the state's social paradigms. The blatant valuation of human beings as less than and more than is shrouded, however, by a guise of normalcy which disavows the systematic violence of such valuation (34).

The historical proximity we have to the creation of the state of Israel allows us to see what may always be the case: racial construction of caste is not unconsciously automatic. There is a violent agency at work. In Israel, pioneering Zionists of the 1950's used long-established racism against Mizrahim to convince Arab Jews to migrate to the newly formed state through a projection of *European* antisemitism onto the Arab World. At once, the trauma of European antisemitism was psychically linked to the anti-Arab sentiment necessary to justify immediate housing for Ashkenazim. If Israel was a state for the Jews and not an imperialist effort by Britain in the region, then ostensibly Arab Jews would be first-class citizens in their new state. However, the deployment of caste by race signifies Israel's structure as first and foremost a European imagination-- irreversibly marked by anti-Black slavery and anxiety about trade with Islamic governments. Ashkenazim who immigrated to Palestine were given resources in central cities, and Mizrahim were displaced to resource-less outskirts of the land and left to fend for themselves (Shohat 2017, 10). Thus unfolded the deliberate creation of a racial caste essential to the formation of an apartheid state that would imitate the many European colonies before it. To combat the normalization of structural violence, social

movements can employ the hermeneutics of love in the shifting locations and transformations of consciousness.

Hermeneutics of Love

The category of love is an indispensable concept for revolutionary movements. While moving toward your "enemy" with the hermeneutic of love generates a contradictory space for the seeds of liberation to appear, it does not necessarily include the *feeling* of love (Sandoval 2000, 159). Rather, we must consider how love can be *taught as* decolonial methodology. This is a question many anti-Zionist Jews in the diaspora wrestle with. Does the love towards Mizrahi Israelis entail the practices of solidarity, patience and centering of a diversity of Mizrahim? What do Mizrahi people signal as what is important to them? Simone Weil wrote that *attention* serves as the highest form of love– and prayer (Weil 1947, 15). With Mizrahi Israelis generally *more religiously observant* than Ashkenazim, the theological space of attention may be an avenue for mutually questioning Zionism. Mizrahi scholar Haviva Pedaya theorizes that the notion of *mesorti*, or between religious and secular, is a product of engagement with the Muslim world, and therefore positions Mizrahim to practice Judaism in the liminal spaces of mysticism, rather than through the comparatively new Israeli Judaism (Pedaya 2016, 138).

Through music, the mystical, or a glimpse of God, we can traverse a passage towards what Sandoval calls "differential consciousness." It is an aberrant "coming to a utopian nonsite, a no-place where everything is possible - but only in exchange for the pain of the crossing" (Sandoval 2000, 158). We are working now with the pain of the crossing: the betrayal of Zionism, how this betrayal affects Israeli born children who are assigned soldiers at birth, and ultimately how to prepare a diaspora to field what may otherwise feel like the global abandonment of Jewish Israelis (Yaniv 2023, 132). The realities of a failed colonial project only come into focus when we are required to look at the face of "the other" – for Israelis, this is the Palestinian. It is the face-to-face encounter with the neighbor that creates an awareness of the other's vulnerability and may instigate an ethical response to help (Levinas 1961, 201). The segregation of Jews and Palestinians in Israel intentionally serves to make this encounter rare. And when Israelis *do* come face to face with Palestinians through direct military violence, the horrors of these memories need to be obliterated. When Israelis finish military service, the self-destructive consequence is a prolonged immersion in drugs, occasionally leading to psychosis or death (Shamir 2007).

We must take seriously then, the communal pain enacted by a weaponization of Mizrahi labor in the name of Zionism. In doing so,

> Every time meaning cannot find a solid signified, escapes from that which is tamed and known, is defiant in the face of any binary opposition, undergoes trauma in relation to the 'real' then consciousness is 'lapsed' and passage permitted to the realm of differential consciousness (Sandoval 2000, 164).

It is here that the empty signifier of Mizrahi wields its decolonial power: unintelligible to both Ashkenazi Israelis and anti-Zionist outsiders, we may contend with its contradictions in a loving and liberatory way. This means that its power to signify a subjectivity will have to come from the meaning-making within its usages by that subjectivity. While the wrestling of Judaism may not permit us to see the face of God, we can still see the face of the neighbor (Levinas 1961, 178). The inner life of a Jewish diaspora is deeply relational and transcendental as it seeks to uphold these two things: wrestling an ideal and oneself to perfect the relationship with the neighbor.

Esther Farmer, a Palestinian Jewish member of Jewish Voice for Peace, models this differential consciousness with her program "How to Have Hard Conversations About Palestine." By inviting *Mizrahi anti-Zionists* to hold the pain of their families in Israel, Farmer conjoins pro-Palestine organizing with the dualities of Mizrahi identity in an honest way. Mizrahi scholar Shirly Bahar adds that "observing documentary performances of the pain of Palestinians and Mizrahim together invites us to contest the segregation of pain and consider reconnection and relatability to others with different experiences of pain by intimating with the very relationality of pain" (Bahar 2021, 2). Rather than drowning out the guilt of colonial consciousness, facing the construction of pain enables the potential for undoing. For these Mizrahi scholar-activists, love is a tool to unsettle the positioning of Mizrahi and Palestinian subjugation against each other.

Double Consciousness of Mizrahi Identity

As Israel adopted the colonizing tradition of Enlightenment universalism, Jews of all backgrounds were encouraged to believe in the democratic unity of a singular Jewish peoplehood (Shohat 2017, 3). Using the idea of *double consciousness* we can explore how Mizrahim have been forced to conceptualize themselves as Israelis first, and yet still

experience discrimination as Arabs in a European-powered state (Fanon 1952, 102). Right-wing Israeli politicians weaponized Mizrahi people's structurally precarious circumstances to turn them against Palestinians and use them on the frontlines of racist apartheid agendas.

Mizrahim are positioned as both dominated and dominators, who experience Israeli privilege over Palestinians, while they are also marginalized as "Orientals" (Shohat 2017, 9). Shohat's critical intervention creates a parallel with Fanon's decolonial scholarship, where the Israeli refusal of Arabness has constructed Mizrahi self-hatred (Fanon 1952, 117). At the same time, anti-Zionist Arabs globally deem Mizrahim to be deficiently Arab due to their forced assimilation into Zionism (Shohat 2017, 107). In this experience "We Jews from Islamic/Arab countries, not unlike Fanon's Blacks, began to manifest a split consciousness, and feel the schizophrenia of being at once Arabs and Jews" (307). The language here is intentionally disturbing, as it reveals the psychic landscape of how many Mizrahim have come to participate in and perpetuate violence against other Arabs.

To generate a "collective catharsis" the second-class citizen must have a "channel, an outlet whereby the energy accumulated in the form of aggressiveness can be released" (Fanon 1952, 124). The Israeli government has maintained a close watch over Mizrahi social development, ensuring a displacement of any eventual catharsis– which could potentially reject Israeli reductionism– into mainstream Israeli aggression towards Palestinians instead. The experience of double consciousness for Mizrahim may serve as an aperture for coming back to a *troubled* consciousness with respect to the occupation and murder of Palestinians.

Deconstructing the Israeli Identity

The middle voice that emerges in the space of double consciousness produces "a mechanism for survival, as well as for generating and performing a higher moral and political mode of oppositional and coalitional social movement" (Sandoval 2000, 174). This may serve as a tool for Mizrahim to climb out of the double consciousness of Mizrahi identity. When Israel first formed, Mizrahim "came to reject their dark or olive skin, their guttural pronunciation, their quartertone music, even their cultural practice of hospitality" (Shohat 2017, 117). And yet, it is precisely the allure of these qualities that early Zionists appropriated to transform the "Jewish nation" from the weak Holocaust survivor to the newly strong Israeli colonizer (Boyarin 1997, 273). The strength *of Israel* quite literally is the appropriated vitality of being

Arab. The appropriation of Arab culture here can be interpreted as a rigidity of modernity that so mechanized White people that they "turn to the Colored's and request a little human sustenance," (Fanon 1952, 108). What might an Israeli recognition of this process look like? If the ingredients of Israeli identity that are so loved were built on the shared Arab history of Mizrahim and Palestinians, there may be a crack in the homogenized identity "Israeli" itself.

What are the possibilities and significations that can arise from this emptied contradictory space? In a country dependent on nationalism to construct its legitimacy, Israelis come to internalize the politics of imperialism as a necessary mode of survival. However, Mizrahim in Israel constantly "work with/resist the conditions of impossibility that dominant culture generates" (Muñoz 2015, 6). The repeated untangling of Mizrahi signification may then serve as a model of Muñoz' 'disidentification' for Israelis trapped in an increasing cycle of violent defensiveness in the name of Jewish safety. Rather than amplifying Holocaust fear as justification for occupation, a political love can expose the way Western powers weaponize anti-semitism to produce Jewish colonization and Islamophobia. Author Meital Yaniv writes:

> Before we are israelis, before we are soldiers, before we are armors, before we are occupiers, before we are army, before we are murderers, before we are immoral, before we are apartheid, before we are ethnic cleansing, before we are state executioners, before we are born, before we are genocide, before we force identities on our bodies, before we are (151).

The praxis of love here collapses time to upend modernity's construction of militarized identity. While more research is needed on the limits of colonial national identities, we can use the history of Mizrahi identity formation to unearth the connected agendas of Mizrahi and Palestinian subjugation.

The Erasure of Mizrahi History

Between 1950-1970 Jews from SWANA were coerced into migrating to Zionist development towns across Palestine. As depicted in the documentary *The Forgotten Ones*, Mizrahim were isolated in poor areas that facilitated Mizrahi children into low-salary manual labor, resulting in an undereducated fulfillment of the caste. Mizrahim sent their children to vocational schools, from which they graduated to remain in a cycle of wage-labor (Boganim 2022). The film includes a heartbreaking scene of Mizrahi elders being shown the documentary footage.

Some erupted in tears, but others rejected the structural circumstances of their lives, that Israel would intentionally dupe and displace them. The project seeks to intervene in this disbelief using a similar hermeneutic of love to Wilkerson's: historical understanding as a path to self-understanding.

For Yemenite immigrants, an even more insidious fate awaited them in Israel. Over 2,000 Mizrahi immigrants, predominantly Yemenites, lived in shacks made by Israeli officials. Given the poverty and unfit conditions of these "homes," Yemeni parents were forced to surrender their children to Israeli medical facilities, on the claim that the infants needed better care than the parents could provide (Gamliel 2021, 2). Parents were told that the infants had died of disease, when in reality Israeli officials "lost" some and rehoused others with presumably more responsible and surely better resourced *Ashkenazi* parents. Now termed the "Yemenite Children's Affair," this separation of families is reminiscent of countless colonial tactics that tore indigenous children from their homes to re-educate them in a Western environment, and ultimately erase the traditions normally passed down generationally. Even today, as devastated Mizrahi families attempt to get answers or compensation for this barbaric act, Israeli officials silence and deny their claims (14).

In fact, some Israeli academics and officials have gone as far as to say that the vanished Yemenite children were "sacrifices on the altar of the Jewish national resurrection" (Gamliel 2021, 11). We see then how openly Israel disparages Mizrahim, in a refusal to reckon with the devastation they caused towards their own citizens. Just as every citizen of Israel is required to serve in the military, born to sacrifice their life for the safety of a Jewish ethno-state, national rhetoric is retroactively produced to determine a necropolitics of Mizrahi servitude to this cause. The Israeli government uses this patriotic praise of dying for Israel to reproduce Mizrahi inferiority that can only be rectified through a greater military commitment to the death cult. The affect of memory here serves to both construct the identity of Mizrahi and simultaneously attach it to violent Zionist agendas.

Assimilation Tactics

Historically, Israel has deployed and continues to rely on the stigmatization of a racialized group within its own settler population to justify its attempted genocide and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population of Palestinians (Eastwood 2018, 60). Zionist initiatives created a

powerful consolidation of the Israeli "collective unconscious" that is anti-Arab and requires Mizrahim to reject their Arabness. Reminiscent of the Martinician Frenchmen serving in France's war against Angola, "it is the peoples of color who annihilated the attempts at liberation of other peoples of color" (Fanon 1952, 83). Placed in positions of military power, the subjugated caste becomes the direct threat to Indigenous communities.

As Ashkenazi racism proliferated during the creation of Israel, opportunistic right-wing parties spoke to the economic demands of impoverished Mizrahim, and ultimately seized the majority of their vote for the conservative Likud party in 1977 (Shilon 2018, 546). Israeli political parties were so drastically shifted, that any governmental advocacy to end the occupation of Palestinians was almost eliminated. At the same time, building on a long history of Mizrahi inferiorization, the Israeli military strategically placed Mizrahi soldiers in the most directly coercive positions towards Palestinians (Eastwood 2018, 71). Mizrahi suffering was warped and weaponized to desire a higher position in Israeli society, predicated on the oppression of Palestinians. We can understand then how the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) incentivizes the most violent military contact with Palestinians through an appeal to the economic interests of poor Mizrahim.

So why are these histories of displacement so rarely acknowledged both in Israel and globally? After the Holocaust, Zionist narratives erased Arab Jewish history to identify a unified "historical enemy" of the Jews (Shohat 2017, 105): Muslims occupying the Holy Land. By conflating all Muslim-Arabs with European Naziism, the Israeli state could further its colonial claim for a Jewish haven via an ethno-nation state in Palestine. For Ashkenazi Zionists, "this Arabness…[was] merely a diasporic stain to be "cleansed" through assimilation" (Shohat 2017, 102). When Mizrahim first arrived in Palestine, the Judaism of the newly established Israel that they were expected to connect to was unfamiliar and violent. While Arab Jews of many nations have centuries-long ties to the Judaism of their origin countries, Israeli assimilatory processes attempt to extricate Mizrahi culture and identity from individual Israelis by attributing their multiple backgrounds to a pure Israeliness. Mizrahim resist through community-specific heritage practices such as Moroccan piyyutim (liturgical poems), Iraqi Judeo-Arabic, and memory productions of Jewish community in Izmir (Seroussi 1984, 35). However, the global reach of Zionist agendas threatens to disrupt the culture of wrestling and questioning so traditionally central to Jewish identity.

The Evolution of "Arab-Jew"

Many Israeli Mizrahim today say that they "just want to be Israeli," in a twisted evocation of Fanon's "I wanted to be a man, and nothing but a man" (Fanon 1952, 92). The language of Israeli here is substituted for human, as Arab has come to symbolize something definitively brutish, even subhuman. There is a contentiousness then, in the process of detangling racism in communities of color that buy into modernity's projects towards equality. As Israeli society subsumes Mizrahi history in propagandized hyper-memory of the Holocaust, the space to remember and mourn their Arab nations of origin shrinks. Assimilation might offer a brief psychological ease, but often leaves its subject feeling unbearably bereft of an existence.

To challenge the "separatist imagination" of Palestinian and Israeli partition across ethnic lines, the signifiers of "Jew" and "Arab" must prove to be inseparable (Hochberg 2007, 53). In the early 2000's, some Arab-Jewish scholars began using this hyphenated descriptor instead of the word Mizrahi to impose a *semiology-of-resistance*, as Sandoval terms it (Shenhav 2006, 12). This idea attempted to propose "a post-partition figure through which to critique segregationist narratives, while also opening up imaginative potentialities" (Shohat 2017, 4). This resistance tactic engages a hermeneutic of love that practices holding the political contradictions in pairing these signifiers.

However, this identifier is often rejected by Mizrahim in Israel, who claim it is an externally and academically produced misnomer that flattens their history to align with anti-Zionist initiatives (Gottreich 2008, 434). This rejection reveals how implementing an oppositional consciousness from the top-down is usually ineffective. This political intervention ultimately "evaporates under the individual expression of Barthes' own genius as originator of a method for decoding and decolonizing dominant order" (Sandoval 2000, 107). There is a social safety in writing change from within academia that risks employing the same colonial methodologies it attempts to undo. In the Israeli Mizrahi rejection of the term Arab-Jew we must ask what relationships of power exist between diaspora anti-Zionists and Mizrahim in Israel, especially regarding discursive shifts. Moreover, how are Mizrahim placed back in the volatile clutches of political whim by being held as a diplomatic block to move, rather than a community still experiencing the effects of Zionist violence?

This debate about the erasure of the word Arab is hugely important, as it can be used either to pit Mizrahim against Palestinians (as they have been historically) or serve as a potentiality for what Shohat calls "cross-border identifications in the Arab world" (Shohat, 2017:4). To hold

the contradictions of various Mizrahi perspectives on the etymology of Arab-Jew and its implications, we can bring them into conversation with larger critiques of liberal social justice movements.

Israeli Moves to Innocence

A critique of individual Israelis' complicity in colonization is usually met with a barrage of Israeli coexistence examples that preclude any responsibility for the degradation of Palestine. These "peace initiatives" often rely on love as a feeling, which is only given conditionally when Palestinians embody the non-violent colonized. This love cannot last when there is any type of retaliation towards the daily conditions of settler colonialism. *Decolonial love* can help us understand why Israeli "peace" initiatives in Palestine have predominantly failed. As Palestinian scholar Rana Barakat reveals, the settler colonial framework has led to liberal Israelis' claims that there can be equality as colonizers. Israeli nonprofits fight for basic principles of Palestinian inclusion, rather than addressing the inherent cause of inequality through occupation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing. As right-wing actors attack and defund the few Israeli nonprofits doing anti-occupation work, the entire leftist landscape becomes about legal protection for nonprofits, rather than standing in solidarity with Palestinian liberation movements. From Palestinian-Israeli "immersion" schools like Yad-b-Yad to social justice grassroots movements like Omdim Beyachad, there is an erasure of the history of Palestinian oppression and a flattening of Palestinian demands.

Liberal Israelis often engage in "moves to innocence" to distance themselves from the radically violent right-wing settlers who are seen as the source of ongoing Palestinian oppression (Tuck & Yang 2012, 10). These moves create an image of the 'good colonizer' who is ultimately excused from feeling guilty about their privileged status in society and can continue doing inclusion work that ignores the daily military abuses of Palestinian civilians. This signifies the success of the Israeli caste system.

There is no ethical way for Israelis to do "peace work" while living as colonizers in Palestine. As Fanon describes, the colonized will not accept any compromise after they have been forced to live under such deplorable conditions. They will continue to resist until they have successfully replaced the colonizer (Fanon 1961, 39). Although they disavow their citizenship and residency as active colonization of Palestine, Israelis do fear this replacement; Ashkenazi

Israelis in particular enact a "paranoid patriarchal white sovereignty [that] manages its anxiety over dispossession and threat through a pathological relationship to Indigenous sovereignty (Byrd 2011, 115). To maintain their dominant reality, Israelis blind themselves to the Palestinian demand for the right of return and continue the ineffective work of calling for peace "on both sides." These calls will always be negligible while the might of the Israeli military is normalized for safety, and Palestinian resistance is decried as terrorist violence.

However, Fanon's portrayal of Africa's decolonizing resistance may not map so directly onto the Palestinian context because "the postcolonial theory arriving from the Anglo-American academy entered a certain post-Zionist, postcolonial world in Israel, where the "colonial" itself had hardly been thought through in any depth…thus we have a 'post' without a 'past,'" (Shohat 2017, 319). As Fanon's decolonial "new humanism" under postcolonial conditions has been reduced to a celebration of violence, the question of how best to support Palestinian resistance arises (314). Co-conspiratorship is made possible when "this Western peace of mind is unsettled" and "consciousness will have the opportunity to grasp the magnitude, the detours" as one step in the hermeneutic of love (Sandoval 2000, 162). We must interrogate ourselves about just how to unsettle the neoliberal grasp for a peace process under colonial conditions. And then we can ask what the ontological opening for an anti-Zionist futurity is.

Abolitionist Practices in Diaspora

Decolonial movements globally depend on Indigenous place-based practices and knowledge to establish solidarity across colonial contexts (Coulthard & Simpson 2016, 251). Indigenous communities from Hawai'i to Turtle Island confront the neo-colonial erasure of Native dispossession and articulate a tangible politics of reparation through Land Back movements. Palestinians too have long called for the *Right of Return* to their indigenous lands, a humanitarian right that has been dismissed as "too complex" in the context of 75 years of Israeli settlement and livelihoods (Khalidi 1992, 25). On October 7, 2023, Gaza militants engaged in the Al-Aqsa-flood operation, killing over a thousand Israelis and taking others hostage. While personally devastating for me and my Israeli Jewish communities, it also served as a critical decolonial shift for Palestinians. After years of both peaceful and violent resistance under occupation, people in Gaza escalated their call for decolonization. Though Palestinian scholar Rashid Khalidi may have written during a time when a one-state solution was the predominant political narrative, the global call for a Palestinian right of return today

reveals a discursive repositioning of armed resistance, its consequences, and its possibilities.

It is ultimately Palestinians who will liberate themselves. If decolonial history teaches us anything, as Palestinians build solidarity networks of resistance, revolution will be extremely violent for all who live in the region. What is the Jewish anti-Zionist responsibility to prepare a form of belonging for ex-Israelis while Palestinians and SWANA organizers lead further decolonization efforts? What are the conditions, the futurities of hope, the betrayals required to reduce this violence from a decolonial perspective? Israeli author Meital Yaniv writes that they will always be connected to the place they were born, but if and when a Palestinian comes to reclaim their home, they will mournfully and lovingly *leave* (Yaniv 2023, 81). It is worth mentioning that after deserting military service in 2017, Yaniv did in fact leave. This moral call can only be made through an abolitionist lens that *works with* Israelis forced into militarization since birth and provides a loving and healing Jewish alternative. While existentially inconceivable to most Israelis, we can root this idea in 2000 years of Jewish diasporic tradition that protects and prioritizes the safety of all Jews, including those coming from Palestine.

This idea is not new to Israelis, only vilified when it infers a policy-bound designation for Israeli dispossession. In the wake of October 7, nearly half a million Israelis *voluntarily* left Israel out of fear for their safety (Middle East Monitor 2023). While very few Israelis who leave actually engage in an intentional decolonization, we may be witnessing the destabilization of belief in the Zionist project. This is a direct consequence of the fear of Palestinian retaliation; the horrifying recognition of being born a colonizer and benefiting from its power. However, when we consider who has the privilege of fleeing the country, Ashkenazi wealth and resources dominate. When Ashkenazim leave Israel, the predominant anti-Zionist critique centers upon this privilege to leave. Another reality is also signified by this White evacuation: Israelis themselves fear the(ir) occupation and know, deeply, its eventual consequences. When it comes down to it: some try to leave before dying for Israel. This does not just point to privilege to condemn, but also to a contradiction to illuminate. Mizrahim and other Israelis of color, many of whom do not have access to dual citizenship, nor resources or connections to reasonably leave the place they call home, may be the communities most harmed by a decolonization process– not least of all simply because they remain *there*. Jewish diaspora movements must critically engage abolitionist practices that take seriously Mizrahi residency; anti-Zionists can hold Mizrahi grief and anger, while materially enabling their immigration.

The No State Solution

Anti-Zionist Jews can engage the hermeneutics of love by unlocking the temporal space capable of utopian thinking. This is a difficult project against a Zionist imagination of contemporary Holocaust fear that both suspends access to Jewish morality and drives anti-Palestinian policy. The Talmud states however, that "Jews are safer when they are scattered in at least two places than when they are all gathered together" (Boyarin 2023, 29). While this biblical interpretation still leaves anti-Zionist Jews in the vulnerable position of engaging skillfully with the tenets of nationhood– unavoidably central to rabbinical tradition– it is a first step in rejecting modernity's universal requirement for a *nation-state*. Jewish anti-Zionist scholarship is critical here in crafting a sound, Jewish rejection of the nation-state of Israel as signifying peoplehood.

Again, this idea is not new to Israelis who daily face the realities of existing in a death cult – not a place of *belonging*. This is made painfully clear, when IDF soldiers return home from the frontlines of Palestinian oppression, only to realize *there is no point of return*. The number one-way Israelis die in the military is by suicide (Ebrahim & Schwartz 2024). The IDF strategically covers these deaths up, disavowing Jewish lives almost as ruthlessly as they disregard Arab lives (Baram & Kaplan 2018). In addition to the thousands of Palestinian lives claimed, we may ask Israelis at what point Jewish life becomes more important than the Zionist agenda?

Zionist censorship and funding have long worked to negatively frame the question of diaspora and dismiss it as an anti-semitic tactic of exile. To combat these claims, we must wrestle with the Jewish *affect of questioning everything* about the unquestionable state of Israel. The first step to retrieving diaspora from Israeli propaganda, is a semiotic turn towards the positive articulation of diaspora. The richness of Jewish history allows us to consider that Jewishness is not a nation-state, but a "repeated and reiterated performance that produces the internal sense of being a Jew and of being connected particularly (not exclusively) with other Jews and that thus constitutes a Jewish diasporic nation" (Boyarin 2023, 57). Modern diaspora initiatives can serve as an opportunity for Jewish tradition to expand and flourish without abandoning the religious scope of nationhood. The ironic situation within the "Jewish" Israeli state, is how many Israelis are secular. It is convenient then, for them to blame Orthodox Israelis for the ills of occupation and economic degradation. Diaspora is an anti-Zionist alternative that prioritizes the longevity of Judaism and the Jewish *faith*. Mizrahi scholars who

already live in diaspora can give us insight into the frustrations and successes of maintaining Mizrahi Jewish traditions both in an anti-semitic West and a Jewish-exiled East (Miccoli 2017).

Practical Challenges

While this essay focuses on the theoretical possibilities of an anti-Zionist Jewish diaspora, we may also consider the feasibility of implementing the article's recommendations on a geopolitical level. We must hold the complexities of large-scale diaspora shifts, including the practical implications of Israeli trauma, and the consequential increase in violence and suppression from Zionist movements that threaten decolonial imaginations in Palestine.

One of the largest challenges to envisioning Jewish diasporic futures is the censorship of academic research and organizational movements that provide avenues for simply *conceptualizing* alternatives to Zionism. U.S. funded organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish National Fund threaten pro-Palestine agendas by pushing forward the IHRA definition of anti-semitism that conflates anti-semitism with anti-Zionism. Under this perspective, Palestinian resistance and demands for the right of return are framed as a terrorism that seeks to wipe out all Jews. Academic spaces like Settler Colonial Studies provide scholarly support for such Islamophobic narratives by equating the colonized's demand for the colonizer to leave with Native genocide (King 2019, 70).

Barakat problematizes this framework by asking, "do settlers ever actually become Native? From an indigenous political perspective this answer is clear: never" (Barakat 2017, 351). This intervention disrupts Zionist claims that equate the violence of Palestinian resistance with the U.S.-funded military might of the IDF. Not only do these claims flatten Palestinian suffering, but they perpetuate Islamophobic and anti-semitic agendas that scapegoat Muslims and Jews by pitting them against each other. While U.S. imperial initiatives in the Middle East continue to benefit from claiming they are defending Jews against anti-semitism, they will not stop sending mass weapons of destruction and surveillance for the IDF to use against Palestinians.

Many objections will also be raised about the *where* and the *how* of encouraging Israeli immigration to the U.S. and other countries with high populations of Jews. Some critical questions may arise out of the necessary fear of displacement: Who is funding this project? What networks will be put in place to support Israeli immigrants? How do we implement this

project with Israeli buy-in? How do we reinterpret this moment as a task of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) instead of a Holocaust repetition? What is the emotional impact for Mizrahim who will experience the dual subjection of Arabness and Israeliness in diaspora? What have been the traumas and possibilities of other communities in diaspora? It will certainly be important to consider the economic, cultural, and social factors that are destabilized during a diasporic shift. However, when these questions are presented as irresolvable grievances, they become a self fulfilling prophecy because all attempts to fund research regarding these practical questions are eliminated from the start. Once again, it is the resilience and hope of this painful crossing that will engage Israeli Jews in the praxis stage of the hermeneutics of love.

Toward a Jewish*full* Future

As we anxiously peek over the deep-cliffed borders of Zionism, Talmud appears again to "produce the sounds of diasporic Jewish sociality" (Boyarin 2023, 108). How do these sounds converge with the guttural prayer of religious Mizrahim in Israel? Mizrahi Scholar Ammiel Alcalay argues that it is the historical connections between Islam and Judaism in the Levant that recall a tradition for *living* religiosity through day-to-day communal ties (Alcalay 1992, 275). Conceptualizing Jewish diaspora depends on centering Mizrahi faith in God, in God's love, through the clutches of a Zionism that has both violated and preserved them. How can we situate Mizrahi incorporation into anti-colonial Jewishness as a project of reparations for their displacement? A displacement orchestrated by the U.K., but upheld and exacerbated by Ashkenazi Jews worldwide? In identifying our complicity *within* diaspora, we can generate spaces for repair.

Investing in Jewish anti-Zionist diasporas will require more research grounded in nationalism studies and methodologies of identity formation. For some diaspora Israelis, the guilt and shame of violent Zionism has led to a complete negation of their Israeliness. Mizrahi cultural scholar Ariella Azoulay, for instance, refuses to be identified as Israeli, an instinct I have also had within the clutches of colonial guilt living outside of Israel and therefore the most direct implications of its occupation (Azoulay 2019, xiv). *Guilt* seems to be the lasting significance of being Israeli. But at what point does an imperially constructed identity become incapable of shedding? And who do we ask to engage in this unraveling, and who remains blissfully ignorant of whose land they reside on? I hope this will be the subject of future research, but

for now we can rely on the semiotic explorations of this essay to amplify the role of language in strengthening Jewish diaspora. In addition to Arabic and Yiddish, we must "recover Hebrew as a *Jewish* language, not only the Israeli language" (Boyarin 2023, 122). The historic linguistic proximity of Hebrew and Arabic may be seen as an opportunity for future libidinal ties between Palestinians and Israelis (Hochberg 2007, 50). For Mizrahim who have been denied access to generational lineages of Arabic, Hebrew is a critical component of continuity and connection for survival in diaspora.

Holding contradictions of identity is not only the work of Israelis, but of all Jews. As pro Palestine movements build in solidarity, some Jews engage in the idea that "the only way to end anti-Semitism is for the Jews effectively to disappear from the earth as a collective" (Boyarin 2023, 126). This may be recognized as another "move to innocence" that often prevents a deeper engagement with Jewish values in alignment with Palestinian liberation. It also implies a racist intention for Arab-Jews, or Mizrahim, to also disappear. White Jews cannot risk this violence for such ideality. To eclipse this fragile tendency requires intricate work against punitive mindsets. By applying an abolitionist lens *within* Jewish anti-Zionist movements, we commit to practicing complexity, and extending this invitation to Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, and Jews of color in Palestine.

Further work on the subject will center the internal practices of survival local to the zones for decolonization and liberation. While we anti-Zionist Jews continue efforts for a Jewish diaspora, *the hermeneutics of love* can aid our engagement by encouraging the strength of sitting in contradiction– a discursive and physical reorientation towards a future without the state of Israel but not without the people subjugated by its caste. This practice places us in an uncertain terrain where we may utter the unutterable and hear the unhearable. It permits us to envision a Judaism beyond Zionism "without knowing an alternative" (Yaniv 2023, 154).

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