

(Ed Note: the article below was written on the first anniversary of the Israeli/Lebanon War of August, 2006. We are publishing it now as the authors feel that the issues that the article covers are even more pertinent as we go to press in early 2009. However, given the Israeli attack against Gaza in December 2008, we asked that the authors write a brief introduction, and they kindly obliged. This introductory note was subsequently expanded into an article, "Sacrificing Gaza to revive Israel's Labor party," and posted at: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10208.shtml>)

A Year into the Lebanon2 War: NGO-ing Mizrahi-Arab Paradoxes, and a One State Vision for Palestine/Israel *

Reuven Abarjel and Smadar Lavie

A persuasion, religious or secular, can, at most, tinge the behavior of some of its followers. Historical experience shows that it is unable to change radically the behavior of the majority over a long period by silencing the voice of their interests and their passions.

—Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*

Introductory Note (January 4, 2009)

We wrote the original Hebrew essay below in Tel Aviv and Ashdod during summer 2007, a year after Lebanon2 war. And now, as its English translation is going to print, yet again Israel has initiated another heinous carnage against the Palestinians, with the silent encouragement by the U.S., the European Union and their Arab subcontractors, Egypt and Jordan. It is the beginning of January 2009, and as we're groping for words that span the distance between Minneapolis and Jerusalem, our background noise is the Israeli TV that broadcasts the Skuds falling on Ashdod.

The forthcoming Israeli elections are the main reasons for the Gaza carnage. The majority of Israel's citizens, fifty percent, are *Mizrahim* ("Easterners", in Hebrew): Jews whose origin is in the Arab and Muslim World, or from the margins of Europe. They are the ones hit by the Hamas missiles. From 1948 on, the Ashkenazi-Zionist Left-oriented regime purposefully settled the Mizrahim in the border zones of the state as cannon fodder, in villages from which the Palestinians had been expelled, so as to prevent the Palestinians' right of return. No wonder the Mizrahi vote has traditionally supported Israel's Right Wing block. The Right Wing, however, rejects relinquishing land for a so-called peace settlement. Our article spells out the paradoxes that as this majority is engaged in an Arab cultural renaissance, they shriek "death to the Arabs." Israel's "peace camp" is made up of the European *Ashkenazi* ("Eastern European," in Hebrew) elite. Ashkenazim, whether Right or Left wing, are only thirty percent of Israel's citizens. Their Left can portray itself in the West as enlightened and progressive because it relies on the Mizrahi demographic majority to maintain its chauvinism. Yet, it is the leaders of the so-called peace camp who started the present Gaza carnage, Lebanon 2, and each and every war of Israel against its Arab neighbors. The "peace camp" progenitors orchestrated the *Nakba* ["catastrophe" in Arabic, by which Palestinians refer to

their expulsion in 1948 –ed.] With the collapse of the Israeli government in Summer 2008, the polls predicted that in the forthcoming February 10, 2009 elections, the Right Wing block, led by Bibi Netanyahu, would receive a 65-70 mandate in a 120 seats Knesset. Both the U.S. and EU leadership, as well as the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes, prefer to negotiate with the centrist block of Israeli politics—the Barak-Livni led Kadima and the Labor Party. The polls predicted a smashing failure for this block due to its almost complete exclusion of Mizrahi representatives. The Right Wing does have Mizrahi politicians, even though they serve their Ashkenazi masters rather than their constituencies. The wailings of Mizrahim hit by rockets provide good copy in the Western media. Our essay explains why, while the Mizrahi public is treated as second-class citizens, the Israeli Ashkenazi regime often sacrifices them in order to justify wars. The post-war boom then invigorates the Ashkenazi controlled economy. Aside from trying to shift the Mizrahi vote from the Right to the Center, another goal of this war is to delay the impact of the global economic crisis on the Israeli economy, whose crux is the military-industrial complex. If Hamas missiles had fallen on Israel's central zone, where the Ashkenazi elite lives, the regime would immediately have nuked Iran or, alternately, sat down to negotiate with the democratically-elected Hamas leadership.

Our Lebanon2 essay spells out how the Ashkenazi block of the "peace camp" has always prevented—particularly after the Lebanon2 war—any possibility for dialogue, let alone coalition, between our communities and the Palestinians, or Arabs in our region. A narrow window of opportunity for constructive dialogue opened for a brief period after the Lebanon2 war. Now, due to the heinous carnage the IDF commits in Gaza, in the name of the Mizrahi border zone public, the window has been completely shut. —*the authors*

*This article is based on a talk given at the Harvard Dept. of Anthropology and Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 29 October 2007, Abarjel and Lavie ©2007. All Rights Reserved. Please note that this is a lecture version that does not include the many footnotes referring to the vast bodies of evidence we used to write this essay: scholarly books and articles, printed and electronic media articles, our journals and "field" diaries, our documented conversations with activists and community members, and our own documentation of the Lebanon2 war and post-war events.

The Last Year – Our 'Hood

A year after the Israeli regime ceased to bombard southern Lebanon, its assault continues more mundanely in the West Bank and Gaza. By now the Israeli public is used to a seasonal bloodletting, expected from what looks to them like the regime's intentional escalations of conflict. In a cyclical pattern, the Israeli establishment expands its military control over non-Jewish civilians—beyond the everyday curfews, roadblocks, land appropriations, house demolitions and targeted killings. These escalations are targeted primarily against the Palestinians, but are also intended to silence the ticking intra-Israeli social time-bomb, the Mizrahim. These are Palestinian Jews, and Jews who immigrated to Palestine and then Israel from non-Yiddish-speaking countries, mainly in the 1950s. Among the ruling elite Ashkenazim (Jews from Yiddish-speaking countries), it is agreed that this bomb is much more dangerous to their investment portfolios than the Iranian bomb. The seasonal bloodlettings are authorized by government policies of Israel, as the Middle Eastern subcontractor for the New World Order's hegemon.

The Israeli public's tribal campfire is produced by the Israeli media, whose journalists and private owners come from the Ashkenazi Zionist sphere that proclaims itself "progressive." Last year's war was the first time the Israeli press's death rite, those sidebar short obituaries of the fallen, conspicuously mentioned not just their residence, but also ethnic marks. From the soldiers' last names and complexions, media consumers could guess their national origins. The Hebrew language media was emphasizing that when Israel goes to war against a sovereign state like Lebanon, the best of the Ashkenazim from the ruling minority are still the ones who come to the aid of their country. This honor is not extended to the fallen who are Mizrahi, Druze, Bedouin or Ethiopian. These Israeli Defense Force soldiers come mainly from the dark majority of Israel's large societal margins, and they are the ones burdened with the unpleasant task of what the regime terms "ongoing security" in Gaza and the West Bank. Nevertheless, even when the military lacks civilian trust, the ordnance display is still spellbinding to the Israeli Jewish public—Mizrahim and Ashkenazim alike. This is why the next bloodletting is supposed to restore civilian trust in the military.

Last year the Hebrew media consistently featured stories that economic growth was up, and the unemployment rate down, since wars are good for the economy. Unlike the minority White elite, however, the majority of the Israeli public, which is Mizrahi, lacked the capital to get into the post-war business—the arms trade, or fortifying the Lebanon-Israel borderzone, or reconstructing buildings damaged by Hezbollah bombardments.

Last year many truisms about the Israeli regime known only outside the public sphere emerged into

public discourse, mainly through the hegemonic media. With awe and reverence, it reported steady erosion of public trust in the courts. The Israeli legal system has long propped up the regime by providing a facade of humanistic values, so the media used to be very careful when critiquing it. Major TV channels and printed dailies flickered some light on waning public trust in the police. Stories appeared about White elites turning to private security companies, often related to Mafia clans, and also about the historical connection between crime families and the Israeli governments dating back to the 1950s.

Critical reporting on the health and welfare services also increased. For the first time, media consumers were told regularly, and in prime time, about the covert experiment in human engineering on the disenfranchised non-European Jewish population, ongoing since the 1930s. The media published investigative reporting about children removed from their families into government forced boarding. A prime time investigative show interviewed people who, as children, had been remanded by family courts into the full custody of their pedophile or violent parents. Medical experiments performed without informed consent in hospitals in Israel's disenfranchised zones were exposed, as well as the giving of addictive narcotics to women and children as a way to solve their socio-economic problems. However, the ruling elite has told Mizrahim for half a century that all this was done for their own good as part of Israel's "development." Thus, despite the publicity, many continue to watch or listen to the news, and hear facts, but deny and repress connecting the dots to see the pattern of state violations of their human rights.

In the past year, the Mizrahi and Palestinian majority civilian population of northern Israel realized they had been abandoned by their government. Their rage was channeled into "North Star," a coalition of about 50 social NGOs. The descriptor "social," however, treats the situation only as a class problem, by eliding the racialization of Arabs, whether Mizrahi or Palestinians. When "North Star" conducted public hearings, about 200 civilian victims of the war testified as witnesses. North Star leaders allowed Palestinians to speak about the connection between their Arab origin and their residence in the economically distressed North—but not Mizrahim, whom the leaders just labeled "poor Israelis." The hearings took place in Haifa, Safad, Nazareth, and Kiryat Shmonah.

The North Star Coalition, like the NGOs composing it, is funded by the New Israel Fund (NIF). NIF is supposed to reflect an enlightened, left-leaning Zionism. In the absence of a realistic state welfare policy, the NIF gradually started to dictate the political, cultural and social agendas underlying the notion of welfare, which in Israel is associated with civil protest. The NIF and its subsidiary, SHATIL, have depoliticized and professionalized the NGOs by offering job opportunities in a reality

of job scarcity. When one becomes a professional, one has to conform to the role expectations. Aside from the CEOs, who are mainly Ashkenazi, the NIF metes out its funds into half-time, quarter-time, and one-eighth-time positions held mainly by Mizrahim and Palestinians.

This tactic confines as many grassroots activists as possible in jobs of fragmented hourly pay, devoid of benefits and labor rights. As it grants its NGO funds, the NIF has performed a Durkheimian Division of protest Labor. The progressive-liberal elite are permitted to be “post”-Zionist, and to protest violations of the human and civil rights of Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, or even of Israel itself. The Palestinian citizens of Israel are considered the exotic, freedom-fighting natives, who are there to prove how enlightened the state is, and thereby how much the NIF supports it. So they, too, are allowed to generate deracinated Human Rights protest. Their protest would be more effective if it addressed current events, rather than abstract fundamental questions about the feasibility of an oxymoronic democratic Jewish state.

The Mizrahi NGOs supported by the NIF—in case they refuse to turn into soup kitchens or “oceans of tears”—are simply neutralized. Mizrahi feminism, due to its dependence on foundations such as the NIF, has been transformed into a subcontractor of mainstream Ashkenazi feminism. Following the now fashionable funding trends, when Mizrahi feminist NGOs receive money for a project to do teach-ins on Islamist feminism, their texts are usually mediated by the English language and Islamophobic West, or the Muslim-exoticizing West.

The public hearings of North Star were led by figures who are considered “left,” but are to be found in the heart of the hegemony: Yossi Sarid, Naomi Hazan, Uzi Dayan and Butrus abu-Maneh. The reports about the hearings were composed by South African émigrée law professor Frances Raday. The civil protest was segregated out, into sparsely attended conferences whose only results were stirring position papers, exciting mainly to NIF donors who read English. Such hegemonically sophisticated forms of containing protest have been recognized by Mizrahi activists since the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow was founded a decade ago: P Ring the Mizrahi struggle, but all the while neutralizing the overlay between the Mizrahim and the racinated lacuna of Mizrahi human rights.

Last year the published media trumpeted that nearly a million Israeli citizens had waded through all the red tape to get a European Union passport. So many second- and third-generation descendants of holocaust survivors now see Europe as an escape hatch.

Most Mizrahim have no such way out of Israel. After 1948, Zionists uprooted them from their homelands to become the demographic human shield of the new Jewish state, since there were no more White Jews to bring to Palestine. By perpetuating all the Arab/Israeli conflicts, and especially by refusing for over 60 years to

let the Palestinian refugees have their right of return to their homeland, the Ashkenazi-Zionist elite has denied the Mizrahi right of return to their own homelands in the Arab world.

The silent Mizrahi public has begun to sense an existential feeling that the Israeli state is being consumed, and there is no escape from its destruction. Along the years, this public has gnashed its teeth and made tremendous daily efforts, unsuccessful, to integrate into the Ashkenazi hegemonic regime. In the last year, the integration fantasy slapped this public in the face.

Last Year – In the Region

Last year the Arab World, including Palestinians both at home and in their diaspora, continued to discuss their situation through the nationalist dualism of Palestine/Israel, derived from the finite binary categories of the Israeli occupation. This all-too-common frame greatly distorts the multivalent Israeli realities. First, it conflates all Jews, European and Mizrahi, no matter where they came from, or are now, into a single Judaism. Then the frame deploys the very same mutually exclusive categories that Ashkenazi-Zionism formulated from its onset, where all Jews either are European or ought to strive to be European, and all Arabs cannot be Jewish. Ironically, Arab protest is actually not against Judaism, but against Ashkenazi-Zionism, seen as the enemy of Arab nationalism. Indeed Egypt and Jordan have been co-opted into becoming subcontractors of the U.S. in the region. But the Syrians, and especially the Palestinians and Lebanese, could have dared to initiate dialogue with the Israeli periphery’s Mizrahi war casualties, who, like themselves, are mostly Arab. They could have told the Mizrahim that, this time, they understand that the bombardments in northern Israel, as well as the Qassam missiles in the Western Negev bordering the Gaza strip, both actually serve the Israeli regime’s interest. Both intensify the enmity between Mizrahim and Palestinians, since it is this very conflict that prevents the Mizrahi public from rising up against the economic neo-colonialism that has so completely impoverished it. The Hezbollah and Hamas leaders could also have pointed out that the Israeli regime abandoned the Mizrahim not only on the battlefield but also in their bomb shelters. Perhaps the Palestinians and Lebanese could have even tried to appeal to the crisis-time essentialist discourse of shared roots, if they noticed that the borderland Mizrahim, for the first time in their Israeli history, have started to realize that the state has little interest in their recovery from the trauma of the war.

Such overtures could have wedged open some small fissures in the sloganish Mizrahi solidarity with Israel’s White establishment, which considered the price paid by those killed in Sderot and the North acceptable collateral damage for its plan. Israel’s unwritten policy is to sacrifice the borderzone Mizrahi civilian population in the seasonal small-scale wars so that most of the Mizrahim

will continue to have enmity against the non-Jewish Arabs. And the Mizrahim do unite behind this enmity, rather than directing their energies to resisting the intra-Jewish racial rifts inside Israel.

In the consciousness of the Arab World, as well as that of the Western Left supporting it, the images of Mizrahim come from the Ashkenazi media: dark soldiers at the roadblocks, Arabic-speaking SHABAK interrogators, borderzone settlers, and crowds screaming “death to the Arabs.” Why do Palestinians and other Arabs not question this media when it comes to its Mizrahi images? It is in the interest of both the Mizrahim and the Palestinians to weaken the hegemonic Ashkenazi power center that has imposed itself on the Arab World. Only then can Israel/Palestine become an integral part of the Middle East.

A discursive dialogical tactic springing from the Arab World, and flowing to engage the war-ridden Mizrahi public, could have offered them alternatives to their Pavlovian shrieks. These shrill cries are their traumatized conditioned reflex to the all-too-effective Zionist socialization. Besides, they know that any Mizrahi who dared to speak out against the hegemon has been violently silenced: see under Mordechai Vanunu, Tali Fahima, Uzi Meshulam and others.

When the battles stopped roaring last summer, perhaps a few articulations on the Mizrahi situation rose from the Arab World. Any such commentaries in Arabic or English should be translated into Hebrew for the Mizrahi communities, because few people in them can read the originals. Zionism cut off the Arabic mother tongue from the Mizrahi communities fifty years ago, and also made it next to impossible for Mizrahim to attend the elitist schools where English is properly studied. Non-Zionist Mizrahi activists cannot accomplish this essential translation task. With only meager resources, and no access to tools for reading, translating and disseminating any such texts, they cannot even translate their own activism into Arabic.

Activism on a Hair's Breadth

To explore the problematics of non-Zionist scholarship and activism from an Arab-world positionality, one could at best read translations into Arabic of work by Mizrahi intellectuals. Most of them are grounded in the North American/European postcolonial paradigm, and articulate themselves far over the heads of their communities. Those belonging to the Israeli academy comfortably exclude themselves from the communities' Sisyphean daily labors through their dissociated writing style, epitomized by their “cut, censor and paste” technique of importing postmodern-postcolonial U.S. theories into the vicissitudes of Mizrahi and Palestinian realities. According to these academics, the anti-Arab racism of the Mizrahi community embarrasses them, and is a millstone around their necks.

The uncritical importing of postcolonial theory into

Israel's academe, and then translating Israeli academic self-proclaimed “post”colonial texts into Arabic, does not generate tools that can support activism. Activism has to speak at least two languages. One is the anti-racist, feminist ideational language designed to open intellectual possibilities for reabsorbing Mizrahim into the Arab space. The other is the language of practice activists must speak to help people find practical solutions to their daily problems dealing with the regime's authorities. Take, for example, a Mizrahi community's uprising against the regime's plan to demolish their houses in Kfar-Shalem as part of its “eviction-and-rebuilding” project. Mizrahi activists raised the community's consciousness, pointing out it was no accident the regime threw them into ongoing, long-term precariousness by settling them in the pre-Nakba village of Salame. As soon as the real estate value increased, the regime demanded that the Mizrahim vacate the land so that an elite neighborhood development could be built there. The activists also confronted the community with another stark reality: the Ashkenazi kibbutzim and upper-class neighborhoods, which were also built on the Nakba ruins, have been spared the long-term precariousness of the post-Nakba Mizrahi slums. No one has ever asked the Ashkenazim who live on the ruins of Palestine to evacuate their homes for the benefit of other Ashkenazim. Not even the Ashkenazi NGOs whose activism is around the Nakba commemoration have asked this. They conduct commemoration tours in Mizrahi ghettos, but rarely visit the Ashkenazi real estate bonanzas.

The costs for non-Zionist Mizrahi activism are high. It is not just that the regime bars activist grassroots leaders from jobs that would enable them to afford permanent housing. They are also exposed to piercing criticism from the very Mizrahi communities they live in and try to serve. This, despite the fact that the community is visibly aided by their leadership and its tool box. But when these activists talk with their communities, it is from the history of the racinated wounds Zionism inflicted on the communities. The post-anti-Zionist Israeli Left, in contrast, deals only with the wounds of the Nakba, which it appropriates unto itself to do fundraising from donors situated in the Western world. Mizrahi communities are so overwhelmed with issues of daily survival that they find it a discursive luxury to deal with the Nakba. The Mizrahim are already living with their own catastrophe.

Non-Zionist Mizrahi activism in Mizrahi communities entails a built-in paradox. Activists are followed around by the familiar calls of “Death to the Arabs!” In contrast, they have been pleasantly surprised to find that in the last year, over half the Mizrahi public willingly admits that the Israeli regime is definitely racist toward non-Ashkenazi Jews. These Mizrahim come from all economic strata and all shades of the political spectrum. As the activists work, tiny fissures appear in the automatic-reflex assumption that critiquing Zionism necessarily

entails having haughty Ashkenazi privilege.

Unfortunately, no alternative cultural-social Arab discourse, written or activist, on Mizrahi issues, can by itself coax into flower the budding consciousness emerging in the Mizrahi communities. The written genre, translated from Arabic to English, arrives in Israel through scientific periodicals or internet portals, and is thus readily available not to Mizrahim, but only to the Ashkenazi “Left” in academe. For them, Palestine, the Arab World, and even the theory of Mizrahi-ness exist mainly in English. If there had been an alternative Arab discourse on the subject of Mizrahi-ness distributed in Mizrahi communities, the activists still would first have to do the hard work of helping their people confront and explore the communal wound through their own non-hegemonic narration of the communities’ histories. Because of the media bubble, and the deep pain of the wound, most in the Mizrahi communities are incapable of self-reflection independent of the Ashkenazi-Zionist master narrative.

In the last year, the activists have wondered whether the Palestinian public is also affected by the New World Order that Washington dictates to the region. Is there in the Palestinian Authority, or PA, as in Israel, a revolving door between the academy and the regime? Are the same processes of academization and professionalization that transmuted Mizrahi “social” NGOs also infiltrating the PA NGOs? The Mizrahi activists are trying to resist hegemony by dreaming up a more liberating discourse, and assume the activists of Palestine would do the same. But how can they know? Not knowing Arabic, aside from the spoken Judeo-Arabic some remember from their parental homes, they live on the edge, hanging by a hair’s breadth. Due to the Arabic language barrier, they cannot form coalitions with social justice NGOs in the Arab world. Ashkenazi NGOs use their English to form coalitions with some of these Arab NGOs. Why do these Arab NGOs succumb to the Palestinian nationalist-hegemonic order and its approach, that they ought to continue talking peace with the Ashkenazim, or just boycott all Israelis across the board? And, due to the Mizrahi activists’ English block, they have no budget adequate to challenge the peace and co-existence fantasy the Ashkenazim wish to produce.

In any case, the Palestinian political system, like those of all Arab states, continues to reject any attempt by a non-Zionist Mizrahi grassroots leader to initiate intra-Arab rapprochement through public communication. Mizrahi activists experience similar rejection from all the NGOs of the Arab World’s public spheres struggling for political, social, gender and cultural justice.

Much of the Israeli oppression in Palestine is accomplished by means of an intentionally cumbersome bureaucracy that kills a person slowly. The arbitrarily ever-changing and never-ending rules and regulations wear down a person’s confidence that life makes sense. The random curfews, house searches, arrests, and ran-

dom openings and closings at hundreds of checkpoints result in lost work opportunities, lost medical appointments, lost family ties, lost civic life, lost demolished houses, lost fetuses. Finally, the apartheid wall. Throttling the soul leads to ailments of the body. This strategy accomplishes a sociocide through sheer bureaucracy. It was honed when the regime deployed it on the Mizrahim and the Palestinian citizens of Israel in the 1950s, during the period of the military rule and the transit camps.

The intra-Israeli bureaucracy is not as brutal and phantasmagorical as that in Gaza and the West Bank, but after sixty years of its relentless abrasion, the Mizrahi communities are burned out. Each individual feels chronic stress from the endless round of desperate encounters with lower-level Mizrahi bureaucrats subservient to the Ashkenazim who hired them. Lacking the learned skill of form-ology, or the money to hire an attorney, and having transferred his or her loyalty to a state conceived as Jewish for everyone Jewish, s/he is all alone. The support system of the extended family was shattered long ago by the Zionist state promising equal rights for all the Jewish citizens of the nation. The Zionized Human Rights NGOs have only a limited toolkit of legal aid. They know that if they file a class action suit arguing against intra-Jewish racism in the Jewish state, they will be going against their own ideology and will lose their funding as well.

This is the Mizrahi sociocide. It results from the sudden panic at a knock on the door that might be the police, ordered *ex parte* by the bailiff court, to confiscate a family’s refrigerator, stove, beds, and kitchen table due to a bounced \$50 check plus accrued interest and fines. Day-long lines in the sluggish legal aid offices, when one falls a week behind in paying the rent and must plead, in vain, for a decent lawyer to delay eviction. More long lines in the National Security office, for the pittance of a welfare allowance after it was denied because an unauthorized search by the welfare detectives found one less or one more toothbrush in the home than the number of residents declared. Long lines at the NGOs for hand-me-down expired food. Long lines at the forced employment bureau. And then, the chronic anxiety about the knock on the door from the welfare officers of the family court, coming at dawn to remove the children, for their own good, to the government’s forced boarding school system, since the family has failed to make ends meet and is therefore unfit to parent. Weaker after each round with the labyrinthine bureaucracy, many just give up and know it is hopeless to try to claim whatever supposed rights the law gives them.

Mizrahim, the Holocaust, and the Haybar Syndrome

Last year, the Mizrahi *Piyut* (sg., hymn; *piyutim*, pl., Heb.) movement received legitimation, even in the White Israeli public sphere. The traditional *piyutim* are Arab-Jewish masculine liturgical poetic texts, sung to the

melodies of classical Arab composers. For years, these *piyutim* were sung in the synagogues and homes of Mizrahi communities. Now, in addition, *piyutim* with new, simpler melodies are sung by both men and women in community centers built with lottery money, and even in academic research institutes, where they are yet another exotic jewel in the necklace of Mizrahi containment. The rabbis and cantors ignore the connection between Judaism and the melodies' source in the golden age of Arab high modernism. This activity is considered unchallenging to Zionism.

When Jerusalemite Rabbi Haim Luk performs the Piyut liturgy before the Moroccan parliament and royal family, he enjoys applause for his Arabness. Women have been allocated popular tune classics in Arabic, or Hebrew translation of Arabic. But in Israel, all these singers refuse to publicly identify with anything Arab, since they are afraid of the Pavlovian response from the Mizrahi community, even though in private events Mizrahi families not only sing and dance in Arabic, but even hire Palestinian musicians. The inherent paradox occurs because the Mizrahi public thinks that its own Arab singing can autonomously exist within the "Israeli" regime, unrelated to Zionist injustices.

A Mizrahi cultural revival is also taking place in independent theaters, where plays are performed in a Judeo-Arabic dialect from Iraq, Morocco or Yemen, or in Farsi. Mizrahi audiences pack these shows. There is also a blossoming of underground Mizrahi budget movies, similar in structure to the well financed grand Egyptian cinematic dramas.

Mizrahi activists simply have no money to mobilize around these current trends, nor have they ever had the financial means to show the deep connections of this cultural revival to the Arab World. Nor can they expose the Zionist censorship which pressures agents of the Mizrahi-Arab cultural revival to compose melodies and texts in praise of the IDF and the occupation. Non-Zionist Mizrahi activists long for the revival's artists and musicians to get down from the Zionist stage. But what other stage do these artists have? Could they collaborate with cultural actors in the Arab World? No, the latter are unwilling to collaborate with Mizrahi artists and musicians who publicly support the Zionist project. As long as there is no alternative stage, it will be necessary, even easy, for Mizrahim to keep living the paradoxes. They play the game of Ashkenazi-Zionism: they get its funds to situate their Arab plays on its stage, yet to pollsters working for the hegemonic media, they anonymously complain that Israeli Ashkenazim are racist against Mizrahim because of their Arab origin. So on stage they sing their songs in Judeo-Arabic; in the stage of the real world they shriek "death to the Arabs." All the while the Ashkenazi-Zionist regime brags about the rare success stories of feeble token Mizrahim in academe, the government, and the higher echelons of civil service.

Last year, the mirage-like bridges the Israeli regime tried to build during the Oslo process and the al-Aqsa Intifada were totally exposed. These peace bridges were supposed to connect Israel to the PA, but the PA was and is already totally dependent economically and politically on Israel's elite. These bridges grew from an apolitical interpretation of the identity politics trend in Western Europe and the U.S. in the early 1990s. The local interpretation of this identity carnival attempted to link—in a postmodern manner—the World War II holocaust with "the New Middle East." The Oslo peace festival brought with it a media wave of well publicized Shoah tourist peregrinations. Mizrahi and Palestinian tourists, like the Ashkenazi ones, were funded by the government's education ministry to fly to visit Eastern and Central European concentration camps.

One ought not trivialize introducing Mizrahim and Palestinians to the *in situ* horrors of the Nazi monster. Yet for Mizrahi youth, these journeys replaced the Ashkenazi Israeli Youth Movement's excursions. Like those trips, a Shoah tour is a rite of passage to socialize Mizrahim into the heart of Israeli-ness. The brief tour, sometimes lasting only 24 hours, and occurring a year before Israelis are drafted into the IDF, requires them to absorb an intentional erasure of actual history, as if nothing happened to the Jews between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Zionist movement. Shoah tours can be seen as the core of Israel's Enlightenment belief. To maintain it requires what Israeli educators term "civic pluralism." This depends on a Shoah interpretation wherein the concentration camps and monuments have been Zionized through overdetermined commodification. In these journeys the normalization of the Shoah is expressed in, among other things, a tourist agenda including visits to concentration camps during the day, but participation in cabaret performances of sex workers in the evening. It is hardly remarkable that, after such a roots treatment, Ashkenazim can open a new page for themselves in Europe, articulated by a German, Polish, Lithuanian, or any other passport of the EU. Last year, preoccupation with Mizrahi and Palestinian Shoah tours took up more than the usual time around the tribal campfire.

Could Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Iran and other Arab states in the region organize well publicized "roots trips" to their various countries for the Mizrahim who came from them? Could Arab regimes facilitate the option of passports for Mizrahi communities to use in times of duress? In case they ever do, we would like to alert Arab regimes to the fact that the Ashkenazim, as the owners of the peace discourse, will probably want to manage the Mizrahi travel agency for Arab World roots trips, as a subsidiary of their "New Middle East."

These days, even secularist discourse in the Arab World has been influenced by the Islamist movements' sophisticated, timely transnational civic agenda. Nevertheless, offshoots of these movements reveal a

modernist Islamist fundamentalism that permeates the public sphere, and radiates also toward the Mizrahim. Non-Zionist Mizrahi activists who participate in Palestinian human rights demonstrations are weary of slogans like “Haybar, Haybar, ya-Yahoud; Jesh Muhammad saya`oud” (“Haybar, Jew, Muhammad’s army / Will return in all its glory.”) It solves nothing to invoke missiles by the names of Haybar 1 or Haybar 2, or to give Friday mosque sermons contextualizing the Intifada through Haybar, or to keep conjuring up the battle of Haybar (628 C.E. in South Arabia) in the context of Israel and Zionism, let alone Judaism. The political Islamist leadership is careful to use the term “Zionism” to be clear, but this care is not taken in mass demonstrations against Israel. It is exasperating to the activists, who realize Israel is not Yahoud, and neither of these is Zionism, to hear the three nouns interchanged constantly at demonstrations. This conflation is everywhere: in pirated cassettes enjoying mass popular circulation; in clerics’ sermons played from cassettes on long distance intercity buses; on local buses, in the markets, and in many other public spaces of the Arab World and its diasporas. Criticizing the Israeli regime by misusing language in this way is counterproductive to any Mizrahi-Arab coalition-building. It is no better than the Mizrahi communities’ cries for “death to the Arabs.”

Yet with all this said—no Arab ruling entity has abused the Mizrahim as much as the Ashkenazi-Zionist regime has. It kidnapped their babies and sold them for adoption. It sterilized their women without informed consent, because it considered them unable to improve the gene pool of Jewish genius. It irradiated their children under the auspices of the U.S., in a disguised “medical” treatment. It shattered the Mizrahi extended family structure. The regime impoverished the Mizrahim by denying them proper education and thus gainful employment. In order to perpetuate the military conflict between Israel and the Arab World, the regime has blocked any possible solution for the Palestinian refugees’ right of return, and thus has blocked, and will continue to block, the Mizrahi right of return to their own sources, even for a roots visit.

One State, Palestine/Israel, and the Mizrahi Predicament

In the last year, the word “Isra’il” has appeared frequently in the Arab media as a replacement for the old term “The Zionist Entity.” This does not mean a normalization of Israel in the heart of the Arab World. It does indicate a transnational comeback of the one-state solution as the only way to resolve the question of Palestine/Israel. This new one-state vision has trumped the former Zionist trump card—The Wall. Israel builds the wall, expropriating Palestinian land, in order to segregate the West Bank and Gaza from the amorphously borderless “Isra’il” created in 1948. The regime expands Isra’il by military might but then mouths a discourse of

surrender, to cash in its ill-gotten gains as bargaining chips when it is strategic to temporarily rein in its aspirations for a Greater Eretz Israel. Nor is the comeback vision compatible with the operational official line of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and the West Bank, because the PA also advocates two states for two peoples. From the Mizrahi point of view, to assume that there are only two peoples involved here, diametrically opposed, is a binarism utterly inadequate to the realities.

Last year, following publicity on statistics about the ethnic distribution of the fallen in post-1967 occupied Palestine, Mizrahi mothers have been encouraging their offspring to join the “gray refusal” track. The IDF, recently termed “the military of phalanges” by Ashkenazi-Israeli Military Science scholars, has become the Mizrahi upward mobility track into the heart of the “Israeli” consensus. This gray refusal, both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, is different from the highly PR-ed Ashkenazi refusal familiar to non-Israeli readers, because the parents of the new gray refuseniks lack the money, power, and influential network to crown a media and law court aura around their children’s heads.

The solution of “two states for two peoples” would have to be maintained by the cyclical war rituals and bloodletting. Non-Zionist Mizrahi activists think such rituals cannot be sustained much longer, and the one-state vision might be the only viable way to resolve the perennial Middle East Crisis. In the activists’ scenarios, though, a just resolution of all their lived paradoxes still seems beyond reach, because there will probably be little or no space to enact equal rights for the Mizrahi citizens of this one state.

The activists assume that with the establishment of a one-state Israel/Palestine, there will be massive emigration. EU passport holders, mainly professional Ashkenazim, will get out. The thin crust of Mizrahim who have risen to white-collar occupations in demand will emigrate to countries like Canada, Australia, and the Latin American republics that encourage immigration of wealthy professionals. The Christian Palestinians will continue their pattern of emigrating from the West Bank and Gaza to their relatives in the Palestinian diaspora of the Americas and Europe.

Will an Islamist patriarchal state be formed in Palestine/Israel, where Mizrahim who stay will be a religious minority? Will there be a secular patriarchal state, ruled by the Ashkenazi elite who would rather not emigrate because they know they would lose their privilege and wealth by going abroad, where no one knows their family names, descent, land holdings, etc., and thus no one can pull strings for them in every aspect of life? Will they be ruling along with the Palestinian moneyed class and educated technocrats? Will these elites once again exclude the majority population, the Palestinians and Mizrahim, from access to education, equitable justice, financial resources, networks of influence and reputation?

Mizrahim belong inextricably to the Middle East. Most of them have nowhere else to go. Ashkenazi Zionism has forced them to unlearn their histories, to hate and be ashamed of them, ever since it imported its Yemeni Jewish “natural laborers” to Palestine in 1882. In the year following Lebanon 2, the Mizrahi communities in Israel have begun to unearth their histories in their ancestral homes. They will first have to unlearn and peel off the silences imposed on them by their respective elites, be they secular, traditionalist or religious. As a therapeutic process, the Mizrahim could identify and reconstruct their Arab-Jewish histories, being careful to distinguish between their own oppressive patriarchy and the oppression from the state’s Ashkenazi-Zionist patriarchy. The Mizrahim will need to demand equality and

true partnership in the one state, Palestine/Israel, which will be a permanent home for the now-silent Palestinian and Mizrahi majority. In order to start a trust-building process between Mizrahim and Palestinians, the Palestinian leadership might consider how to let go of pinning their hopes on the Ashkenazi-Israeli Left. Meanwhile, the Mizrahi communities can consider their right to identify themselves, here and now, as the demographic majority on which rests the state of Israel. Only by reclaiming this majority status can Mizrahim advance the peace process. But the citizens of the Arab majority states in this region, also, ought to commit themselves to promise the Mizrahi public, and by deeds, not merely words, that when the one state comes to be, they will not be pushed away once again to its margins.

Reuven Abarjel is a co-founder of the 1970s Jerusalem Black Panthers and a key figure in Mizrahi and Palestinian anti-racist movements. He supports the international coalition advocating boycott, divestment and sanctions against the state of Israel, as long as the occupation of Palestine continues.

Smadar Lavie, a Cultural Anthropologist, holds the Hubert H. Humphrey Distinguished Visiting Professorship at Macalester College, St. Paul, MN. She is a member of several Palestine/Israel feminist and anti-racist NGOs and a co-founder of the Mizrahi-Palestinian Coalition Against Apartheid in Israeli Anthropology.