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Confession and Mirage: Professor Mas`uda and
the Ashkenazim-for-Palestine in Israel's
Academe*
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Abstract

This autoethnography unveils its thesis as the biographic narrative unfolds. Ashkenazi upper-class Israeli faculty make Palestine advocacy their international career. When threatened, North American–Western European white colleagues, employing the dualism Israel-Palestine, obtain for these Ashkenazi upper-class Israeli faculty cushy Western positions. Mizrahi anti-Zionist intellectuals and activists are not the secular Ashkenazim with whom Western academics are familiar. Shunned from professorships due to the whiteness of Israel's academe, their activism is in dialogue with the traditional Judaism of right-wing Mizrahi communities. Ashkenazi anti-Zionists have minimal constituencies in Israel and converse in English with Palestine scholars and activists outside Israel. Their impact on Israel's Mizrahim (roughly half of Israel's citizen body) is negligible. Mizrahi exiles, however, converse in Hebrew with their constituencies.

The front-page story published in *Haaretz Weekly Magazine* got me on a strange Shavuot 2020 holiday eve, sheltering in place in San Francisco with my son and his partner (Littman 2020). It told the story of Israeli leftist professors in exile, mostly Ashkenazim, who left their university appointments for cushy academic positions in Britain and the United States. It triggered my own longings for the homeland. Rippled images of

* For Carol Bruch.

the anemone fields on the Gaza border. The mulberry tree in my granny's Jerusalem backyard. Fig season. I yearn for the relative quietude of Tel Aviv at Shabbat eve's dusk and ache for the cacophony of El Nora `Alila melodies, the prayer that climbed to the skies from the synagogues of my granny's 'hood at the end of Yom Kippur.

I am an academic political exile, but my story—personal and professional—is radically different from the one told by *Haaretz*. Mas`uda (Arabic for “joy”), from the title to this essay, is a common Middle Eastern woman's name. It is also the colloquial Hebrew slang for the Mizrahi Big Mama from the barrio, often far from Tel Aviv: heavysset, loud, and uneducated. Professor Mas`uda's destiny lies outside academe. Her college application would be tossed aside for the name alone. Israel's fifty percent citizen majority is the *Mizrahim*, or Jews with origins in the Arab and Muslim World and the margins of Ottoman Europe. The other two segments of Israel's citizenry are the twenty percent Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and the remaining thirty percent *Ashkenazim*, or European Jews of Yiddish-speaking origins. Ashkenazim control the division of power and privilege in the state.

Haaretz regularly publishes items about the anticolonial struggle of Palestinians, brazenly reports Israel's atrocities against Palestinians, and is well read by the Palestinian intelligentsia and in Palestine solidarity circuits in North America and Europe. What *Haaretz* won't publish are pieces exposing the racism of Ashkenazi pro-Palestine intellectuals toward Mizrahim. The textual benevolence of these anti-Zionist Ashkenazi intellectuals provides absolution for their daily racist practices toward Mizrahi plumbers, cleaners, nannies—toward all Mizrahim. Thus, my framing complicates the Palestine-Israel binary characterizing much of the critical anticolonial and anti-Zionist dialogue. It highlights the Israeli Ashkenazi intelligentsia's own in-home, intra-Jewish racism. Israel's Mizrahi majority is racialized into a disenfranchised minority. Nonacademic Israelis—most of whom are Mizrahim—use the term “Ashkenazi Academic Junta,” or “the Academic Junta” to indicate their estrangement from the impenetrable networks of the Israeli academic elite (Blachman 2005; Zarini 2004).¹

A Halfie Kid

Since childhood, I've known I'm a guest—an occupier—on this land, a fact that doesn't detract from my love for it. Unlike many of my comrades in the Mizrahi struggle, I'm a halfie. I grew up in Holon, a Tel Aviv satellite city, in the Labor A neighborhood, a bastion of the Ashkenazi middle class. My Yemeni mother said, "You can't trust the Arabs. I know them from before the state's foundation," but my Litvak father, a Dachau survivor, was highly critical of the Zionist operation (Lavie 2018a). My Jerusalemite Yemeni granny divided history into "before the state burst out" and "after the state burst out." When I was in third grade, my father told me about the Nakba. "Don't talk about it or the kids at school will beat you up," he advised. In sixth grade, he told me about the Haganah commandos expelling the Palestinians from Lubyá—the village neighboring his kibbutz, Beit Keshet. "The State of Israel is a historical mistake and a 'no choice' fact on the ground. One can always fix mistakes." This is how, as a child, I was introduced to the One State vision.

My mother worried I would get *brown* brown. "You have enough problems as a smart gal. Go practice your piano, forget politics, and sign up for Weight Watchers." My dark skin, wide hips, loud voice, and ever-increasing consciousness of state injustices enforced on Mizrahim made it impossible to enjoy my father's Ashkenazi privilege. "Shaynele Schwartzele" (Yiddish for "beautiful little black girl"), cooed the neighbors growing up.

During elementary school, I was "a young journalist" for a children's weekly magazine. At the end of sixth grade, right after the June 1967 war, while everyone was ecstatic about the victory of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), I published an essay condemning the destruction of the Mughrabi quarter and the expulsion from the Western Wall Plaza of Palestinian locals whose ancestors had been there for centuries.² In 1971, as a youth reporter for another weekly, I interviewed Yitzhak Halutzi and Vicki Shiran—the founder of the 1990s Mizrahi feminist movement—on their Black Panther theater.³ I also interviewed my peers from Kafr Qasim, asking whether their parents' memories of the Israel Border Police massacre would facilitate our coexistence.⁴ Despite our political

differences, *Maariv* senior journalist and Stern Gang alum Geula Cohen mentored me in journalistic writing.⁵ Later on, Geula's son, Tzachi Hanegbi, who would become Israel's justice minister, whipped me with a bicycle chain during the Hebrew University students' protests against the dispossession of the Bedouin from their lands.⁶ "You got what you deserve!" Geula laughed.

Givat Ram, the Hebrew University

After adventurous military service as an IDF hiking guide and a year of fieldwork among the South Sinai Bedouin, I arrived at the Hebrew University's Givat Ram campus. Appeasing my mother, I registered and was admitted to the very selective medical school.

But I wanted anthropology. The admission committee rebuked me, "Whaat?! A Yemeni studying anthropology?! Why not a stable profession like medicine?"

I owe much of my anthropologist identity to my mentors, Emanuel Marx and Don Handelman, even though we were so divided on politics. Emanuel oversaw my field research, and Don was and still is one of my theoretical lightning rods. On Don's balcony, discussions on "the historical mistake" and discrimination against Mizrahim always ended in a screaming match followed by heavy silence. Years later, during a visit from Berkeley, Don said, "So . . . now Baruch [Kimmerling] is saying the same [on "the historical mistake"], so you were probably right" (Kimmerling 2004).⁷

I spent most of my BA years doing anthropological fieldwork in the Sinai. In my student circle, I was the only Mizrahi activist in the Palestinian-Israeli non-Zionist student movement (*see* Greenberg 2019). At the end of my sophomore year, Don told me, "You are so talented, original, and hardworking, but you don't stand a chance here. Go to America. They have excellent anthropology departments, and you can get a full scholarship." Later on, I passed my knowledge of "how to get admitted to US PhD programs on a full scholarship" to generations of Mizrahim and Palestinians who couldn't realize their full potential due to the choke chain of Israel's social sciences and humanities.

Berkeley

In September 1979, I landed in Berkeley straight from the Sinai, my untamed curls woven, Bedouin girly style, into four braids. Officially, I had not received a BA. In the final course, I received a “fail.” My father and Don filed an appeal with the dean. The external committee the dean convened to evaluate my final paper gave me a 96/100. My BA arrived together with my Berkeley MA. In the spring of 1980, way before the birth of queer theory, I wrote my MA paper on Papua New Guinea initiation rites as drag performances. One teacher, a junior faculty member, gave me an A+, but the senior professor failed me. He told me his parents were best pals with Golda Meir. “You don’t belong in the program!” he announced. “You can’t be more than a typist!” Due to the dispute, all the cultural anthropology professors read the paper and decided that I indeed deserved an A+.

My second-year scholarship was dependent on a teaching assistantship. The anthropology department thought it best used on a Hebrew language course. Word likely got around about my activism to the professors administering the Hebrew teaching assistantships, and they too probably didn’t want me on campus. But they did appoint the Ashkenazi elite Israeli students, who participated in activism critical of Israel, as TAs for Hebrew language courses. Was it because I joined the campus’s Arab Student Union, where Israel was still “the Zionist entity”? Or because during lunch breaks, I argued with the Hillel House campaigners?⁸ When Middle Eastern studies are at stake—specifically the Palestine-Israel conflict—there is no academic freedom in the United States (*see* Deeb and Winegar 2016).⁹

And yet, at Berkeley, I could live up to my agency. It was acceptable to discuss Zionism within the framework of the colonialist-settler project and analyze it through the optics of critical race theory. We were a tight cohort spread between Santa Cruz, Stanford, and Berkeley—the first generation of PhD candidates to contextually analyze comparative colonial discourse and challenge the traditional format of academic writing.

In 1981, together with a group of Palestinians, Arabs, Arab Americans, Ashkenazi Israelis, and American Jews (Ashkenazi by default), I cofounded the Committee for Academic Freedom in the Israeli-Occupied Territories (CAFIOT). The only two Mizrahim in CAFIOT were myself and a sociology PhD candidate, a former member of Matzpen, a revolutionary socialist, anti-Zionist Israeli group.¹⁰ A devout Marxist, he argued that identity politics interfered with class struggle, and thus he ignored the Mizrahi struggle. Despite this, he could not land an academic position in Israel.

In the summer of 1982, just before the Lebanon War, I teamed up with a Palestinian PhD candidate to teach Berkeley's first-ever student-initiated course on modern Palestine's history. We also discussed the complicated relationship between Mizrahim and the Palestinian struggle. Hillel conducted a smear campaign to cancel the course. Assisted by the student-of-color unions, we achieved a majority vote in the general assembly. Shortly thereafter, my Palestinian colleague and I were summoned to the president's office. The two professors who had prevented me from TAing in the Hebrew language courses were already waiting for us inside. "Why teach about Palestine? It ceased to exist in 1948," said the historian among them. "But you teach about the Ottoman Empire," I replied. "It ceased to exist way before 1948." The president, who presented himself as a Jew, approved the course. It was a hit. Its students subsequently organized mass demonstrations on campus after the Sabra and Shatila Massacre.¹¹ Hillel deployed its requisite pair of Yemeni Israeli students as its "diversity assets," who frequently showed up to interrupt our campus events. But even this didn't help them secure tenure-track positions at Israeli universities.

I received my PhD in 1989 with four articles published in refereed journals, several articles in press, and a book contract with the University of California Press. Together with me, a CAFIOT member from another department marched down the aisle to receive her doctorate. Two years prior to graduation, she returned to Israel and immediately landed a tenure-track position at the Hebrew University. All she did was submit the proposed chapter titles for her doctoral thesis. For the first time, I understood that as long as you are an elite Ashkenazi, criticizing Israel is

profitable. Moreover, the university uses you as a trophy to prove its academic freedom.

I wanted to go home. In the final year of my doctoral studies, Emanuel and Don suggested I apply for the Hebrew University's Alon Scholarship—a postdoc for outstanding young scholars returning to Israel. My application was rejected. The scholarship was granted to another Jerusalemite elite Ashkenazi who lived in Berkeley. Her doctorate was from a study-by-correspondence university with no accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges under the US Department of Education.

I landed a tenure-track position at the University of California, Davis, and commuted from Berkeley. Many of my generation doing critical anthropology about the Israel-Palestine conflict could not secure academic appointments and went to law school or pursued an MBA. Others were stuck in remote universities. US elite universities are fearful of being labeled “anti-Semitic” by the pro-Israel lobby and its Jewish donors (*see* Deeb and Winegar 2016). “Fortunately, your ethnography is about the theater of Egyptian Bedouin,” remarked my US colleagues. Only after September 11 did the generations of young PhDs in critical anthropology of the Middle East land positions at elite US universities. Still, in today's star-studded anthropology department at Berkeley, not one faculty member specializes in Israel-Palestine. “Israeli studies” have been exiled from the humanities to Berkeley's law school.

My career flowered. I obtained generous research grants, invitations to conferences, publications in prestigious periodicals, quotations, and prizes. These led to an accelerated tenured associate professorship after a year of postdoc and three years as faculty. I enjoyed a loving support system of students and colleagues protecting me from the campus's powerful Zionist lobby. Nevertheless, I wanted to go home. I applied to every job opening in Israeli sociology and anthropology departments. I wanted to be part of the Mizrahi consciousness revolution that started in Israel in the early 1990s, to teach Mizrahi and Palestinian Israeli students. But I was always rejected. Those who rejected me still asked that I pull strings for their abstracts to get admitted to conferences or departmental colloquia.

In 1990, I shifted my research center from Egypt to Israel, studying the disjuncture between Ashkenazified Mizrahi and Palestinian hybrid poets and authors who write in Hebrew but whose mother tongue is Arabic (*see* Lavie 1992). My American colleagues started to shift their focus inward to study their own cultures rather than those of faraway places. I, too, wanted to shift from “fieldwork” to “homework” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996). I understood that research and publication of critical scholarship on Israel-Palestine was a career risk. In 1990, I was a US-based scholar. I knew that studying intra-Jewish racism in the homeland of the Jews could alarm the highly influential pro-Israel lobby. Nevertheless, I thought my tenure-track position would provide safe harbor for “Hebrew as Step-Mother Tongue,” my next project.

In 1993, when visiting Israel, anthropology and sociology departments invited me to lecture. At the Hebrew University, I spoke about the intersection of race(ism) and gender in the lives of Mizrahi women poets. As the lecture went on, faculty left the seminar room one by one, slamming the door each time. From then on, I was boycotted by the Israeli academic establishment. They argued that “racialization,” “racism,” “border crossing,” “silencing,” “hybridity,” or “intersectionality” were not suitable for analysis of Israeli identities, and that feminism of color lacked a scientific foundation (*see* Hess 1994). Even so, these same concepts sometimes made their way into Israeli academic and public discourse. My work was appropriated without credit.

Southside Tel Aviv

My Berkeley Camelot ended abruptly in 1999, on the eve of my becoming a full professor. Even with my academic success and activism, my son and I lived the nightmare of domestic violence. In February 1999, we fled to Israel. During the abduction trial, the Israeli courts confiscated our Israeli and US passports, and in 2001, the Israeli Supreme Court (verdict 4445/96) cleared me of any and all allegations brought by my ex-husband in the United States, Israel, and The Hague. After the verdict, my son and I received our US passports but not our Israeli ones. So, we were stuck in Israel until receiving our Israeli passports in October 2005. Israeli citizens

having multiple citizenships must enter or depart from Israel using their Israeli passports.

These were the years of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. Haim Beresheeth, an old friend and a Mazpenist returning from Britain, invited me to the Sapir College in Sderot—a small, largely Mizrahi desert town about five kilometers from the Israeli border with Gaza. Haim hired me as a tenure-track professor to establish a cultural studies department in the communication school he founded, but the college withdrew its promise to allocate tenure lines for other faculty. I couldn't understand how I, alone, was expected to establish a department, run it, and teach all of its courses. The college aspired to attract "quality students," that is, affluent Ashkenazim, rather than Mizrahim from the local disenfranchised communities, and relied on inexpensive adjuncts. So I resigned. The October 2000 Palestinian uprisings, Al-Aqsa Intifada,¹² and the college's unfulfilled promises shipped Haim back to Britain and sent me to Israel's welfare lines. Under abusive employment terms, Beit Berl Teachers College hired me as a part-time adjunct.

In 2001, *Haaretz* published an article on Ashkenazi women professors who complained about discrimination in academia (Caspi 2001). In response, I wrote "In Search of the Mizrahi Woman Professor" (Lavie 2002a). *Haaretz* rejected it due to "lack of interest and space." Yet after I sent it to email lists of Israeli academics, it went viral. It caught the attention of Billie Moscona-Lerman, a senior journalist at Israel's largest daily, *Yediot Aharonot*.

Billie's front-page story, "For You, a Mizrahi Woman Is Just a Maid," got me on prime-time TV, where I was introduced as the "Mizrahi unemployed professor from Berkeley" (Moscona-Lerman 2002). The leftie Ashkenazi producers cast me as "the angry Mizrahi feminist." Though it was the habitual TV screaming match, I put on my polite American smile and waited quietly until the ruckus died down.

"The Ashkenazim, in their Mt. Scopus bunker-like campus, have the memory of an elephant, and you must stay sane!" ordered the great mother and soul sister Vicki Shiran. "Come join Ahoti [Israel's Mizrahi feminist movement]!¹³ We need you! You have your Berkeley activism and great English. Connect us with similar organizations globally!" One

of the joint projects Vicki, Yifat Hillel, and I worked on was writing weekly to all academic conferences' organizers who published ads in *Haaretz*. We asked why no Mizrahi women were in their list of speakers. We sent follow-ups but never received an answer.

During my Israeli years, I fought against the treatment of children as property. In cases of divorce, children are often shuffled from one parent to another, or even worse, taken from their parents' homes and forced to attend boarding schools. I assisted dozens of mothers, mostly Mizrahi, to face Israel's aggressive family courts, welfare authorities, and psychological and psychiatric establishments. In 2002, my essay "A Pedophile Father Is Better than an Alienating Mother" was published on an influential Israeli legal website and submitted to Israel's Supreme Court as an expert opinion (Lavie 2002b). From then on, the powerful deadbeat dad lobby has denigrated my reputation and threatened me in all possible ways.

In 2004, I cofounded the Coalition of Women for Mothers and Children with Esther Herzog and Hanna Beit Halachmi. It was the widest coalition in Israel's feminist history, including Islamist feminists and Orthodox Jewish settlers from the Occupied Territories. University feminists opposed my activism, labeling me "an extremist," but appropriated my ideas for their English-language academic publications. "It's not because of your politics or ethnic origins," chimed an Ashkenazi professor who identifies with Mizrahi feminism. "You're too old to fit in with the academic faculty." I was forty-seven.

In the spring of 2002, during Operation Defensive Shield, Vicki phoned me.¹⁴ "Are you out of your mind? Why did you sign the petition for the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions by those British loonies?! How did your name creep into *Haaretz's* Hebrew edition? (Levy-Barzilai 2002). I got a phone call that they'll cut off your NSB allowance!¹⁵ What are you going to live on?"

The majority of Ahoti activists were left of Israel's political center. But our constituencies were right of center and conceived the discussion of justice for Palestine as the territory of the *smolavan*, the white-leftie-minnies. In Mizrahi lingo, *smolavan* is a term for Ashkenazi lefties who enjoy white privilege. Conjoining *smol* ("left" in Hebrew, but also evoking

the English *small*) and *lavan* (“white”), *smolavan* signifies this miniscule privileged group loathed by Israel’s Mizrahi majority.

Ashkenazi feminists from affluent Jerusalem or Tel Aviv focused on “ending the occupation.” Guided by Vicki, Ahoti’s strategy was to avoid the Palestine conflict. We focused instead on employment security, housing rights, and nutrition stability. In right-wing, working-class communities, the liberation of Palestine wasn’t the major concern—getting food on the table was.

Vicki ordered me to write to the organizers of the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions petition explaining that my inclusion was a mistake. She would then pass on this letter to the entities determined to cut me off the welfare roster. Even though seven other Israeli professors signed the boycott call, no one threatened their academic positions. They were all Ashkenazim, after all.

I also joined the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow.¹⁶ In 2004, from Mizrahi and Palestinian positionalities, Rafi Shubeli and I led the first-ever academic conference to contextualize Ashkenazi Jews in whiteness studies. On the conference day, we had unexpected guests—dozens of retired Ashkenazim who came to remind us that without the education they bestowed upon us, we could not have put on such a conference.

Also in 2004, along with Rafi Shubeli, Reuven Abergel, and Shira Ohayon, I researched and initiated a grievance submitted by Ahoti against all Israeli research universities. This was due to the near complete absence of Mizrahi and Palestinian tenured faculty, mainly women, from their anthropology departments. The grievance urged the ombudsman to investigate—and undo—the intellectual community property violations committed by Israeli academic faculty who profit from the Mizrahi and Palestinian cultures from which they build their careers. It also requested that the state comptroller investigate why Israeli anthropologists performed their studies without adhering to a research ethics code. To this day, we’re still waiting for an answer (Lavie 2005).

Following the grievance, Rafi and I joined forces with the Mossawa Palestinian nongovernmental organization (NGO) and founded the Mizrahi-Palestinian Coalition against Apartheid in Israeli Anthropology (CAAIA). CAAIA conducted an international campaign against the denial

of cultural rights for Mizrahim and Palestinians, and joined forces with similar NGOs and scholar activists throughout the world.

Unfortunately, my economic hardship and the daily demands of activism took time away from academic research. In addition, in Israel, I was blacklisted. With my Israeli passport confiscated, I could not travel abroad to network. I was stuck, my professional CV marred by a large gap in scholarly publications.

Berkeley, Again

In 2005, on the eve of Yom Kippur, my son and I finally got our Israeli passports after the family court recognized that I am my son's mother. Right away, we took our first trip abroad to Dahab, in South Sinai, Egypt, to visit my adoptive Bedouin family. Despite our legal freedom, we were stopped from crossing into Egypt because the family court had "overlooked" recording its verdict with Israel's National Police. "They hold their grudges forever and will always seek revenge," was one of Vicki's mantras.

On August 20, 2007, we left Israel. On July 31, while en route to Dahab to say goodbye to my adoptive family, my son and I were stopped at the Taba border. The border police informed me that I had to pay \$16,000 bail to leave Israel—supposedly for the child support debt I owed my ex-husband while he was in California. Due to the Israeli courts' refusal to grant me custody, he was still the legal parent of our son even though I was the sole provider. Again, my magnanimous colleagues helped and paid the bail so that I could leave on time and not lose my job opportunity.

Once back in the United States, I embarked on a series of essays for a book about the web of relationships between the rightward move of the Mizrahi public, the racial formations of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and Mizrahi feminism. I queried how the logjam at the intersection of Mizrahi identity politics prevents social movements, such as Ahoti or the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, from achieving the long-term success that might improve the material lives of Mizrahim in central Israel's low-income neighborhoods and forlorn periphery. I wanted to understand how the Mizrahi love for the homeland results in populism led by an Ashkenazi elite advocating white supremacy. My book *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel:*

Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture won awards and gifted me with a lecture tour of the United States and Europe (Lavie 2018b). But the pain that my publications are not translated into Hebrew and available in Israel won't go away.

With the return of my academic success came the pro-Israel lobby. Assisted by improved Internet technology, various online platforms spread fake news about my colleagues and me. These scare campaigns are run by Israeli *hasbara* (official propaganda) against the critics of Israel on US campuses.

The *smolavan* professors who leave Israel for cushy positions in the United States and Britain focus their research on the dualism of the conflict: Israel against Palestine and vice versa. They enjoy the support of both the pro-Palestine academic community, whose members praise their bravery, *and* the liberal academic community, who points to them as exemplars of the academic freedom to criticize Israel. Diaspora Ashkenazim never ponder whether these white-leftie-minnies have any constituencies in Israeli communities, as opposed to Mizrahi intellectuals who were exiled out of Israel's academe yet continue to be woven into the fabric of their communities. And as for Israeli Mizrahi scholars abroad, it is better to adore them as colorful diversity jewels in departments of Jewish and Israeli studies, financed by the pro-Israel Jewish lobby, rather than house them in their disciplinary departments (see Traubmann 2006). Through a handful of Israeli-Mizrahi scholars who research Mizrahism as if it were not embedded in the Israel-Palestine conflict, departments of Jewish and Israeli studies become a counterpoint to departments of ethnic studies.

In the summer of 2012, my son graduated from college. I returned to Israel to gather the belongings we left in storage before our exit in 2007. Every sweltering day, when I was sorting out objects and memories, I wanted to cry. I knew this was the end. I would live here and there, between time zones and continents. No home. Today, I binge everything possible in Hebrew and am overjoyed as Mizrahi discourse expands its reach into Israel's public sphere. But alas, this is not reflected in university tenure lines. My fear of the Israeli public's populist rightward move keeps escalating due to the relentless hijacking of Judaism into the structure of

Israeli citizenship (Lavie 2018b). Whether here or there, I continue to keep in touch with friends and assist Mizrahi students navigate the academic obstacle course.

Despite my longing, visiting Israel is emotionally taxing. When there, I grieve over my exilic loss. The immediacy of Israel-Palestine and the normalization of the occupation constrict my body like the barbed wire of the apartheid wall that cuts deeply into the flesh. When my friends warn me, "Israel today is not the same. Shut up about politics around commonfolk on public transport or they'll beat you up," my heart breaks.

I learned how to daven in the major key, Reform style, but it feels jarring. When I started writing this piece on Shavuot Eve, I envisioned a short response to the *Haaretz* article, and here, I give a confession. These are pandemic times. My son, his Asian American partner, and I are locked down in San Francisco. It felt so odd for us to participate in my shul's Zoom for a midnight study of social justice issues in relation to the Torah.¹⁷ We changed into white shirts, shut off our laptops and iPhones, lit the candles, blessed and ate takeaway *bourekas* and cheesecake. We sang holiday tunes. After the meal, we went down memory lane to our lives on welfare when we were stranded in Israel. Our memories, translated into English, feel as if we'd lived in a mirage. They cut less into the soul than in Hebrew, our mother tongue.

Smadar Lavie is professor emerita of anthropology at UC Davis. She authored The Poetics of Military Occupation (1990), which received the honorable mention of the Victor Turner Award, and Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture (2014/2018), which received the honorable mention of the Association of Middle East Women's Studies. The book was finalist in the Clifford Geertz Competition of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion. Lavie won the American Studies Association's 2009 Gloria Anzaldúa Prize and the "Heart at East" Honor Plaque for lifetime service to Mizrahi communities in Israel-Palestine.

Notes

¹ The only available statistics on the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi-Palestinian women faculty in Israel can be found in Zarini's MA thesis (2011). She counted 1,032 women professors out of the five thousand or so associate and full professors in Israeli universities and community colleges, and in government services, such as hospitals or agricultural research facilities. Mizrahi women number thirty-seven out of these 1,032. Of these thirty-seven, almost all are married to wealthy and well-placed Ashkenazim. Only six of these thirty-seven were in the non-applied humanities and social sciences. Zarini reports that all thirty-seven self-identified as Zionists. Even more marked is the present state of Israel's Palestinian academics. In 2011, of Israel's five thousand total professors, a mere sixty-nine were Palestinian. There was only one woman among them, in the Tel Aviv University School of Education. Since then, as far as I know, only two other Palestinian-Israeli professors have received tenured professorships at Israeli universities.

² The Mugrabi Quarter was a nearly 800-year-old neighborhood located in Jerusalem's Walled City.

³ Born in Cairo, Dr. Vicki Shiran was a pathbreaking founder of many Mizrahi social movements and is considered the mother of Mizrahi feminism.

⁴ The Kafr Qasim massacre took place on October 29, 1956, when Israeli Border Police executed forty-nine Palestinians with Israeli citizenship as they returned from work to their village, Kafr Qasim. They were unaware a curfew had been decreed earlier in the day.

⁵ Geula Cohen was a Stern Gang leader and a senior *Maariv* journalist. Between 1974 and 1999, she was a Knesset member from the Tehiya party. The Stern Gang, also known as Lehi, was an extreme right-wing Zionist paramilitary organization that sought to evict British authorities from Palestine by force.

⁶ As of August 2020, Hanegbi was minister of settlement affairs.

⁷ Baruch Kimmerling was a Hebrew University sociologist, the first from inside Israeli academe to question Israel's creation.

⁸ Hillel House is the largest Zionist organization present on North American and Western European college campuses. It creates a framework for campus Jewish life while disseminating pro-Israel propaganda disguised as student activism.

⁹ Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar (2016) provide an excellent analysis of the obstacles US scholars encounter when teaching critically about the Middle East.

¹⁰ Matzpen (Hebrew for "compass") was active between the 1960s and 1980s.

¹¹ The Sabra and Shatila Massacre was the murder of 3,500 Palestinian refugees by Christian Phalange militiamen and was masterminded by Ariel Sharon, then Israel's defense minister.

¹² The October 2000 Palestinian uprisings broke out within the 1948 borders of Palestine or the State of Israel in solidarity with West Bank and Gaza mass demonstrations in response to Ariel Sharon's uninvited pilgrimage to the Temple Mount

or Al-Aqsa Mosque. During this insurrection, the Israeli police executed twelve Palestinian youth demonstrators in the Galilee. Al-Aqsa Intifada was a 2000–2005 insurrection of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians.

¹³ Ahoti is Israel's feminist of color movement. It no longer has a website, so see their Facebook page.

¹⁴ Operation Defensive Shield was a 2002 large-scale IDF response directed mainly against Palestinian civilians of the West Bank during the second Intifada.

¹⁵ Israel's National Security Bureau (NSB) is similar to the US Social Security Administration.

¹⁶ The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow is an antiracist, social justice NGO.

¹⁷ Tikkun Leil Shavuot is the practice of going to the synagogue for Maariv after a Shavuot holiday meal and studying the Torah into the night.

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