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Mizrahi Jews and the Zionist Settler Colonial Context:

Between Inclusion and Struggle

Abstract

This article intends to analyse the 'in-between' category of Mizrahi Jews within Israeli society. In detail, the main objective is to draw attention to how Israel's Mizrahi majority has been part of the Zionist settler colonial system itself while, at the same time, it has been greatly marginalised from the mainstream Zionist discourse primarily led by white Ashkenazi Jews. Theoretically founded on the interconnection of three major approaches, namely settler colonialism, critical whiteness, and decolonial feminism, this contribution aims to question the current academic debate depicting asymmetric power relations founded on race, ethnic, gender and class discrimination inside Israeli society. Accordingly, Zionist settler colonialism needs to be critically analysed from a Mizrahi perspective, providing an additional element for understanding the relevance of connecting all the actors involved in the Zionist settler colonial project and reinforcing the discourse concerning settlers and indigenous people. Moreover, as the article discusses the wide cultural and political range of the Mizrahi Jews by questioning the viability of the Arab-Jew historical construct up to very recent times, it is also intended to further enhance the examination of an emerging field for studying Israel and Palestine within which several aspects and areas of inquiry remain unexplored.

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Introduction: settler colonialism as a paradigm for the Mizrahi question

In history, from the United States of America to South Africa, from New Zealand to Kenya, from Palestine to Mexico, from Australia to Canada, and from Algeria to Cyprus, the imperative of transforming territorial boundaries and creating new demographic and socio-political facts on the ground has fragmented geographies and identities. As the leading scholars working on these issues have shown,[1] there is no unique trajectory for studying the settler colonial phenomena, and no single definition has been established. Nonetheless, there is a broadly common starting point: the fact that settler colonialism is not an event but a structure, with the primary rationale of eliminating the native population so as to build up a new society.[2]

Going in depth into the specificity of the land of Palestine, Zionist settler colonialism has been mostly studied in terms of the conflicting relations between settlers and natives, specifically starting from what happened when the earliest Zionist settlers arrived in the historic Palestine, and how they faced the native Arab Palestinians by means of territorial conquest, land dispossession and domination leading to the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population.[3] In the main, and in parallel with what happened in many other settler colonial contexts, native Palestinians have been expelled from their lands rather than exploited for their labour,[4] as the logic of elimination has predominated and destroyed any kind of examples of cohabitation and cooperation between Jews and Palestinians from the pre-1948 period.[5]

On the other hand, this context can also be explored as 'surrogate colonialism',[6] through which 'the Ashkenazim brought in their own brand of Arabs - Yemeni Jews - to build their own European franchise in Palestine, independent of indigenous Palestinian labour'.[7] It shows how Ashkenazi Zionists have affirmed their will to establish a Jewish homeland in historic Palestine by using Mizrahi labour from 1882 onwards. In particular, within this settler colonial background, this article will discuss the wide cultural and political range of Mizrahi Jews (also called 'Arab-Jews' or

'Oriental Jews') as the main category of analysis who, although representing a demographic majority in Israel, have experienced discrimination and marginalisation within the Jewish state by the Ashkenazi elite.[8]

As other cases of major settler colonial societies have demonstrated, the study of the Israeli settler colonial context also requires the introduction of differentiated perspectives from which to analyse the status quo.[9] Therefore, the debate regarding the structure and the consequences of Zionist settler colonialism[10] hinges on identifying the inextricable connection between social class, national, ethnic, race and gender narratives of the actors involved in the construction of such a peculiar settler society. Accordingly, in order to make an original contribution, and to suggest a new research agenda in the field, this article will address the controversial 'in-between' position of Israel's Mizrahi majority[11] who, on the one hand, support the Zionist system but, on the other, question its major internal power asymmetries. This means exploring settler colonialism as a paradigm for the Mizrahi question, including its internal cleavages, and, as a result, moving from the Israel-Palestine binary - that has characterised most contemporary scholarship - to the study of the peculiarly nuanced position of Mizrahi Jews in relation to the Zionist settler colonial project.

As part of a wider ongoing project concerning the heterogeneity of types of activism and resistance against the current status quo inside Israel, this article is based on extensive fieldwork that took place throughout summer 2016, mainly in south Tel Aviv (with a focus on the neighbourhoods of Neve Sha'anan, Hatikva, and Kfar Shalem) due to the high number of Mizrahim who live in that area, along with other marginalised communities, such as migrant workers and African refugees. I primarily conducted semi-structured interviews with social and political activists engaged in several grassroots movements and organisations in order to explain how the intra-Jewish rift between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim represents a crucial element to be considered as part of a more complex understanding of the Zionist settler colonial project, founded on discourses of race, racialisation and racism.[12]

In detail, the first section of this article will examine the way Mizrahi communities have played an active part in the settler colonial project, while being excluded from the most prominent positions of power. Consequently, in the second part, the focus will move onto the role of Mizrahi social and political activism, mostly linked to the basic needs of their communities, in contrast to the so-called 'Zionist Ashkenazi Left',[13] and especially onto the importance of Mizrahi feminism as a leading political and social actor.

Problematising materials and methods

In suggesting the centrality of this framework to explore the complexity of the Mizrahi discourse and politics, this article tries to connect settler colonial studies with two other leading approaches, namely studies of critical whiteness and decolonial feminism. They represent, in fact, useful tools for furthering the importance of researching communities at the margins and, in particular, their political and social roles. Looking specifically at Israel's Mizrahi majority, I claim that the combination of these three theoretical lenses allows us to describe how Zionist settler colonial practices and policies have become consolidated and, at the same time, consigned Mizrahi communities to their unique position.

On the other hand, it is undoubtedly important to address the complex context in which this study takes place, which is the analytical framework of settler colonialism in Palestine. Taking into account Rana Barakat's critical overview of studies on settler colonialism that address Palestinian history,[14] it also seems critical to discuss the limitations of the settler colonial framework, so as not to underestimate the importance of the indigenous Palestinian resistance against the Zionist system and, moreover, not to equate forms of dispossession, and discrimination against the indigenous people, with other forms directed at marginalised communities, primarily the Mizrahim, but also labour migrants and refugees.

Nonetheless, by primarily dealing with questions related to the two main actors - Zionist settlers, predominantly led by Ashkenazi Jews, and Palestinian natives - the study of Zionist settler colonialism has omitted the other protagonists who have been systematically excluded from this discourse, starting with the Mizrahi communities. In examining this condition of 'in-betweenness', this research intends to fill this gap in current scholarship, with the aim of focusing on one of the most significant segments of the population profoundly implicated in the settler colonial project, but still living at the margins of Israeli society,[15] namely the Mizrahim.[16]

At this point, based on the contested nature of Zionist settler colonialism, I also suggest it would be of interest to look at approaches that have attempted to 'transcend settler colonialism as a dynamic order, and to move beyond the settler-native opposition'.[17] Reflections on Mizrahi Jews as influential actors in the settler colonial agenda, and, in a parallel way, as voices resistant to the dominant position of the Zionist Ashkenazi Jews, have been required both at the academic level and among grassroots activists. Therefore, by taking into account the wide-ranging tensions and problematics that can emerge when conducting research within such marginalised contexts,[18] I aim to enlarge the existing scholarship that has used different lenses to examine the relationship between the Mizrahi discourse and the Zionist settler colonial project.[19]

Despite the much debated prerogative to question the existing dichotomy between the 'occupier' and the 'occupied', it is also critical to examine other forms of oppression, power asymmetry and discrimination that have been generated by Zionist settler colonialism with respect to other marginalised actors since the very beginning of the establishment of the Jewish state. This is of particular importance at a time of increasing violence and racism inside Israel, as demonstrated at the institutional as well as at the grassroots level.

Within this framework, it is not my intention to equate the Palestinian and Mizrahi narratives, and in particular the ways by which the Zionist project has developed different and asymmetric power dynamics towards the two communities from the outset. As a system founded on

hierarchical oppression experienced at various levels, with the Palestinian people suffering the most, the Israeli establishment has strengthened structural conditions aimed at opposing heterogenous marginalised communities, firstly on the question of land and the decision to settle them far away on the geographic and political margins of the country.[20]

The 'in-between' Mizrahi case

The dichotomy between settlers and natives, or the fact that, to borrow Frantz Fanon's words, the colonial world is cut in two,[21] continues to be the primary lens through which Zionism is called into question. Nonetheless, also in the light of certain North American scholarship based on critical indigenous studies that have dealt with racialized immigrants in the framework of settlers, migrant-settlers and natives,[22] in the case of Israel, it becomes crucial to acknowledge the role of the Mizrahi communities as fundamental actors in the construction of the settler colonial society.

This 'in-between' position, as a conceptual basis for depicting Israel's Mizrahi majority in terms of their position as occupying settlers who also suffer internal racism and discrimination, can be defined by looking at the conflicting arguments in the Zionist settler colonial discourse. In particular, this approach takes into account the controversial dynamics of the socio-political Mizrahi/Ashkenazi divide, and thus enables an understanding of the left- and right-wing inside Israel, which are rather distinct from traditional patterns.

Given this overview, it is necessary to highlight the huge Mizrahi support for the right-wing, especially following the historic victory in 1977, when the majority of Mizrahim found their political home in the conservative party, Likud. Also called the 'upset of 1977' with 'a resounding electoral victory against the Labour party, which was held responsible for Mizrahi oppression, brought euphoria to the Mizrahim'.[23] In fact, from that time, ethnic, race, gender and class issues have become even more connected with political orientations inside Israel. Involved in a process of 'identification and integration'[24] and also 'in a melancholic bind between assimilation and

rejection',[25] Mizrahi Jews have needed to strongly assert their loyalty to the state and, in particular, to the political faction that has always most advocated the Israeli Jewish nationalist project, namely the right-wing.[26]

Defined as a 'refractory anomaly, one that could not be remedied by conversion or the discreet passage of a generation or two',[27] Mizrahi Jews have had to face difficult living conditions since their arrival in Israel,[28] and for decades they have not generally improved their status. In particular, the socio-economic gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim has continued until the present, as shown by everyday reality as well as statistical data about the disadvantaged Mizrahi labour force.[29] As described by the historian Gerardo Leibner:

> The Mizrahi identity is part of the social experience of many people. It involves past scarcity and issues that are still painful (experiences of discrimination, humiliation and even self-denial). Mizrahi demands are generally expressed as founded on the following terms: 'we are also Jews, we are supposed to have full rights in the Jewish nation-state, however we do not have them. In comparison with the Ashkenazi elite, we are considered second-class citizens, while we should be first-class citizens'. The political language of these struggles uses the colonial logic while trying to change their subordinated position inside the Jewish community.[30]

As a matter of fact, within the Israeli settler colonial paradigm, the internal system of power relationships can be described as the result of 'three different agencies: the settler coloniser, the indigenous colonised, and a variety of differently categorised exogenous alterities'.[31] In this framework, through the use of exclusionary policies since before 1948,[32] the Zionist Ashkenazi elite has been able to keep the Mizrahim away from pursuing any position of influence in the political,

economic or cultural sectors. By understanding the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi rift as based on prejudice and exclusion, the study of Israel in terms of a settler colonial society becomes urgent.

As already mentioned, although the first wave of Mizrahi labour migration dated from the early 1880s, mainly from Yemen,[33] together with pioneering settlers from Eastern Europe, the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi dichotomy has to be considered as a social construction that was deeply reinforced at the time of the establishment of the Jewish state.[34] In the early 1950s, Jews from Arab and Muslim countries immigrated massively to Israel, starting living in socio-economically disadvantaged conditions and suffering cultural discrimination maintained by the most powerful Jewish component of the new Israeli society, namely the Ashkenazim coming mostly from Central and Eastern Europe.[35]

While the Zionist Ashkenazi settlers have been able to incorporate Mizrahim by giving them citizenship, the right to vote and mandatory military service, on the other hand they have been able to marginalise them. This has meant that, since the beginning, the reality on the ground has delineated hierarchical relationships between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews, and today it still characterises every sector of life. Overall, the Zionist Ashkenazi leadership has created and maintained an unequal power structure among Jews themselves, and not only towards the indigenous Palestinians.

Revisiting race, class and gender in the Zionist settler colonial project

To problematise this situation in the settler colonial framework, I suggest the use of critical whiteness studies that allow the ongoing internal struggles among people at the margins of Israeli society to be disassembled.[36] To this end, it is extremely important to contextualise the concept of white privilege, or more specifically white supremacy, in the power structure emerging from Israeli society. In fact, the major ongoing intra-Jewish cleavage between Jewish Ashkenazim, as the dominant group, and Jewish Mizrahim, as the inferior segment of the Jewish population, has been

consolidated by a discourse based on the white ethnicity of the Ashkenazim, also defined as Jewish whiteness. This has legitimised the fact that "white ethnicity in Israel, therefore, is constituted and maintained as a privileged position through an ongoing process of boundary-making that produces and reproduces a hierarchical social structure".[37]

Throughout the history of the Jewish state, the idea of white supremacy has implicitly been at the core of the Zionist Ashkenazi leadership, even when its founders, primarily led by the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, wanted to apply the melting-pot principle (*mizug galuyot* in Hebrew) of unifying all the different cultural, ethnic and class waves of Jewish immigrants to Israel. In reality, what has been generally described as a homogenous society has always been a very heterogeneous and fragmented one, led by a minority that has maintained privileges and consolidated its power.

Consequently, the Mizrahim have frequently been compelled by the Zionist leadership to forget their Arab origin or, in other words, their 'Arabness'.[38] As explained in depth by the scholar Ella Shoat, Zionism has obliged the Mizrahim to make an irreversible choice, to be either Arab or Jewish, without any compromise.[39] This has implied that they have had to decide between their Jewish religion[40] and their Arab culture, specifically by following the religious path to enter the new Israeli society and denying historical connections with their cultural roots. Moreover, in several cases, the practice of 'acting white', also known as 'Ashkenazification' (*Hishtaknezut* in Hebrew) has been adopted by Mizrahim who, eager to become part of the Ashkenazi dominant side of society, have actually reproduced and normalised the status quo by reaffirming Ashkenazi supremacy.[41]

Such conditions have created the peculiar situation in which Israel's Mizrahi majority has had to face Ashkenazi domination, while, at the same time, they have shared with the Ashkenazim the founding pillar of Zionism, namely the domination and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. This

is a central issue to explore in the controversial Mizrahi identities, as underlined by the activist and scholar Gadi Algazi:

> Part of the story of Mizrahim is that, within a single family, you can find people with radically divergent views and social positions. Say, one brother becomes an officer, another sister lives in a poor neighbourhood, another brother goes into the secret services, and a fourth takes the very same legacy and pursues radical politics. This is part of the story of my own family. Unlike Palestinians, some Mizrahim can be integrated - at the price of accepting the dominant politics and becoming 'a good Jew'.[42]

This overview clearly explains the heterogeneity of Mizrahi communities, deeply divided by social and political tensions among themselves and towards the Ashkenazi elite. Accordingly, in the process of producing diverse hierarchies within Israeli settler society itself, it is evident how the discourse of race, along with the struggle to create a nation, has always been crucial in the Zionist project of deracinating Mizrahi Jews to build up a uniform Jewish society.[43] This is the reason why considering 'the ways white supremacy fundamentally structures space, place and race within settler colonial states'[44] also helps to explore the Israeli settler colonial context from the Mizrahi perspective. Indeed, one of the most powerful political instruments used by the settler colonial paradigm has been to represent Mizrahi Jews as black and primitive people in contrast to the white European Ashkenazi Zionists and the modern life they have set up in the new settlements.

From this standpoint, settler colonialism in Israel, predominately based on the Ashkenazi white hegemony, has been able to dominate all the other sectors of Israeli society, or, in other words, has been able to contain a majority of non-white people. As a white settler colonial project that implies 'a nexus of racial and colonial power',[45] Zionist settler colonialism has successfully aimed to admit Mizrahim into society, by limiting their power.

On a continuum in the analysis of such intersecting systems of domination, another useful perspective in this study is the one attempting to challenge the historical concept of 'intersectionality'[46] as it can be relevant to Mizrahim overall but, on the other hand, it has failed to discuss crucial issues, first of all religion and religiosity.[47] Moreover, it has usually highlighted how gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality and so on are strictly interrelated, but has not questioned the current reality within feminist scholarship and the movements themselves, based on ongoing discrimination and exclusion conducted by white women towards 'other' women living at the margins. Although Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw has more recently expanded her view on the term she coined, declaring that 'it is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power … a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion',[48] thinking of such analytical categories as inseparable is not enough if it does not include the analysis of the stratification of power among the different actors involved, and the way in which the various forms of oppression are still deeply intersecting.

For this reason, I stress the importance of also incorporating certain features from decolonial feminist discourse into this debate,[49] particularly that of Gloria Anzaldúa with her concept of 'plural personality'/'pluralistic mode'.[50] This can be effectively used to examine the controversial position of Mizrahi Jews within the Zionist settler colonial discourse in terms of multiple-voiced subjectivities. Decolonial feminist studies, led primarily by the Chicana feminism of Gloria Anzaldúa and Norma Alarcon, have focused on concepts of borderlands and pluralism to deconstruct relations of power at every scale in everyday life, and also to shed light on the basis of common resistance struggles. In particular, in the case of Mizrahim and also Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, previous relevant feminist studies have already suggested the use of the concept of 'staying put'[51] as 'a source of empowerment, a means of dancing delicately on the hyphen while concurrently rejecting it, in the hope that life becomes easier if one is able to enter the Ashkenazi mainstream'.[52]

By crossing intra-settler racial and gender hierarchies, this discourse is intended to seriously question Ashkenazi whiteness in the everyday Mizrahi experiences. Therefore, these theoretical perspectives are relevant for challenging the predominant representation of a homogenous Zionist settler society and for exploring the Mizrahi issue. The potential linkage between theories and methods of settler colonialism, critical whiteness and decolonial feminism enables an exploration of the power structures that have been used by the Ashkenazi Jews to consolidate their role in all the major aspects of Israeli society. In fact, Israel has been established on powerful policies of assimilation and exclusion that also affect Jews, and that have reflected the final objective of Zionism itself, more specifically, the intent to control Mizrahi Jews in order to colonise a new territory and expel the native Palestinian population from their lands. Moreover, looking at 'in-between' borderlands also means acknowledging 'the process of the intersections where Arab and European, Palestinian and Israeli, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, clash and merge'.[53]

Past and present: continuing 'our own Mizrahi struggle'

Historically, a large majority of Mizrahim have rarely questioned either the policies of dispossession of Palestinian land, or the internal socio-political fragmentation of Israel. However, the increasing politics of 'it's our turn',[54] with regard to the current demand by broader sectors of Mizrahi Jews to expand their political influence within Israeli society, represents a further element to be analysed. Protests and critiques concerning the political strategies used against Mizrahim, their difficult everyday living conditions, and their lower status in comparison with Ashkenazi Jews, have slowly and gradually come to light, generating challenging and confrontational discourses within the Mizrahi communities.

As a consequence, it is worth recalling the fact that the Mizrahim have shaped various social and political forms of grassroots activism, mainly related to the conflicting reality in which the Mizrahi communities have predominately lived inside Israel. Although most have been incorporated

into the mainstream strategies and policies of the settler colonial project, a few have also provided alternatives, addressing political and societal changes. In Israel in general, and within the Jewish framework in particular, socio-economic intra-Jewish divisions and their related linkages with current political initiatives have been at the core of everyday experiences. Nowadays, they still represent one of the main reasons for mobilisation by Mizrahi activists, as strongly asserted by one of them, Shlomi Hatuka:

> Most Mizrahim are struggling for the recognition of themselves, but within Israel itself. It is time to understand that you are not an Israeli, you are a Mizrahi. Mizrahim want to feel like regular citizens, Palestinians do not. The legal policy does not recognise the Mizrahim as a title, as a group that suffers oppression. This is another struggle we have to engage in.[55]

In stressing their different positionality compared to the Palestinian struggle, most of Israel's Mizrahi majority have looked at their own conditions, rooted in historic intra-Jewish oppression and subordination. In fact, going back to history, Mizrahim started organising demonstrations in the 1920s, and later on, in the 1950s, resistance actions especially led by North African immigrants arose with the aim of demanding work, and, in general, better living conditions and socio-economic support from the state. These earlier protests took place in the *Ma'abarot* and in urban spaces with the aim to 'escape the ghettoisation of Oriental Jewry',[56] a policy that was developed through many forms and in different contexts, from urbanised to peripheral and underdeveloped areas.

Nevertheless, only around the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, did the Mizrahi issue achieve a wider appeal both inside Israel and abroad, especially with the formation of the Israeli Black Panthers (*HaPanterim HaShhorim* in Hebrew). Unemployment and poverty have been the main problems that have affected, and in many cases, continue to affect the Mizrahi population today, and, consequently, have been the primary objectives of the major battles waged

by Mizrahi activists. In an attempt to link local and international issues, the Israeli Black Panthers, who were mainly active in the poorest neighbourhoods, such as Musrara in Jerusalem and Wadi Salib in Haifa, and led by second-generation Jewish immigrants, especially from Morocco, fought to achieve full equality within Israeli society.[57] Moreover, defined as the 'great black hope',[58] they also identified common aims with the largest oppressed and marginalised people, the Palestinians. Indeed, a new political agenda, in contrast to the mainstream Zionist principles, arose in the 1970s with the Israeli Black Panthers, as their founder Reuven Abarjel has explained:

> I formed the Black Panthers and we struggled with the Palestinians. All my life I never stopped meeting Palestinians, talking with them, living with them. I do not see myself being that far removed from any of the Palestinians, it would feel unnatural to me. There is no day I do not meet Palestinians. Mizrahi groups are different from the white groups that keep flaunting their relationships with Palestinians, and who immediately write books and reports about their relationships. Moreover, in my eyes, the racism we deal with in the Middle East is an ongoing oppression.[59]

Just as the question of solidarity with other marginalised communities was meaningful in the political programme of the Black Panthers, particularly its aim of identifying the use of similar oppressive policies by Zionist settler colonialism, it is also imperative not to forget the privileges the Mizrahim have benefited from as Jews at the expense of the occupied people, the Palestinians. This point needs to be underlined to achieve a deeper and fair understanding of the 'in-between' status of the Mizrahim, without disregarding the indigenous practices and strategies of resistance.

Having acknowledged this, it is still relevant to take into account other common initiatives between Mizrahim and Palestinians, such as when a number of intellectuals got together with activists and organised an historic joint conference in Toledo in 1989 in order to build political

bridges between the two peoples who were both oppressed, although through different strategies, by the Zionist Ashkenazi leadership.[60] More recently, another political project - under the name of *Mizrahit Meshutefet* - has focused on dealing with the consequences of the settler colonial project for both Palestinians and Mizrahim, including similar forms of discrimination and ongoing hostilities against these two underprivileged sectors of Israeli society. In order to provide an alternative to the Israeli political scenario, particularly following the significant success, in the 2015 legislative elections, of the 'Joint List' (consisted of Hadash, the United Arab List, Balad and Ta'al), the major representatives of *Mizrahit Meshutefet* publicly upheld the idea that 'pluralistic identity, joint responsibility, and partnership in the struggle to end wrongs and oppression can be a foundation for collective life and a source of inspiration and reform for all residents of this land'.[61]

On the other hand, these joint political efforts were contested and posed critical dilemmas both among internal supporters and those outside. Unbalanced dynamics of power along with widespread hopelessness and disillusion have persisted in meetings and relationships, prejudicing the final outcomes of common struggles. This has also resulted from the fact that only a few Israeli Jewish left-wing activists have supported a genuine implementation of the political attempt to unite the Mizrahi and Palestinian struggles into a single cause. The mainstream Left has never taken a decisive position in relation to the Mizrahi issue nor, in general, against the oppressed and underprivileged conditions in which Mizrahi Jews live due to the power asymmetry within Israel itself.

One of the main critiques by Mizrahi Jews towards the Israeli Left, mainly identified in terms of the Ashkenazi white hegemonic left-wing, has been their persistent attitude of supremacy, arrogance and often hypocrisy[62] regarding the low standard of living experienced by Mizrahim, as well as towards their culture and origins. Indeed, most Ashkenazi Jewish left-wing activists, including those participating in the so-called 'Israeli peace camp' in favour of the Palestinian right

to self-determination, have often denied the existence of similar internal oppression, and have deliberately avoided discussing the Mizrahi issue.

At present, in a framework in which 'there is virtually no political Left as it is usually conceived',[63] and there is no longer a real distinction between the ways of doing politics of the left- or right-wing, it is necessary to underline the importance of dealing with the intra-Jewish cleavages that have been determined by class, ethnicity, gender and race issues. Specifically, an analysis of the different levels of opposing narratives between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim clearly shows the uniqueness of this case and the need to deconstruct traditional definitions of what is Left and Right inside Israel. From a critical perspective, the current debate can be summed up by the words of Tom Mehager, a Mizrahi activist:

> I think that the Left and Right are now artefacts. It should be the Left when you talk about Palestinians, and it should be the Left when you talk about Mizrahi. Leftist Ashkenazim do not represent the people, their stories or their communities. It is very important to explain what you mean by the Left in Israel, as a colonial settler society. You do not say Left or Right, but you say whether you are Zionist or not. You cannot be on the Left and Zionist, and most of the Ashkenazi left-wing consider themselves to be Zionists. They do not think about 1948. They are not interested in speaking about the land, about 1948. They do not want to speak about their privileges.[64]

According to this critical assessment of the current status of intra-Jewish disagreements between Right and Left, mostly as a result of the political strategies adopted by the Ashkenazi left-wing, it is unsurprising that there is a powerful ongoing radicalisation of right-wing parties and groups that have especially involved Israel's Mizrahi majority. Although political engagement by the Mizrahim has continued to be subservient to Ashkenazi decisions, right-wing governments and municipal

councils have in general terms served Mizrahi communities much better than the Left.[65] Consequently, in social and political struggles, ongoing asymmetries and cleavages between Left and Right, upper and lower social classes, and Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (including the respective divergences among their communities), are still key in interpreting the current Israeli settler society.

Debating Mizrahi cleavages and narratives: current struggles

To approach some of the core targets of the major battles initiated by the Israeli Black Panthers and described in the previous paragraph, since the mid-1990s, more progressive Mizrahim have taken alternative political pathways, as in the case of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition (*Hakeshet HaDemocratit HaMizrahit* in Hebrew, also known as the *Keshet*), created by second- and third-generation Mizrahi intellectuals, in terms of apolitical and non-parliamentary social movement. More specifically, they have addressed Mizrahi subordination in relation to the issues of land, housing and education.[66] Both socio-economic and educational divides have been at the centre of such Mizrahi struggles to improve their living conditions characterised by low-wage jobs in a less-educated milieu. On the other hand, still problematically adhering to Zionism, the Mizrahi discourse has often been characterised as a Mizrahi-only struggle separated from other more universal struggles.[67]

However, what has emerged specifically from the background of Mizrahi feminist activists needs to be highlighted since they have been leading political and social actors within Israeli grassroots movements, though this part of the narrative has been omitted from mainstream history, namely the Ashkenazi one. This discourse, mostly related to Mizrahi feminist scholarship[68] on the one hand, and, to Mizrahi grassroots activism especially in the form of the feminist organisation *Ahoti (Sister) - for women in Israel* on the other, suggests how an extension of Anzaldúa's 'plural personality'[69] can contribute to developing additional perspectives to the 'in-between' category of the Mizrahim within the Zionist settler colonial context.

Based on a comprehensive idea of inclusiveness among women from the most disadvantaged communities and peripheries, particularly the Mizrahim, Palestinians, Ethiopians, refugees and migrant workers, Ahoti has been one of the most influential intellectual and political Mizrahi initiatives able to connect social and political struggles by understanding the mutual interest in fighting together against the status quo. A practice of shaping heterogeneous narratives and creating common agendas has been stressfully underlined by Ahoti chairwoman, Shula Keshet:

> We are making connections between Palestinians, Mizrahim, Ethiopians, asylum seekers and more, because we believe that underprivileged communities have a mutual interest in struggling together, ending the occupation, ending gentrification, demanding justice and equal distribution of funds etc…Our agenda is multi-ethnic, multi-national feminism that connects gender, colour, nationality and ethnicity together.[70]

From this contribution and from a thorough analysis of the projects that have been developed throughout the last decade, the uniqueness of the feminist Mizrahi struggle(s) and its relevance to the theoretical framework suggested in this article, provides a revealing example of the interconnection of the three approaches of settler colonialism, critical whiteness, and decolonial feminism. In fact, Mizrahi feminist activists, and in particular Ahoti's activists, have been engaged in major struggles, from public housing to the allocation of resources in the domain of culture, and from gentrification to the fight against gender violence. On the everyday level, making connections among women from marginalised and underrepresented backgrounds has clearly shown the interdependence of struggles that have taken place in the most conflicting contexts within Israel; conflicting contexts that can be considered as a mirror of the main consequences of the settler colonial project.

At present, as a further step in constructing new forms of inclusion and questioning ongoing power relations, a few topics have appeared at the core of Israeli public debate, especially in relation to the unresolved, and still very active, case of the so-called 'Yemenite baby affair' in which hundreds of Yemeni children were stolen from their parents and sold for adoption in the 1950s,[71] and to the social housing conflicts in the poorest neighbourhoods of the major cities of Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. As regards the disappearance of hundreds of Yemenite children, the rift between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim on this issue continues to be very deep since the allegations have raised profound questions over the role of the Zionist Left, and the Labour party as well, in hiding the truth.

Moreover, the ongoing Mizrahi protest movements struggling for social housing, and improved living conditions in the peripheral areas have presented a central demand, addressed to Israeli society and governments, to end Ashkenazi privileges. In the last decade, in addition to those issued to Palestinians, hundreds of evictions have been issued to Mizrahi Jewish residents, meaning that both communities have experienced and resisted similar problems, and, in a few cases, they have also tried to jointly protest against the decisions taken by the Zionist Ashkenazi establishment.

Although struggles related to public housing have always been central both in the Mizrahi communities and among Palestinian citizens of Israel, looking for common ground has not been so easy. While it is not possible to compare the two realities, particularly as, in many cases, the Mizrahi evictions have taken place on lands that had once been Palestinian villages, the dimension of the evictions and destructions of Jewish Mizrahi communities, especially Yemenite,[72] by the Zionist authorities is relevant in this context.[73] This is also connected with the Zionist strategy to settle the most marginalised communities, both Jews and non-Jews, in peripheral areas of the country and in peripheral neighbourhoods in the major cities. In addition, in most recent times, several gentrification plans, mainly in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, have promoted policies 'under the

banner of 'improving the neighbourhood,' which means pushing out the poorest inhabitants, mostly Mizrahi, Ethiopian Jews, or Arabs'.[74]

On the ground, this debate has been also been pointed out by the social housing activist, Zehorit Adani, when she described what happened between two neighbourhoods located in the south of Tel Aviv, namely the Jewish Hatikva (meaning 'the hope' in Hebrew and also the title of the Israel's national anthem) and the Palestinian Jaffa, in the summer of 2011:

> When the connection between Hatikva and Jaffa started, many leftist activists thought that the people from Hatikva were against Arabs and were all right-wing and racists, but there were also Arabs in the Hatikva tent. On one occasion, Hatikva protesters organised a demonstration by bringing people from a rather right-wing soccer club, with connections to Ben Ari[75] and to fascists. It was not easy to connect Hatikva people with Arab Palestinians, but a few meetings and demonstrations were organised, even though, in one of these, someone from the white left-wing raised the Palestinian flag, which is not something we are used to here. The idea of the flag came from Ashkenazi left-wing activists, not from the Palestinians. The Ashkenazi left-wing can destroy such an alliance. They impose their culture on the others, but when the struggle finishes, the people also disappear. The Left want a white hegemony here, and Palestinians in Palestine, not here.[76]

This represents a clear example of ongoing power asymmetries also within the common struggles of grassroots activists. The reality of fighting together to resolve shared problems, such as questions of housing and land, has continued to be critical and hard to manage by joint groups. Indeed, in response to these political attempts, further tensions, forms of racism and discrimination have arisen within the Jewish majority itself, as well as against other oppressed communities inside Israel, such as the Palestinians and the African refugees. In this perspective, the 'in-between' Mizrahi position

might explain the direct correlation between their own oppression and the oppression historically practiced towards other more underprivileged communities, representing one of the most serious outcomes of the Zionist settler colonial project.

Conclusion

As has been shown throughout this article, it is evident that Israeli society, and also the Jewish majority itself, is still embroiled in ethnic, class, gender and race cleavages, primarily resulting from the Zionist settler colonial project. The initial idea of creating a uniform society composed of new Jews very soon became incompatible with the arrival of different and asymmetric Jewish communities. Indeed, since the establishment of the Jewish state, Israeli society has been composed of a majority of non-Europeans, or more generally, people of non-Western origin. However, it has been dominated by a leading European minority at the political, economic and cultural level. This situation has defined a complex demographic scenario and, especially, a problematic political reality in which the numerical majority (mainly Mizrahi Jews together with Palestinians and other marginalised communities) is fragmented, often on opposing fronts, and with very little intention to share common struggles against the powerful minority, namely the Ashkenazi Jews and their settler colonial project.

Defining this context as a 'political paradox, perhaps the most important of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict',[77] this research is an attempt to overcome the general lack of interest, both academically and politically speaking, in dealing with the Mizrahi issue, or in other words, in considering the centrality of diversities, conflicts, asymmetries among Israeli Jews. Such a perspective thus highlights the relevance of renewing both academic and political discussions concerning the role of Mizrahi Jews in defining the settler colonial project and, on the other hand, in struggling with the project itself from within. Both frameworks reveal how the Mizrahi narrative

has been absolutely critical to Israeli politics, despite the fact that the Ashkenazi leadership has historically tried to obscure and marginalise it.

This article reveals that analysing the 'in-between' Mizrahi category is essential for fully understanding the complexity of the political and economic colonisation of Palestine, and adds further elements to the argument concerning the intra-Jewish divide. In relation to this, I suggest it is necessary to take into account two major theoretical currents, critical whiteness and decolonial feminism, in order to examine the extent to which the peculiar status of Israel's Mizrahi majority has put into question the binary nature of the Zionist settler colonial structure. Similarly, regarding the controversial meaning of what is called Left and Right in the Israeli panorama, on the one side, tensions among the different components of the Jewish communities seem to have become consolidated in recent years, due to the fact that intra-Jewish racism has increased along with internal structural discriminations. On the other side, a renewal of joint political projects between Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews has taken shape.

Overall, this discourse is related to the urgency of creating connections between several multiplicities living in Israel, rather than stressing their identity differences.[78] In challenging the essentialist and monolithic conception of social and political struggles divided between and within communities from different ethnic, race, gender and class narratives, a tiny group of grassroots activists from the most marginalised and underprivileged communities has tried again to search for a common project, opposed to that of the Zionist settlers.

In a settler colonial society like the Israeli one, where everything is based on hierarchies of power, such aims sound rather challenging and, at the same time, elitist in the way they are mainly connected with people who have the privilege to be able to choose their path in life, albeit from within their marginalised status. On the other hand, it is undeniable that these alternative forms of politics, led by the majority ruled by the minority, represent the only way to overcome the status quo.

Finally, at such an historic moment, in which social and political issues continue to be strongly connected, especially when related to the most underrepresented communities, the basic idea under the slogan 'oppressed people can unite' can represent a new pattern of grassroots change.[79] By uniting people from the lower social classes who have been widely discriminated against, struggles for social change can also include struggles for political change which aim, by means of different tools and at different levels, to decolonise and deracialise the settler colonial system produced by Zionism. As this article aspires to open a new discussion on the topic, further research can be undertaken to develop the ongoing interconnections of these theoretical notions along with their development in the field.

[1] For an in-depth analysis of different contexts of settler colonialism, see: Ran Greenstein, *Genealogies of Conflict: Class, Identity, and State in Palestine/Israel and South Africa* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1995); Scott L. Morgensen, 'The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now', *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 52-76; Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler* Society (London: Pluto Press, 2006); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: a Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

[2] Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (2006): 390.

[3] In detail, see the renowned book by the historian Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

[4] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*.

[5] Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 109.

[6] Scott Atran, 'The Surrogate Colonization of Palestine 1917-1939', *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 719-744.

[7] Smadar Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 44.

[8] As, throughout the article, I analyse the diverse and fragmented roles of the Mizrahim in the Zionist settler colonial framework, in order to contextualise the intra-Jewish Israeli social structure, it is necessary to take into account the main demographic composition of the country, which includes: 50% Mizrahim (Jews originally from Arab and Muslim countries), 30% Ashkenazim (Jews originally from Eastern and Central Europe), 20% Palestinian citizens of Israel, also called '48 Palestinians (Palestinians who remained in their lands after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948). This means that the majority of Israel's citizens are not European. Although the Ashkenazim do not have a demographic majority, they have achieved full control of power in Israel. This asymmetric power relationship between the Ashkenazim and the rest of Israeli society is one of the main issues on which this article is based. Some preliminary bibliographic references by which to approach Mizrahi Jewish identity through differentiated perspectives are: Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); As'ad Ghanem, *Ethnic Politics: The Margins and the Ashkenazi Center* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Smadar Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture;* Joseph Massad, 'Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 53-68; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Ella Shohat, 'The Invention of the Mizrahim', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999): 5-20; Shlomo Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1989).

[9] Although I am aware of the fact that Zionist settler colonialism is not limited to the 1948 geographic boundaries, and that the Palestinian struggle is far more extensive, I decided to focus in greater depth on this specific area, because I carried out most of my fieldwork there.

[10] Nahla Abdo and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Palestine, Israel and the Zionist Settler Project', in *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*, ed. Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1995), 291-322.

[11] This expression, which I owe to Smadar Lavie, conveys the importance of underlining the heterogeneity of the Mizrahim and the way they identify with the Jewish people, to which the Ashkenazim also belong. I also decided to use it in order to stress the ongoing social, political, economic and cultural intra-Jewish divide between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim; in other words, the fact that, in spite of representing a numerical majority inside Israel, the Mizrahim are still underrepresented and occupy a lower position than the Ashkenazim.

[12] The decision to use the term 'racism' within Israeli society refers to what has been defined as 'racism without race', or also as 'racism without racists'. In relation to this issue, see: Etienne Balibar, 'Is There a Neo-racism?', in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003); Paul Gilroy, 'Race Ends Here', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 5 (1998): 838-847; Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (London: Zed Books, 2011). In this way, I evidence how racism inside Israel has been hidden and not considered as such. Moreover, affirming this also means taking into account all the dimensions in which racism can be expressed and developed, from the institutional level to everyday life.

[13] Common understanding in Israel has usually depicted the left-wing as the political faction advocating Palestinian rights and opposing the Israeli military occupation. However, it would be incorrect to take for granted such a basic definition without considering the numerous differences within the general panorama of the Israeli Left, from the Zionist Left to the anti-Zionist Left, passing through diverse shades relating to critical approaches towards Zionism, its meaning, and its direct consequences in everyday life and at the institutional level. In addition to this, other critiques against the Zionist Left have been matured by Mizrahi political activists who have accused the leading Ashkenazi leftists of demonstrating in favour of Palestinian rights, while failing to take stance concerning intra-Jewish asymmetries and racism. For in-depth analyses of the heterogenous panorama of the Israeli Left and their internal debate related to controversial themes on Zionism, see: Ran Greenstein, *Zionism and Its Discontents: A Century of Radical Dissent in Israel/Palestine* (London: Pluto Press, 2014); Tikva Honig-Parnass, *False Prophets of Peace: Liberal Zionism and the Struggle for Palestine* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

[14] Rana Barakat, 'Writing/Righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost(s) of History', *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 349-363.

[15] The expressions 'margins' and 'marginalisation' can define several characteristics related to the communities taken into consideration throughout this article, especially regarding race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and class. People can be considered marginalised in different arenas, ways and stages. Following Lavie and Swedenburg's reflections (Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, 'Between and Among the Boundaries of Culture: Bridging Text and Lived Experience in the Third Timespace', *Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (1996): 154-179), I have adopted this term to include Mizrahim among disadvantaged and underprivileged communities within Israeli Jewish society, though numerically representing a majority.

[16] I have decided to use the term *Mizrahim* (literally 'Easterners') to define Oriental Jews in order to stress the political force of its meaning that has become central in Israeli politics, especially since early 1970s.

[17] Raef Zreik, 'When Does a Settler Become a Native? (With Apologies to Mamdani)', *Constellations* 23, no. 3 (2016): 351.

[18] On this theoretical and methodological topic, see: Kalwant Bhopal and Ross Deuchar, eds., *Researching Marginalized Groups* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Bernd Reiter and Ulrich Oslender, eds., *Bridging Scholarship and Activism: Reflections from the Frontlines of Collaborative Research* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014); Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999).

[19] Related to the debate, see: Gadi Algazi, 'Matrix in Bil'in: A Story of Colonial Capitalism in Current Israel', *Theory and Criticism* 29 (2006): 173-192 (Hebrew); Smadar Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*; Ronit Lentin, *Traces of Racial Exception: Racializing Israeli Settler Colonialism* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018); Ella Shohat, 'The Invention of the Mizrahim'.

[20] Regarding the way new arrivals of Mizrahi communities to Israel were settled, see note 28.

[21] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

[22] One of the most significant works on the complex relationship between settlers, migrant-settlers and natives, focusing on the case of Asian settlers in Hawaii, is by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

[23] Sami S. Chetrit, 'Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 4 (2000): 54.

[24] Ibid., 62.

[25] Raz Yosef, 'Restaging the Primal Scene of Loss', *Third Text* 20, no. 3-4 (2006): 489.

[26] Despite being beyond the scope of this article, a comparative approach could be extremely useful for exploring a similar paradoxical reality in the US. Specifically, although still fairly limited in comparison with the Mizrahi support for the Israeli Jewish right-wing, support of African Americans for the alt-right has increased, mainly due to a wider disillusionment with the Democratic party, and the historical role of Black conservatism (Charles Henry, 'Herman Cain and the Rise of the Black Right', *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 6 (2013): 551-571). Looking in the field, an example of this is a recent initiative, related to the 2020 electoral campaign, called 'Black Voices for Trump' whose aim is to encourage the black community in the US to re-elect President Donald Trump.

[27] Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 256.

[28] In relegating Mizrahi Jews to the most peripheral areas of the country while expelling the indigenous Palestinian population from their land and destroying their villages and houses, the Zionist settler colonial project was founded on the reorganisation of the territory in order to create a permanent presence and a new sovereignty. One main feature of this project has been the establishment of the so-called *Ma'abarot*, a kind of immigrant camp where the Mizrahim were first put, before being transferred to transit camps of metal dwellings or to development towns. This represented the primary urban tool set up by the new-born Jewish state to create a Jewish majority in Galilee and the Negev desert by de-Arabising those areas of as many native people as possible. On the other hand, this was a political and ideological strategy implemented by the Zionist Ashkenazim to control not only the territory, but also to force the Mizrahi population to the margins of Jewish society and oppose them to the native Palestinians. See Oren Yiftachel, 'Social Control, Urban Planning and Ethno-Class Relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's "Development Towns"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 418-438; Erez Tzfadia and Oren Yiftachel, 'Between Urban and National: Political Mobilization among Mizrahim in Israel's "Development Towns"', *Cities* 21, no. 1 (2003): 41-55. In relation to the planned marginalisation of North African Jewish immigrants, see the documentary entitled *Sallah, Po Ze Eretz Yisrael* by David Deri (2017).

[29] As questioned by Patrick Wolfe who wrote that 'as a settler-colonial labour force that is radicalised in contradistinction to their Ashkenazi superiors, Mizrahim are more like American slaves than Australian convicts' (*Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 259) exploring the ethno-class division inside Israel, and specifically within the different components of the Israeli Jewish communities, is essential to understand the settler colonial project itself. For a deeper understanding, see: Shlomo Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority*; Deborah Bernstein and Shlomo Swirski, 'The Rapid Economic Development of Israel and the Emergence of the Ethnic Division of Labour', *British Journal of Sociology* 33 (1982): 64-85.

[30] Author's interview, July 2016.

[31] Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: a Theoretical Overview,* 16.

[32] Elie Eliachar, *Living with Jews* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

[33] Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*, 44.

[34] Meir Amor, author's interview, July 2016.

[35] See Clare L. Ducker, 'Jews, Arabs, and Arab Jews: The Politics of Identity and Reproduction in Israel', *ISS Working Paper Series* 421 (2005): 1-58; Smadar Lavie, 'Israeli Feminism and the Question of Palestine', *MEI Perspectives* 4 (2015): 1-25; Bryan K. Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948-1966* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

[36] Although it is a concept that has not been largely related to the specific context of the Zionist settler colonial framework, I believe it represents a useful tool to use in this study. To follow the debate about critical whiteness studies through intersectional analyses, see Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149-168; Alfred J. Lopez, *Postcolonial Whiteness: Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005); Anoop Nayak, 'Critical Whiteness Studies', *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 2 (2007): 737-755. By looking at the way through which whiteness is still deep-rooted in several social, political, cultural environments across the world, this concept can also be considered as an integral part of the Israeli settler colonial project, particularly with respect to the Ashkenazi Jews' hegemonic paradigm to achieve power and privileges.

[37] Orna Sasson-Levy, 'A Different Kind of Whiteness: Marking and Unmarking of Social Boundaries in the Construction of Hegemonic Ethnicity', *Sociological Forum* 28, no. 1 (2013): 47.

[38] For in-depth analysis of this concept, see: Sami S. Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel*; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews*; Ella Shohat, 'Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Point of View of its Jewish Victims', *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35.

[39] Shohat, 'Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Point of View of its Jewish Victims', 11.

[40] In terms of religion, the relevance of the various religious communities among the Mizrahim should be understood. This perspective has always been central throughout history, and has also led to the well-known intra-Jewish rift between 'orthodox' and 'secular' Jews, even though, in reality, a great number of Jews consider themselves to be 'traditionals' (*masortim* in Hebrew) and represent a significant percentage of the Mizrahi population. Nevertheless, a further relevant political actor to consider in this regard is the *Shas* party (abbreviation of *Shomrei Sfarad* in Hebrew), historically supported by Mizrahi Jews and founded with the aim of uniting ultra-orthodox traditions with a deeper Zionist perspective. For a comprehensive preliminary overview of the topic, see: Yaacov Yadgar, *Secularism and Religion in Jewish-Israeli Politics: Traditionalists and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

[41] Orna Sasson-Levy and Avi Shoshana, ''Passing' as (Non) Ethnic: The Israeli Version of Acting White', *Sociological Inquiry* 83, no. 3 (2013): 448-472.

[42] Author's interview, July 2016.

[43] Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 3.

[44] Anne Bonds and Joshua F. Inwood, 'Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism', *Progress in Human Geography* (2015): 8.

[45] Scott L. Morgensen, 'White Settlers and Indigenous Solidarity: Confronting White Supremacy, Answering Decolonial Alliances', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* (2014).

[46] I mainly refer to: Patricia H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, no. 8 (1989): 139-167; Angie-Marie Hancock, 'Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm', *Politics and Gender* 3, no. 2 (2007): 248-254; Leslie McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', *Sign* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771-1800. Although the concept of 'intersectionality' is usually considered to have begun with Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, it actually dates from earlier in the 1970s with the Combahee River Collective, a collective of Black feminists 'actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking' (Zillah Eisenstein, 'The Combahee River Collective Statement', 1977).

[47] Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture.*

[48] Tom Bartlett, 'When a Theory Goes Viral', *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* May 21, 2017, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Intersectionality-Wars/240095 (accessed April 24, 2019).

[49] I am aware that the meaning and the use of 'decolonial' and 'decolonization' can be very critical, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue in 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40. On the other hand, due to the specificity of the Zionist settler colonial context and the particular kind of settler subjectivity of the Mizrahim's 'in-between' position, I decided to suggest the use of decolonial feminist lenses, as they have focused on border zones characterised by fluidity and movement, and particularly, a continuous status of borders crossing.

[50] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

[51] Hastings Donnan, 'Material Identities: Fixing Ethnicity in the Irish Borderlands', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12 (2005): 69-105; Smadar Lavie, 'Where Is the Mizrahi-Palestinian Border Zone? Interrogating Feminist Transnationalism through the Bounds of the Lived', *Social Semiotics* 21, no. 1 (2011): 67-83; Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

[52] Smadar Lavie, 'Where Is the Mizrahi-Palestinian Border Zone?', 68.

[53] Smadar Lavie, 'Blow-ups in the Borderzones: Third World Israeli Authors' Gropins for Home', *New Formations* 18 (1992): 90.

[54] Author's interview, July 2016.

[55] Author's interview, July 2016. Besides being poet, editor, and activist, he is also one of the founders of *Amram*, an organisation focusing on the kidnapping of Yemenite children in the 1950s, as reported in note 71. See Shlomi Hatuka, 'The Tragedy of the Lost Yemenite Children: In the Footsteps of the Adoptees', *Haokets*, October 4, 2013 (Hebrew) https://www.haokets.org/2013/10/04/המ-של-הטרגדיה-בעקבות-מסע-מסע-תימן-ילדי-פרשת/ (accessed June 11, 2020).

[56] Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948-1966*, 110.

[57] Shalom Cohen and Kokhavi Shemesh, 'The Origin and Development of the Israeli Black Panther Movement', *MERIP Reports* 49 (1976): 19-22; Frankel Oz, 'What's in a name? The Black Panthers in Israel', *The Sixties* 1, no. 1 (2008): 9-26.

[58] Ran Greenstein, *Zionism and Its Discontents: A Century of Radical Dissent in Israel/Palestine.*

[59] Author's interview, July 2016. For more on this debate, see: Reuven Abarjel and Smadar Lavie, 'Another Act in the Mizrahi-Palestinian Tragedy', *The Electronic Intifada*, July 24, 2006, https://electronicintifada.net/content/another-act-mizrahi-palestinian-tragedy/6182 (accessed June 15, 2020); Reuven Abarjel and Smadar Lavie, 'A Year into the Lebanon2 War: NGO-ing Mizrahi-Arab Paradoxes, and a One State Vision for Palestine/Israel', *Left Curve* 3 (2009): 29-36.

[60] Joseph A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 75.

[61] 'Open Call: An Eastern Joint Initiative - Mizrahi Palestinian Partnership', 2016.

[62] Ran Greenstein, 'Israel: Where Do the Mizrahim Fit In?', *Jadaliyya*, August 25, 2015.

[63] Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*, 59.

[64] Author's interview, July 2016. On the topic, see: Tom Mehager, 'Why Mizrahim Don't Vote for the Left?', *Haokets*, January 22, 2015 (Hebrew) https://www.haokets.org/2015/01/22/ל-אז-למה-מזרחים-מצביעים-לימין-ואשכנזים/ (accessed June 11, 2020); Tom Mehager, 'Why Won't Israeli Peace Groups Talk About the Nakba?', *Haokets*, May 15, 2015 (Hebrew) https://www.haokets.org/2015/05/15/1948-הפיל-שהיהודים-בחדר-לא-מדברים-עליו/ (accessed June 11, 2020).

[65] Regarding the Mizrahi communities' involvement in supporting right-wing political parties, both secular and ultra-orthodox, see principally Smadar Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*; Sami S. Chetrit, 'Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative'; Catherine Thorleifsson, *Nationalism and the Politics of Fear in Israel* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

[66] For further readings on the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, see: Chetrit, 'Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative'; Tilde Rosmer, 'Israel's Middle Eastern Jewish Intellectuals: Identity and Discourse', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 62-78.

[67] Sigal Harush Yehonatan, author's interview, July 2016.

[68] In detail, see: Henriette Dahan-Kalev, 'Tensions in Israeli Feminism: The Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Rift', *Women's Studies International Forum* 24, no. 1 (2001): 1-16; Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture;* Lavie, 'Israeli Feminism and the Question of Palestine'; Pnina Motzafi-Haller, 'Scholarship, Identity, and Power: Mizrahi Women in Israel', *Signs* 26 (2001): 697-734; Vicki Shiran, 'Feminist Identity vs. Oriental Identity', in *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991), 303-311.

[69] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera.*

[70] Author's interview, July 2016. With a focus on the reality of south Tel Aviv and, in particular, on the everyday relationships between the residents of the poorest neighbourhoods and the African refugees see: Shula Keshet, 'Israel's 'Backyards': First South Tel Aviv, then Holot', *Haokets*, September 26, 2014 (Hebrew) https://www.haokets.org/ 2014/09/26/מתקן-חולות-ודרום-תל-אביב-חצרות-אחוריו/ (accessed June 11, 2020); Shula Keshet, 'We Helped Asylum Seekers and Got Elected - Now They Have a Voice', November 5, 2018, https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-helped-asylum-seekers-and-got-elected-now-they-have-a-voice/ (accessed June 11, 2020).

[71] Just after arriving to Israel in the early 1950s, many Yemeni Jewish women who gave birth in public hospitals were told that their babies had died without any further explanation, or in other cases, mothers just saw their babies taken from their arms. After being kidnapped, most of those children were adopted by Ashkenazi families, often Holocaust survivors without kids. Such tales have been repeated hundreds of times, and although several earlier commissions, such as those in 1967 and in 1994, investigated these disappearances, the truth has not yet been revealed. More in depth see: Rachel Shaby, *Not the Enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab Lands* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 44-45. Accusations have also been directed to the government of the time, since the elite knew what was happening, but did not do anything. Furthermore, the Israeli media narrative was completely supportive of the Jewish state; see Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal Conflict: the Yemenite Babies Affair* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). For further updated information about the ongoing debate, see the website of *Amram* - http://www.edut-amram.org, an NGO founded by third-generation Mizrahim and dedicated to raising awareness, discovering and publishing histories related to the disappearance and trafficking of those Yemeni Jewish children.

[72] Further material on this issue, including maps, has been published by the research centre on Palestine and Israel called 'De-colonizer', https://www.de-colonizer.org/map (accessed July 10, 2019).

[73] In relation to the question of evictions, it is also interesting to examine the Zionist settler colonial project by looking at the interconnection between domestic and foreign policy. For more detail, see: Smadar Lavie, 'Gaza 2014 and Mizrahi Feminism', *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 42, no. 1 (2019): 85-109.

[74] Gerardo Leibner, 'HaTikva Encampment, 2011', *Current Anthropology*, 56, no. S11 (2015): S159-S168.

[75] Michael Ben-Ari is one of the most well-known leaders of the far right-wing in Israel and disciple of Rabbi Meir Kahane who, in the 1970s, founded the radical orthodox Jewish and ultra-nationalist party Kach.

[76] Author's interview, July 2016. Mizrahi grassroots activism has been characterised by different forms of 'tent movements', since the 1970s with the *Ohalim* movement mainly based in Jerusalem's most underprivileged neighbourhoods. In Tel Aviv, another significant example of such Mizrahi tent protests concerns HaTikva, which, although its name means 'the hope' in Hebrew, is one of the poorest areas of south Tel Aviv, also known as the 'black city' in comparison with the 'white city' - central and north Tel Aviv - inhabited mainly by the upper middle-class (Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City* (London: Pluto Press, 2015)). The HaTikva neighbourhood has historically been a place of grassroots protests with local families camping in the public park to demand social housing programmes.

In relation to the waving of the Palestinian flag, it is important to remember that this act is illegal for Palestinians in '48 Palestine. The Mizrahi interviewee wanted to underline the arrogance of the Ashkenazi doing this without considering the possible consequences of such an act; in the eyes of the Mizrahi, a privileged gesture by left-wing Ashkenazi activists.

[77] Greenstein, 'Israel: Where Do the Mizrahim Fit In?'.

[78] 'Multiplicity', or better 'subversive multiplicity', and then substituted by the notion of 'plurality', represent core concepts in post-leftist feminist discourse and political practices. In particular, see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

[79] Gadi Algazi, author's interview, July 2016.