

SALT IN THE WATER: RACIALIZATION, HIERARCHY AND ARAB-JEWISH
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN ISRAEL

by

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**SALT IN THE WATER: RACIALIZATION, HIERARCHY AND THE SPECTER OF
ARAB-JEWISH ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN ISRAEL**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the specter of romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Given the statistical rarity of such relationships, the extensive public, media, and governmental attention paid to preventing ‘miscegenation’ seems paradoxical. I begin with an exploration of these attempts, which range from highly successful advertising campaigns and televised interventions to citizen patrol groups, physical assault, and, in the case of underage women, incarceration in reform schools. By turning to work on racializing processes within contested colonial space, this research traces the specter of ‘mixed’ relationships back to fears of internal contamination and the unstable nature of racial membership within racialized hierarchies of power. I conclude with a close analysis of three works – two novels and one film – that revolve around relationships between Arab and Jewish characters. By examining the way these texts both reify and challenge assemblages of race and belonging in Israel, I argue that these works should be viewed as theoretical texts that strive to present possibilities for a different future.

ÖZET

SUDAKİ TUZ: İSRAİL’DE İRKSALLAŞMA, HİYERARŞİ VE ARAP-YAHUDİ ROMANTİK İLİŞKİLERİ

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Bu makale, Araplar ve İsrail'deki Yahudiler arasındaki romantik ilişkilerin spektrumunu incelemektedir. Bu tür ilişkilerin istatistiksel azlığı göz önüne alındığında halkın büyük bir kesiminin, medyanın ve devletin “misejenasyonun” önlenmesine verilen önem paradoksal görünmektedir. Makalem son derece başarılı olmuş reklam kampanyalarından ve televizyonda yapılan müdahalelerden, vatandaş devriye gruplarına; fiziksel saldırıya, özellikle de reşit olmayan kadınların söz konusu olduğu, reform okullarında hapsedmeye kadar uzanan bu girişimlerin araştırılmasıyla başlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, tartışmaya açık sömürgeci alandaki irksallaştırma süreçleri üzerinde çalışmaları temel alarak, “karışık” ilişkilerin içsel kontaminasyon korkusunun ve ırksal üyeliğin iktidari hiyerarşilerin dengesiz doğası hakkındaki belirsizliğinin altını çizmektedir. Son bölümde Arap ve Yahudi karakterlerin arasındaki ilişkileri gösteren üç eserin -iki roman ve bir filmin- yakın bir analizini yapmaktayım. Bu eserlerin halkın ırksallığını ve İsrail’e aidiyet hissini hem birleştirici hem de meydan okuyucu bir unsur olarak somutlaştırdığını tartışarak eserlerin farklı bir gelecek için olanaklar sunmak için çaba gösteren teorik metinler olarak görülmesi gerektiğini savunuyorum.

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For Mare and Richard

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1. INTRODUCTION

This project began with a casual comment made to me in a park in Tel Aviv, in the summer of 2014, approximately three weeks after the Israeli state had begun “Operation Protective Edge,” a military operation against Gaza that was popularly understood as retribution for several rocket strikes aimed by Hamas in Gaza towards several Israeli cities. At the time, I was attempting to conduct research in the form of interviews on Israeli political identity, a project which proved both fruitful and deeply depressing. One night, I accompanied two Jewish-Israeli friends while they walked their dogs through the park in an upscale neighborhood of Tel Aviv. Searching for neutral topics, I mentioned that on a recent trip to Turkey I had met a man who I was still in contact with, and who I found attractive. With a wave of her cigarette to accent her point, one of my friends remarked quickly, “If you marry an Arab, he’ll cut your clit off.” I don’t recall how I responded – I likely laughed, as was my defensive response to most of the violence I witnessed that summer. But that comment, the immediacy of it and the commonsensical nature of its delivery, struck me immensely. Where did it come from? What personal histories, affective resonances, and webs of meaning allowed for the categorization of all (presumed) Muslims as ‘Arabs’, and the association of implied sexual desire for an ‘Arab’ with physical disfigurement and pain?

These questions, which form the tangled, neural core of this project, have ultimately led me to much larger queries about the mutually constitutive nature of sexualizing and racializing processes. It is these processes that I will try to unpack in this project, and to do this, I begin with a simple, stripped-down question: why does the Israeli state seem to care so deeply about with whom its Jewish citizens enter sexual relations? To answer this question is less simple. It requires an examination first of what it means to be a Jew, and concurrently what it means to be an Arab in relation to the modern Israeli nation-state. These categories,

‘Jew’ and ‘Arab’, are often taken as fixed and accepted without question. However, as we will explore, these identities are neither fixed nor natural; rather, they constitute ambiguous and flexible racialized categories in constant need of redefining, regrouping and reconstruction.

As quickly became clear to me, romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere; that is, actual occurrences of these relationships are exceedingly rare, yet, as we will see, their specter haunts nearly all corners and crevices of Israeli socio-political life. And despite the fever-pitch of public discourse surrounding mixed marriages in Israel, there is surprisingly little published academic work on the subject; as such, this thesis is greatly indebted to a few works in particular. Sociologist Yohai Hakak has written extensively on contemporary opinions and legislation surrounding romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews. His work offers invaluable insight into the lived realities and daily barriers faced by Jews and Arabs who enter into these relationships, which I draw from throughout this project. Hakak synthesizes and analyzes several studies published by Israeli psychologists and sociologists, who he notes have distinctly negative views of these relationships and whose works serve to further pathologize both Arab men and the Jewish women who choose them as their partners. Although his work constitutes an excellent analysis of the material realities that constitute the specter of mixed relationships in Israel, he focuses largely on the period between the late 1980’s through the present. He does not attempt to trace the source of these fears, nor does he contextualize them within much larger assemblages of racial belonging and hierarchy that share structural and discursive similarities across different global and historical contexts. The local specificity of his work allows for excellent sociological analysis, yet it simultaneously freezes the contemporary Israeli reality as a moment outside of historical or comparative context.

By contrast, historian Elise Burton’s work on the fears of an “assimilating majority” situates Israeli miscegenation fears within a wider history of European eugenic science. This is an incredibly important insight, as it recognizes and traces the flow of ideas about race, inheritance, and degeneration from their 19th century European roots through contemporary genetic science today that attempts to prove the existence of a “Jewish gene.” However, her work limits its understanding of race to eugenic science, ignoring a longer history of racially-determined social hierarchy that was formed through and informed by colonial policy and

plantation regulation. To compare these histories, as I do throughout this thesis, is not merely an academic exercise: as we will see in chapter three, Jewish Israelis often invoke whiteness as a descriptor for their own status and compare their desire to maintain racial “purity” with that of the perceived necessity to do so in the United States.

To trace these webs of historical-contextual similarity and difference, I turned to critical race and whiteness studies. Chapter one of this thesis utilizes the works of Hakak, Burton and others to outline the daily, lived realities that create and constitute the assemblage of the mixed relationship, with a particular focus on the myriad attempts to prevent these relationships and the equally diverse consequences faced by those who transgress. In chapter two, I attempt to historicize and contextualize miscegenation fears within the context of an ongoing colonial project. I rely on anthropologist Ann Stoler’s work on racial categories and the intimate in colonial contexts as an analytical framework to understand how anxieties over the assignment of bodies to racial categories, by which material privileges such as citizenship and land rights are also determined, gives urgency to ‘proper’ affect and behavior. I argue that, within this context, sexual behavior (specifically the partner one chooses) becomes a site of particular importance, given as it is to produce children who further complicate already-murky categories.

The specter of mixed relationships is, on a day-to-day basis, perhaps most visible in cultural and media representation, be it through public scare campaigns, grotesque portrayals of Arabs on television and in the media, or the parallel, warped reality of social media. As such, I found it useful to trace these fears as they appear in three particular popular texts: two novels and one film. Guided by Donna Haraway’s understanding of the role of feminist science fiction in performing radical critical theory, I approach and analyse these texts as critical works in their own right, rather than as mere examples of a larger phenomenon. Guided by the major plotline of a romantic relationship between a Jewish and an Arab character, the two novels – Sami Michael’s *A Trumpet in the Wadi* and Dorit Rabinyan’s *All the Rivers* – are unique from each other in a myriad of ways. However, both are proposing and actively drawing out the possibility of a different world: to borrow Dina Georgis’s term, they are looking for the better story. The film, Eytan Fox’s “The Bubble”, is (despite some serious shortcomings) similarly searching for a different story to tell about love across seemingly insurmountable boundaries. Drawing from literary theory and historical analysis

of Israeli literature, I examine both the failures and the successes of these texts in imagining a different way forward.

Throughout this project, I use the term ‘race’ to refer to a category of practice rather than a category of analysis. Frederick Cooper summarizes this distinction as follows:

“Analysts...should seek to explain the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the ‘political fiction’ of the nation – or the ethnic group, race, or other putative identity – can crystalize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality. But we should avoid unintentionally reproducing or reinforcing such reification by uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis” (Cooper 2005, 63).

Accordingly, it is my assertion throughout, and indeed the ultimate thesis of this project, that ‘races’ do not exist on a biological level, but rather as hierarchical classes or categories of the human by which certain physical characteristics, behaviors, and even tastes or desires are attributed social meaning and are both classified (racialized) and used to classify (racializing). In other words, they exist as categories of practice. While relationships between Jews and non-Jews are referred to within the community by many terms, including ‘interfaith’ and ‘interethnic’, I use the term ‘mixed relationships’ throughout. Both of the aforementioned terms imply a type of self-identification that may or may not be at work in individual cases, but that should not be taken for granted as universal. ‘Mixed’, however colloquial it may sound, encompasses the feeling that there is a fundamental difference of classification between the two partners, and thus can be used as an umbrella term without making decontextualized assumptions.

It is of utmost importance to make note of the limitations of this project. There is a long history of the marginalization and silencing of Arab and Palestinian narratives, both in Israeli political discourse and popular culture. There is, further, a troubling tendency in both Israeli literature and political discourse towards placing ‘the Arab’ as the foil against which “the morality and humanity of the Israeli in times of military strife, mortal danger, and fierce combat” (Morahg 1986, 149) can be measured. Given these violent histories, I worry that this project, focused as it is on the specter of mixed relationships largely as it is constructed by Jewish Israeli citizens, might contribute to this trend by which ‘the Palestinian’ exists to moralize, condemn, or otherwise illuminate something about the existence of ‘the Israeli’.

With this in mind, this paper should be taken firmly at its limits: it is intended to examine the role of miscegenation fears in informing official policy concerns as well as informal, personal and group actions at all levels of Israeli Jewish society.

Concerns over intermarriage do exist in Palestinian society, but to assume that these concerns stem from the same root causes would be to flatten Palestinian experiences into an extension or a mirror of Israeli sociocultural life, and thus to recreate the very rendering that I aim to avoid. The fear of an “assimilating majority”, as Elise Burton has termed it, and the fact that the specter of these relationships far outweighs their actual occurrence in a state where Jewish identity is the hegemonic norm is what forms the core question this research seeks to address. Given the material disparities between Israeli and Palestinian daily lives, any concerns about ‘mixed’ relationships in Palestinian communities would thus arise from a different context and need to be examined with regard to its own material specificity. In the practical interest of length, it is impossible to include both perspectives in comparative focus with the necessary nuance – although it is a project I would very much like to undertake someday.

Finally, although we will discuss at some length a film depicting a gay relationship between an Arab man and a Jewish man, heterosexual couples form the primary focus of this project. There are several reasons for this: first, the state, private, and hybrid institutions focused on preventing and punishing mixed relationships themselves focus largely on heterosexual couples. This, I argue, is because of their potential to produce mixed children, the existence of whom would (and do) radically throw the organizing hierarchy of the state into question. Second, while LGBT individuals and couples in Israel do face multiple forms of oppression, many of which are racialized/racializing, these deserve their own analysis. To lump them in with the consequences faced by mixed heterosexual couples would be to ignore the immense roles of both homophobia and pinkwashing in determining outcomes for mixed LGBT couples in Israel. Thus, this project should be taken as a very specific examination of a phenomena that, while it does have larger implications for the understanding of racialized hierarchies of power, should not be understood as universally relevant or applicable to all contexts. I have accordingly tried to avoid broad, generalizing statements whenever possible.

2. THE LAY OF THE LAND

In the summer of 2014, a wedding took place that aroused the ire of right-wing Israeli Jews to the extent that the police were called in to hold a barricade around the wedding venue, keeping shouting protesters at a distance deemed acceptable. The bride and groom were Morel Malka and Mahmoud Mansour, both Israeli citizens. Morel, born into a Jewish Israeli family, converted to Islam in order to legally marry Mahmoud, an Arab Muslim. The timing - a moment when Israel was receiving well-deserved (yet ultimately toothless) condemnation from the international community for the rising death toll in Gaza during “Operation Protective Edge” - lent this particular wedding an overdetermined position of importance as right-wing nationalist sentiments ran amok. The opinion pieces flew, and within them was a general disagreement over what exactly the problem was: was it the marriage of a Jewish woman to an Arab man, or the fact that she had to convert to Islam to do it? Liberal and centrist newspapers tended to take the latter position, portraying the Israeli state’s legal marriage system, based on the Ottoman *millet* system according to which marriages are performed (and thus overseen) by religious authorities, was embarrassingly archaic and incongruous with Israel’s otherwise-secular system of governance (Burton 2015). While heterosexual marriages conducted outside of the state of Israel through non-religious legal apparatuses are recognized as legal by the Israeli government, there remains no option for civil marriage available within the territory of the state. Accordingly, as religious authorities within the state will not perform marriages between people classified as belonging to different religious groups, couples who wish to be married must either muster the resources and permits to travel abroad, or one partner must convert. Both Jewish *halakha* and the laws

of the state of Israel make converting to Judaism effectively impossible, rendering the Jewish partner the one who will likely convert to their partner's religion (Burton 2015).

Within both the Israeli legal system and sociopolitical discourse there is a great deal of ambiguity over the definition of Jewishness, and over who is and should be considered a Jew (Burton 2015, 83). Israeli legal code is a patchwork amalgamation of secular-nationalist civil law and *halakhic*¹ law, a division that becomes particularly problematic regarding marriage law. Jewish legal code currently gives exclusive power to religious authorities (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim primarily) to conduct marriages and thus, *de facto* (but not *de jure*) bans religiously 'mixed' marriages. While it could be argued that this is a distinction based religious, rather than racial, categories, I argue that the highly racialized nature of religious identity in Israel serves, in practice, to collapse these categorical distinctions into each other. Religious identity is not viewed as something one chooses, but rather an essential characteristic that one is born with and that will determine other aspects of one's personality, behavior and inclinations. Religion, racialized as it is in the Israeli state, effectively determines the acceptability of one's potential partner as well as the children that could result from that union. For a person to choose to marry outside of their racio-religious group, they must either have a civil ceremony outside of Israel (the most common site for this being Cyprus), which will then be recognized by the Israeli state as legal, or one partner must convert to the other partner's religion. Given the exceptional difficulty (and in many cases impossibility) of converting to Judaism, in most cases the Jewish partner must convert to the non-Jewish partner's religion. It is at this point that the fear of 'assimilation' (*hitbolelut*, a Hebrew term with a very negative connotation) reaches a fever-pitch. Israeli Jews who intermarry or otherwise enter sexual relationships with non-Jews have been accused by both official and social media, without a hint of irony, of perpetrating a second Holocaust. Despite this panic, as numerous Israeli op-eds have pointed out, Jews form a clear majority of Israeli society, and thus the hyperbolic attention afforded to the specter of Jewish assimilation within Israel is statistically nonsensical. Further, this condemnation does not fall equally across *all*

¹ Halakha is the collective body of Jewish religious law, as understood through and derived from both oral and written sources (primarily the Torah and the Talmud). The literal translation of the term 'halakha' is 'walk' or 'go', as it is considered the path by which Jewish communities and individuals must lead their lives. It encompasses civil and criminal law, as well as the rules and regulations for proper worship and comportment in the relations of daily life. See, "Halacha: The Laws of Jewish Life," My Jewish Learning, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/halakhah-the-laws-of-jewish-life/>

Jews who choose *all* non-Jewish partners. As we will explore at length, Jewish individuals who enter into romantic relationships with Arab partners face surveillance, vilification, punishment and violence that are not wielded against other pairings. As Elise Burton reports, a 2007 survey of 500 Israeli men and women showed that over 50% of respondents (all Jewish) agreed that “the marriage of a Jewish woman to an Arab man is equal to national treason” (Burton 2015, 86). This too cannot be explained statistically, because the number of Jews who marry white and/or Christian non-Jews is vastly larger than those who marry Arab/Muslims; yet, the specter of Jewish-Arab sexual relationships and their hypothetical product (‘mixed’ children) haunts almost every aspect of Israeli social, political, and cultural life (Burton 2015, 76).

The controversy over Morel and Mahmoud’s wedding gave various far-right Israeli Jewish groups the spotlight they craved. A group known as Lehava, a Hebrew acronym that translates to Preventing Assimilation in the Holy Land, is a particularly pernicious example. Created in 2009, the extremist group is known for tactics that include public marches and physical assaults against Arab men who are suspected by the group to have been involved with Jewish women.² Lehava was present at the protest against Morel and Mahmoud’s nuptials, its members waving signs that read “assimilation is a Holocaust of the Jewish people” (*hitbolelut hi shoah l’am ha-yehudi*) (Burton 2015, 73). Another group that became involved was Yad L’achim, Hebrew for Hand to our Brothers. A relatively better-organized group than Lehava, Yad L’achim’s activities range from a hotline to ‘support’ women who are already engaged in or considering entering into romantic relationships with Arab men, to televised (and wildly popular) paramilitary operations to extract Jewish women from the homes of their Arab partners (Hakak 2015, 1). Their website, which includes English, French, Hebrew and Russian translations and numerous, prominently displayed donation buttons, characterizes their work in the following manner:

“This department deals with women and teenage girls who have become involved with Arab men. In most cases, these relationships lead to marriage, which then deteriorate into violence. Among the many serious problems that result from such

² As reported in Haaretz, these attacks generally go unpunished and are indeed often openly ignored by the police. A Lehava attack against three Palestinian men in East Jerusalem that was covered by Haaretz prompted a lawsuit against the publication by Lehava founder Bentzion Gopstein, who claimed that the three men in question had arrived at the scene of a Lehava protest with the intent of causing trouble, and thus that 20 men who attacked them were acting in self-defense.

relationships is the identity of the children. They are Jews, but they are raised as Arabs” (Yad L’achim, n.d).

The page goes on to detail the organization’s activities, including its “military-like rescues [of Jews] from hostile Arab villages” (Yad L’achim, n.d) and its legal battles, usually centered around petitioning the state to remove half-Jewish children from the care of their Arab parent or relatives. Ever-present is the threat of violence; more specifically, the assertion that Jewish women’s relationships with Arab men can only and always end violently.

In addition to their televised interventions, Yad L’achim operates a hotline for the concerned parents of women and girls who are in, or are considering, relationships with Arab men. These hotlines are manned by social workers who firmly believe that these relationships can only end in violence (Yad L’achim, n.d). Beginning in 2013, they ran a highly successful propaganda campaign with the slogan “your grandchild will be called Achmed son of Sara”, attempting to scare the parents of young Jewish women by conjuring the specter of a ‘mixed’ grandchild. As sociologist Yohai Hakak points out, “helping ‘Achmed son of Sara’ and their ‘survivor’ mothers became the highlight of an extremely successful fund-raising campaign by Yad L’achim that followed” (Hakak 2015, 3). Here, as in numerous other historical and geographical contexts, racism and profit prove to be closely entangled. Their webpage is regularly update with pathos-heavy stories of women saved from the clutches of Arab men and their communities and placed under the marital care of a Jewish man.

These stories are characterized by a noticeable silence - a lack of any comment or corroboration from the women themselves. Hakak makes note of this presumed, and indeed carefully enforced, lack of agency on the part of girls and women of lower socioeconomic classes, many of whom are Mizrahi (a term for Jews from the Middle East or North Africa) or are new immigrants to Israel. Falling under the category of “at-risk” teens, they are often portrayed simultaneously as helpless victims of opportunistic Arab men and as scheming threats against the unity of the Jewish people. Hakak further argues that the “ethnic and class marginality of these young women and girls made them an especially easy target for the intervention of social services and the rabbinic administration,” (Hakak 2015, 48) and that this lack of agency is almost never wielded against upper-class Ashkenazi women who enter

into relationships with Arab men. He attributes this to classist and gendered assumptions about who is capable of choosing freely.

However, a recent, highly publicized incident illustrates the limitations of the assumption that classism and nationalist misogyny alone lie at the core of ‘miscegenation’ fears in Israel. Tzachi Halevi, the Jewish star of the popular Israeli television series *Fauda* (‘chaos’ in Arabic), married Lucy Aharish, an Arab-Israeli news host, in a private ceremony. News of the marriage spread through social media and sparked outrage amongst the Israeli far- and center-right. In a tweet that caused a subsequent uproar, MK (acronym, Member of the *Knesset*, the Israeli parliament) Oren Hazan of the far-right Likud party accused Halevi of having converted to Islam, saying:

“I don’t blame Lucy Aharish for seducing a Jewish soul with the goal of harming our country and for preventing more Jewish progeny from continuing the Jewish dynasty, on the contrary she is welcome to convert. I do blame Tzachi ‘the Islamicizing’ Halevi, who took *Fauda* too far – bro, stop being delusional. Lucy, it’s not personal, but you should know Tzachi is my brother and the Jewish people are my people, stop the assimilation!” (*Haaretz* 2018).

In his accusation of “taking *Fauda* too far”, Hazan refers to Halevi’s character on the show, who is an Israeli army officer involved in a secret relationship with a Palestinian doctor. Other politicians issued slightly more tepid condemnations, with Interior Minister Arye Dery opining that he is “Against such things...despite all the love...” and that while he did not condemn the couple for falling in love and does not believe that Aharish married her husband out of malice towards Israel (a conspiracy theory that circulated online in the days following the wedding), he was concerned that “You’ll [Aharish] have children, and they’ll have a problem in Israel because of [their] status” (*Haaretz* 2018). Here, it is instructive to note that Halevi is neither a woman nor a member of the working class, and thus does not represent the normally targeted demographic. While Halevi and Aharish’s fame and higher economic status may shield them from the types of direct, material consequences and violence that people of lower socioeconomic status are made vulnerable to, their marriage was nonetheless viewed as dangerously transgressive and deserving of public scrutiny.

2.1. “Non-Physical Kidnappings”: Government Involvement and Vigilante Surveillance

Given the racialized partition of space maintained in Israel (this we will explore in detail later), “the option of crossing these lines of segregation through a romantic relationship is inconceivable” (Hakak 2015, 46) to most citizens of Israel, Jewish or otherwise. The ongoing political crisis between Israel and Palestine serves as a justification for segregation on the basis of ‘security’ and “maintains the status of fellow Arab citizens [of Israel] as part of the enemy camp” (Hakak 2014, 46). It should also be pointed out that groups such as Lehava and Yad L’achim have a considerable amount of influence at the highest levels of government. In 2013, Lehava was successful in getting a law passed that banned Jewish women who were volunteering at hospitals, as part of their army service, from working night shifts: it was suggested that this environment was likely to foster romantic relationships between these women and Arab doctors (Hakak 2015, 2).

It is important to avoid the assumption that these are fringe concerns, or in any way outside of what is normatively acceptable. Relatively few married Muslim, Christian and Druze residents of Israel (1%) say their spouse has a different religion, and only 2% of married Jews say they have a spouse who belongs to a non-Jewish religion or is religiously unaffiliated. While there is a clear discomfort across all social groups in Israel with the concept of intermarriage, an overwhelming majority of Jews (97%) state that they would be “not too comfortable” or “not comfortable at all” with their child marrying a Muslim in particular (Pew Research Center 2017). This throws a wrench into the common Israeli defense against accusations of racism - that for a Jew to marry *any* non-Jew is problematic, all things being equal. The evidence suggests the contrary: *what kind* of non-Jew does indeed matter a great deal. In the past three decades there have been numerous cases of protest marches against “foreign men who steal our daughters” (Hakak 2015, 25), in which Arab men specifically were physically attacked and injured by the crowd. Similarly, while most cities in Israel and Palestine are highly segregated, in areas where there is a larger percentage of ethnic diversity it is not uncommon to find civilian patrol groups that carefully monitor

public areas such as malls and parks and intimidate Arab men and Jewish women from approaching each other (Hakak 2015, 3).

All of this has been profoundly effective. The intermarriage rate between Jews and non-Jews in Israel is a mere 2%, with an even smaller percentage representing marriages between Jews and Arabs (Pew Research Center 2017). Yet despite this, the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) has devoted a formidable amount of time and resources towards addressing this problem as if it were imminently causing the collapse of the state. In 2006, a report published by the State Comptroller on the treatment of “at risk” girls in four separate municipalities dedicated a section of its findings specifically to the treatment of “girls at risk who befriended adults...from the margins of society” (Hakak 2015, 49). The report found that 54 young women from two municipalities had become involved through their relations with these “adults” in drug dealing, prostitution, and other illegal acts. In 2007, the Knesset Parliamentary Committee for Internal Affairs centered around this report. Hakak reports that at this meeting, when someone reminded the crowd that “befriending an adult” is not illegal or in any sense a crime - and thus that “adults” was obviously a euphemism for “Arabs” - a department deputy manager at the State Comptroller responded with contempt:

“We definitely didn’t write even one word in the report that relates to religion or nationality. We don’t deal with religion and nationality and didn’t go into who these adults were. We are talking about people at the margins of society that pull the girls in a negative direction” (Hakak 2015, 49).

This represents an interesting moment of tension between two opposing impulses within the Israeli state: to brand the state a Jewish state or a democratic state. *Hasbara*, pro-Israel propaganda, has found great success in presenting the state as an oasis of tolerance and modernity within the otherwise ‘backwards’ and anachronistic Middle East. Maintaining this image proves materially valuable for both liberals and conservatives alike, who insist that there is no tension within Israel’s self-fashioning as both a Jewish and a democratic state.

However, cases such as the aforementioned Knesset Parliamentary Meeting clearly present the incompatible demands of these two imperatives. To be a Jewish state first and foremost requires a racialized hierarchy of power structuring all aspects of political, and consequently social, life. Within such a system it is logically coherent to pass laws directly discriminating against members of particular ethnic groups. However, to maintain a

semblance of multicultural democracy by definition requires treating all citizens equally, rendering laws against “befriending adults” of particular ethnic groups incoherent. The ‘balance’ that was found in this particular situation was a verbal scrubbing of all mentions of race from a fundamentally racist proposition. To borrow from David Goldberg, it is a prime example of “counter-commitment regarding race in social arrangements [being] expressed as color-blindness, or more generally as racelessness” (Goldberg 2009, 330).

Yet if the language at this particular meeting was coded, it would not remain so going forward. In December 2011, an emergency parliamentary meeting was held by the Committee on Immigration, Absorption, and Jewish Diaspora. In his opening statement, MK Danny Danon declared:

“We were all exposed to very frightening evidence of the troubling rise in the number of cases of young women from low socio-economic backgrounds that are simply being kidnapped...that men from minority groups are simply forcing girls into cars...*it is important to mention that most of the cases aren't physical kidnapping but cases are such in which a romantic relationship is being developed*” (Danon, quoted in Hakak 2015, 51. Emphasis mine).

MK Danon, a member of current Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu’s far-right Likud party, saw no need to clarify what exactly a non-physical kidnapping might be; after all, that was not important. By invoking a term heavy with both pathos and legal weight, Danon was proposing the criminalization of romantic relationships between Jewish women and Arab men on the grounds that consent cannot be given by these women. The portrayal of the young women in question as poor, helpless, and not fully “integrated” into Israel society accomplishes the rhetorical work that Danon wishes to see legalized. It is instructive that Yad L’Achim and Lehava were also present and vocal at this meeting, an example of the blurring of the line between state and private interest. The fact that both groups have, through methods both legal and illegal, made it their mission to terrorize Arab citizens of Israel in the name of preventing “assimilation” - itself a euphemism for Arab-Jewish relationships - apparently did not disqualify them from participation in the debate.

Interestingly, the veracity of the data presented by these groups was only questioned by a representative of the police department, Inspector Rachel Gribben, who declared unequivocally that the police had no idea what anyone was talking about and had dealt with

no cases that matched MK Danon's "non-physical kidnapping" scenario (Hakak 2015, 50). This response raised the ire of Lehava, whose spokesperson argued:

"Just like we have a law that says that sex with a minor, even if they are willing, is forbidden, the same is needed here. The moment they 'buy' the girl with (a can of) coke, pizza, 500 shekels or a mobile phone and she is a minor – this is kidnapping. Indeed, they don't take her by force, and you will ask her - she's fine...and when the family calls the police and the police calls the girl, the girl says 'why not? I love him'" (Hakak 2015, 50).

Here we see a disturbing normalization of the idea of criminalizing sexual contact between Jews and Arabs. The parties involved seized on both preexisting laws against sexual contact with minors as well as fundamentally sexist, classist, and racist discourses that predetermine who is deemed capable of making choices and who is not. Or, as Tammy Razi explains, the girls' choice of partners "were perceived as the most dangerous expression of crossing religious and national borders, and as a sign of the ethnic proximity between Mizrahi Jews and Arabs, which in itself threatened the national, ethnic, and geographical separation between Jews and Arabs" (Razi 2009, 250). However, where Razi sees "ethnicity", I argue that the slippage between categories of nation, ethnic group, and religion, the work that each of these categories is employed to do, and the understood nature of these categories as imbued within the body renders them both racialized and racializing. We will explore the close entanglement of sexual panic with fears of racial contamination converging around the working class at length in the following chapter. What is important to note here is that these young women find themselves in a rhetorical double-bind from which they cannot escape: their social status renders them always-already both silence-able and corruptible, and their relationships with Arab men are wielded against them as evidence that they have been corrupted and silenced.

2.1.1 Personal Accounts: Complicating the Narrative

We have focused so far on institutional attempts - state, private, and hybrid - to prevent intermarriage. But how do these tensions and fears play out at a personal level? I

began this project with my own anecdote – the threat of debilitating sexual violence that was immediately presented to me as the only possible outcome of my relationship with an ‘Arab’. This association, between violence or bodily disfigurement and mixed relationships is so commonly and instantly uttered that it appears almost as a Pavlovian response, or a verbal tick. Loolwa Khazoom, a Mizrahi writer and activist, quotes her neighbor’s response upon finding out she was dating a Muslim Bedouin man: “You better watch out...They’re all smiles and well-mannered on the outside, but when you least expect it, they’ll slit your throat” (Khazoom 2019). To enter into a mixed relationship is to risk verbal harassment, social ostracization, physical assault, and even, in the case of young women from lower-income families, incarceration in psychiatric institutions (Hakak 2015).

But as with all complex processes, the experiences of those in mixed relationships are not uniform, nor are they signified only by pain and dislocation. A *Jerusalem Post* article written in honor of Valentine’s Day took a uniquely progressive stance: while acknowledging the difficulties and violences often faced by such couples, the article takes clear steps towards normalizing these relationships. Describing a middle-class heterosexual couple from Jaffa, a mixed neighborhood in Tel Aviv, the article quips: “On Valentine’s Day, the widely practiced celebration of love, the two will spend their time just like any busy couple juggling work, school and love” (Kamisher 2017). It goes on to detail the daily normalcies of any relationship – drinking beers and eating chocolate, hanging out with each other’s friends. The couple in question, identified in the article as Michal and Achmed, assert that the success of their relationship, or at least their relative comfort, is largely due to having “[created] a really nice bubble for ourselves”. It is interesting to note that the term “bubble” is not without precedent in their specific context: Tel Aviv is often referred to as “the bubble”, with both positive and negative intent. It refers to the city’s purported (and often self-declared) removal from the political and social turmoil of the rest of the country, and indeed the region, due to its wealth and its free-wheeling, relaxed social atmosphere.

This is, of course, more an ideal than a reflection of the reality of life in Tel Aviv. But it remains true that the immediate community surrounding a couple, and especially acceptance by their families, is critical to whether they will be able to determine the trajectory of their relationship for themselves. In Michal and Ahmed’s case, both reported that their families and friends were accepting and even encouraging of their relationship, although

Michal's father had expressed mild concern over how the couple's hypothetical children would be raised. According to Michal, the only time their bubble was shattered was during her military service, when the other women she was living with told her to not bring her "Arab boyfriend" to the house. Given the experiences of harassment, ostracization, and even incarceration that many individuals report, their situation is a success story indeed (Kamisher 2017).

The other couple whose story was covered by the article is unique in its own way: Mahdi, an Arab Muslim 17-year-old who is dating an Israeli Jewish woman, is an avowed right-wing Zionist and is vocally supportive of Netanyahu's Likud party. According to the article, Mahdi hopes to convert to Judaism, a task that is near-impossible for Arab Israelis. Perhaps determined to counter the overwhelmingly negative portrayals of interrelationships, the article ends on a positive note:

"...spending their first Valentine's Day together in a state that sees their relationship as a threat to Jewish continuity, Mahdi is resolute in the future of his relationship. 'Love can beat every single problem', he said" (Kamisher 2017).

While it could be argued that all lovestruck 17-year-olds view their relationships as uniquely 'meant to be', the belief that love can conquer all has been embraced broadly by a global community of social progressives who read their own meanings into these already-overdetermined relationships, seeing them as the future of 'coexistence' in Israel/Palestine.

This was an animating assumption behind the creation of a popular Facebook group, "Jews & Arabs Refuse to be Enemies". Born out of the violence of the summer of 2014, the group highlights not only romantic relationships, but also friendships between Arabs and/or Muslims (here we see a discursive slippage between the two categories) and Jews. People around the world posted photos with their friends and partners, often holding signs indicating who in the relationship was Jewish and who was Arab, always with the hashtag "Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies." One photo (see figure below), shared over a thousand times, depicts a heterosexual couple kissing and holding a sign pointing towards the woman's visibly pregnant belly. The sign reads "I am a Dutch/Tun[i]sian Muslim [pointing towards the man] and I am a Dutch Jew [pointing towards the woman]. She [indicating the unborn child] is a result of our love! How can she be an enemy of herself?" (Jews and Arabs Refuse

to be Enemies, 2014). This point – the child’s inability to “be an enemy of herself” – directs us to a fundamental set of fears that animates the specter of romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Namely, the status of ‘mixed’ children, whose very existence throws into question the organizing logic of the Israeli state – a racialized and classed hierarchy in which privileges and access to resources are unevenly distributed (Abu El-Haj 2010).



Source: facebook.com/JewsAndArabsRefuseToBeEnemies

As mentioned at the outset, while gay and lesbian relationships threaten this project in other ways, I focus here largely on heterosexual relationships for their potential to produce children whose existence, a complex entanglement of inheritances, would be fundamentally destabilizing to the organizing logic of the Israeli state. And while it is certainly a fair point that, given how the couple pictured above (and indeed the majority of those who posted their interfaith friendships or romances on the Facebook group) are not Israeli or Palestinian, and thus cannot speak to the unique challenges and experiences of those who are, I concur with Frederick Cooper that “organizational and discursive resources can bring together people across borders – contingently and with awareness of the asymmetrical power relations involved” (Cooper 2005, 139).

Even within groups and organizations that accept or even celebrate interrelationships and ‘mixed’ marriages, we find an interesting tendency to try to ‘salvage’ the ‘Jewishness’

of the relationship. This may be a genuine concern, but it also serves as a careful strategy to counter the assertions of groups such as Lehava and Yad L'achim, whose slogans and advertising campaigns insist that to marry someone outside of one's own racio-religious group is synonymous with losing one's identity. One organization engaged in such efforts, albeit with a focus largely on American Jewish communities, is InterfaithFamily (IFF), which boasts a website full of blog posts, articles, and resources for couples and families within which one partner is not Jewish. Their promotional video, filled with testimonials from grateful couples and shots of healthy young adults frolicking in parks, makes the following claim directly: "Interfaith couples and families are a significant part of the Jewish future. They are the future of the Jewish community" (Interfaithfamily.com, n.d). Given the huge stigma against intermarriage both in Israel and in Jewish communities historically worldwide, this is no small statement. And while Israel is continually gestured to as a reference point for Jewish life and Jewish sociopolitical opinion – IFF's promotional video includes a picture of Morel Malka and Mahmoud Mansour on their wedding day, alongside a statistic claiming that 70% of Israelis do not support intermarriage – IFF's resources and cultural context are very much geared towards American Jews, and upper/middle-class American Jews at that.

With the recognition that, far from being selfish or tragically misguided as is often suggested by anti-assimilation groups, many young Jews across a wide variety of contexts place equal importance on community values as on individual happiness, IFF and similar organizations seek to create a space in which there would be no necessary conflict between the two. It should be noted that, focused on this specific subset of the Jewish community as it is, IFF's work likely has little to offer lower/working-class individuals or couples whose relationships are doubly stigmatized by their economic and ethnic marginalization. Further, the group refers specifically to relationships being 'mixed' on the basis of different religious beliefs or practices, with ethnic or racial identity placed as relevant only secondarily.

Indeed, while the question of interracial relationships is explored on the website's blog, it is done so in a way that makes it unclear exactly what the IFF considers to be an interracial relationship. Particularly given the racialization of religion both within the Jewish community and more broadly within contemporary sociopolitical discourses, for a Jew to marry *anyone* non-Jewish brings in questions of racial identity and racialized hierarchy – at least in Israel. Likely due to the fact that in the U.S 'race' is deemed to be determined by

phenotype and phrenology alone, the IFF's blog entries and articles dealing with *interracial* marriages seem to take these to be marriages between light-skinned Ashkenazi Jews and anyone Black, brown, or Muslim (here figured, again, as a racial category). One particularly interesting blog post, purportedly written by David (an Italian-American Jew) and Nadia (a Pakistani-American Muslim), discusses the difficulties that their relationship has encountered as a result of their different religious and cultural backgrounds, and argues that in terms of acceptance by family members, "the Jewish community as a whole is a lot less prejudiced" – a statement that would no doubt raise the eyebrows of similar couples living in Israel. When discussing their plans for their children – a topic which is central to the IFF's resources – they write:

"David believes that raising our children Jewish will benefit them enormously as it will not only teach them good lessons but will eliminate any negativity that is contained within Islam. It is something noteworthy, as we would not want our daughter to grow up and think she will be punished for marrying a man of her choice, who may be non-Muslim. Nadia wants to keep parts of her culture and teach her kids the positive things that her religion taught her" (David Nadia 2014).

Aside from the deeply questionable assertions that Judaism as a set of cultural values is a) unified and universally agreed upon across all contexts and b) some sort of antidote for Islamic "negativity", the article gestures to numerous assumption that animate fears over the specter of interrelationships – fears that appear to be present both in Israeli and American Jewish communities.

For one, the question of children looms large; specifically, the gendered assumption that a mother must be culturally fit to raise a Jewish child – a fitness that her association with Islam or her own family throws into question in the eyes of the Jewish community. That the burden is on Nadia, rather than David, to choose "parts of her culture" to keep is in line with the IFF's goal to retain as much 'Jewishness' as possible within intermarried families. While the IFF and its members may view Israeli reticence towards interrelationships as anachronistic or distasteful, they have clearly not divorced themselves from the assumptions and logics that underlie Israeli 'miscegenation' and 'assimilation' fears – that an essential 'Jewishness' is at risk of being lost through the creation of 'mixed' children, and that said Jewishness must be preserved. As the very existence of a group such as the IFF would

suggest, intermarriage rates in the U.S are significantly higher than in Israel: while 98% of Israeli Jews are married to other Jews, only 56% of American Jews living in the U.S have a Jewish spouse (Pew Research Center 2017).

2.1.1.1 Zionism and the “Assimilating Majority”

This significant disparity points once again to the conundrum that is the specter of interrelationships in Israel. Given the overwhelming majority of Jews in terms of population (80%) and the clearly insignificant number of Jews who have married non-Jews (2%), it seems baffling that miscegenation fears would be so much more pronounced, and so much more visible in pop culture and sociopolitical discourse, in Israel than it is in the U.S (Pew Research Center 2017).³ Elise Burton refers to this as the fear of an “assimilating majority”, and asks a simple question: how can a majority group assimilate into a minority group? Burton traces these concerns back to pre-state Zionist thought in Europe, which turned heavily on then-popular notions of eugenic science and racial purity. The assertion of Jews as a racial category determined by ‘blood’ has a long history dating back arguably to the 2nd century CE (more on this in the following chapter). This would later become entangled with the eugenic anthropological ‘science’ of the 19th century that held that there was as a biological basis for racial categories. A full excavation of this history is well outside the parameters of this project, but a summarization of its ultimate entanglement with nation-building projects is necessary as it pertains directly to the creation of the state of Israel and the social boundaries and hierarchies that have come to define it.⁴

Decades before the founding of the state, Zionist thinkers were already linking the creation of a Jewish state, a fundamentally political entity, with the biological redemption of the Jewish ‘race’. As Burton succinctly explains:

⁴ For a nuanced historiography of the search of the Jewish gene, see Nadia Abu El-Haj’s work *The Genealogical Science*.

“Zionism takes numerous ideological forms that diverge considerably on several fundamental questions but all of its incarnations harbor the same basic assumptions: that the Jewish people or nation constitute a cohesive unit of humanity that is bound together not only by shared beliefs and practices, but also by shared ancestry, a concept often conflated with biological race or ethnicity” (Burton 2015, 75).

The classification of Jewishness as a coherent racial category was expanded upon by Max Nordau, an influential Zionist thinker, and co-founder (alongside the better-remembered Theodor Herzl) of the World Zionist Organization. One of Nordau’s famous works, *Degeneration*, envisioned a ‘new Jew’ saved from genetic deterioration by the building of a state, an activity that, for Nordau, was decidedly masculine (Weiss 2002). Taking sociopolitical circumstances to be the direct result of bodily desires and affects, Nordau argued that the persecution faced by European Jews was wrought by their own genetic deterioration, which he declared to be “a black death of degeneration and hysteria” (Nordau 1895, 537). Nordau’s obsession with the relationship he saw between perverse sexual behavior – for him, this consisted of anything outside of the most normative, procreative heterosexual contact – and societal collapse is instructive, as racializing and sexualizing processes would continue to be deeply entwined in the creation of the state of Israel. As we will discuss in the following chapter, these same associations would go on to determine the experiences and social classification of Sephardic and Arab Jews when they arrived in the newly-created state of Israel.

At the Second Zionist Conference in 1898, Nordau introduced the concept of the “muscle Judaism” (*muskel-Judenthum*), and of “muscle Jew” as the ideal, masculinized and properly-desiring body that would, in tandem with the construction of a secular, nationalist state, be the catalyst of the “‘regeneration’ of the male Jewish body into one that is militarily fit to fight for “self-reaffirmation” (Amraoui 2013, 85). Responding to a troubling history of anti-Semitic anthropological and medical attributions of effeminacy to the Jewish male body, Nordau does not refute these claims, but rather assesses them as accurate yet remediable. This is an assumption, alternately stated and implied, that persisted throughout the early 20th century as “European and American Jewish scientists drew upon the reigning paradigms of race science to generate their own scientific accounts of the (racial) character of the Jews...recognizing the ‘fact’ of Jewish degeneration while reinterpreting its cause” (Abu El

Haj 2012, 32). Nordau, like the majority of 19th century Zionist thinkers, understood Jewish identity not as something learned through socialization or inherited through tradition (although these were understood to be part and parcel of what made a ‘real’ Jew), but as something biologically inherited and thus manifesting itself in observable physical traits – in other words, as a race (Burton 2015, 75).

Nordau’s vision of the muscle Jew would become more widely accepted as an ideal embodiment of Jewish racial purity than he could have imagined. Early 20th century fascist and nationalist projects linked discourses of racial purity to the state and to citizenship and, as texts such as *Degeneration* illustrate, racializing processes were linked inextricably with sexualizing and gendering processes (see McClintock 1995). Earlier experiments with nationalist assimilation also hinted at this – during the *Halaskah* (Jewish enlightenment) movement in the late 19th century, Russian and German Jewish men encouraged each other to “Be a Jew at home and a man in the street” (Harms and Ferry 2008, 49). This division – the splitting between ‘man’ and ‘Jew’ – was not to last. As the ideal body of the proper national citizen took shape in various global contexts through the state-building and colonial projects of the 19th and 20th centuries, a great deal of interest – both popular and ‘scientific’-developed around the problem of determining who belonged in a nation-state and who did not, a determination which took on racialized, classed and gendered terms.

Referencing the 19th century work of German and Austrian (respectively) physicians Felix Theilhaber and Ignaz Zollschan who spoke dramatically of a “racial suicide” and the “decomposition” of the Jewish people, Burton notes that these fears were directly clustered around intermarriage, which these authors believed had been encouraged by Jewish assimilation into secular European spaces such as national schools. This, they believed, created “demographic insecurity, because it facilitates intermarriage with non-Jews and thus creates ‘mixed’ Jewish offspring whose status as authentic Jews cannot be consistently determined” (Burton 2015, 76). With these concerns already firmly in mind, several decades later European Zionists would find in Palestine a society that, while still delineated in many ways along ethnic lines, was to them entirely too unclear. Menachem Klein argues in his seminal work on Jewish and Arab lives during the late Ottoman/British Mandate period that religious rituals, commemorations of life events such as births, weddings and deaths, linguistic preferences, daily practices such as shopping and food preparation, and bodily

intimacies including breast feeding and sexual relations were far less separate than is generally assumed (see Klein 2014). The messy realities of everyday life in Palestine did not in any sense conform to the expectations of the Zionist thinkers, whose imagining of a ‘pure’ nation that would redeem the European Jewish community from its purported degeneracy was a fundamental organizing impetus of the Zionist movement. Thus, while it is important to not idealize Ottoman or Mandatory Palestine as a haven of tolerance or as a classless or ‘raceless’ society, it remains true that the highly intermixed nature of daily life practices and the difficulty in distinguishing ‘Jewish’ tastes and comportment from those of their Arab neighbors represented a troublesome reality for those who wished to build a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. We will discuss this further as we move into chapter two.

2.1.1.1.1 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to trace the numerous means employed by both state and private organizations of discouraging and intervening in romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Moving from non-governmental (yet nonetheless highly politically influential) groups such as Lehava and Yad L’achim to emergency meetings of the Knesset, to the segregation of public spaces and the careful boundary-keeping efforts of citizen groups, this chapter has attempted to map for the reader the material reality mobilized by the specter of ‘mixed’ relationships. But what is it that animates this specter? We have begun to examine the gendered and classed nature of prohibitions on romantic contact between certain bodies, which we will continue to explore in the next chapter. However, as we have seen in the case of Tzachi Halevi and Lucy Aharish, a focus on gender or class alone cannot fully explain the conundrum of why, given both the overwhelming majority that Jews represent in Israel and the statistical near-nonexistence of romantic relationships between Jews and Arabs, these relationships nevertheless occupy such an overwrought position of importance. Further, nationalist constructions of gender roles and an attempt to control the behaviors of the lower-socioeconomic classes, or generalized concerns about ‘assimilation’ cannot account for why relationships between *Arabs* and Jews specifically are rendered uniquely unacceptable, as opposed to relationships between Jews and non-Jews more generally. In the next chapter, I

will argue that at the heart of these fears lies a recognition of the fundamentally unstable nature of racial categories. As we will see, attempts to prevent mixed relationships represent an effort to solidify inheritance - that is, access to resources, legal rights, and cultural capital - in the contested geographical territory of the Israeli state.



3. RACIALIZED HIERARCHY AND DESIRE

The long history of who ‘counts’ as a Jew, of what practices should be considered Jewish, and of which bodies should be privileged over others is, to borrow a phrase from Frederick Cooper, “lumpy” (Cooper 2005, 111) and filled with inconsistencies, uncertainties, and contextual specificities. To trace this history, I will first attempt to historicize racialized hierarchies of power and understandings of race as they closely entwine with and inform fears of miscegenation in contemporary Israel. Accordingly, I will argue for the necessity of a theoretical framework centering racism and racialization to understand these fears as they emerged historically in Israel/Palestine. But why talk about race when discussing Israel? Generally speaking, the term that most readily pops to mind when discussing the fraught history of the Middle East is ‘ethnicity’, or perhaps ‘ethnic differences’. However, there are several problems with this framing that chip away at its initial usefulness. Ethnic groups undoubtedly exist insofar as individuals recognize themselves as members of one or more groups, and it is reasonable to say that said groups often maintain aspects of their socio-cultural cohesion across shifting political and economic circumstances. Nevertheless, it seems that within both popular and academic discourse the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ are often deployed, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to make racializing processes appear as something cultural, or as a somehow natural outcome of the traditions of a particular group.

The term ‘ethnicity,’ when used to explain events or processes as they unfolded in Palestine and Israel, thus has a tendency to belie the complexity of, and internal divisions within, the two groups that are generally singled out – Jews and Arabs - by whitewashing the historic and ongoing difficulty of parsing out who belongs and who doesn’t in each category. That is, it assumes that who is considered an ‘Arab’ or a ‘Jew’ is something clear, and that it

is outside of processes that have historically produce bodies and social taxonomies within hierarchical systems of privilege – in other words, racializing processes. To try to shoehorn these issues into the framework of ‘ethnic conflict’, or to suggest further that the nature of the contemporary conflict between Israel and Palestine is a case of inherently incompatible ethnic groups stepping on each other’s toes, is to flatten space, time, and context.

To avoid falling into this narrative, it is necessary to examine this history through the lens of racialization and racism as they produce and inform “the organization of the state around the distinction between Jew and non-Jew, military and civilian legal systems, enclosure and movement and, since the 1967 war, the additional distinction between citizen and subject” (Abu El Haj 2010, 30). Further, it is critically important to recognize that the structures of the Israeli state do not begin in 1948, nor even with the British Mandate. While the creation of the state of Israel was a watershed event that very much set in motion a new range of outcomes and life possibilities for the former imperial subjects who lived within its borders (as well as many others), I argue that it important to counter the popular narrative that the social landscape within the newly founded state represents a complete rupture from the structures, identities, and common knowledges of the past (see Klein, 2014) and accordingly, to avoid falling into a teleological history that arrives inevitably at “the triumph of the nation-state” (Cooper 2005, 22). One example of such a structural continuity is the *millet* (ethno-religious community) system, a legal system of governance implemented by the Ottomans that “recognized its non-Muslim populations (namely Jews and Christians) as distinct, largely self-governing communities... protected by imperial privileges” (Naar 2016, 6) and placed jurisdiction over marriage and various other legal affairs in the hands of religious leaders. The vestiges of this system are still in place in Israel, where the fact that religious authorities oversee and legitimate marriages within their respective communities renders intermarriage effectively impossible (Burton 2015, 75). Thus, while the scope of this paper remains roughly within the period between the late 1920s until the present, further research towards excavating racializing processes and assemblages of race in their full historical context in Ottoman Palestine and the Ottoman Middle East as a whole is absolutely necessary.

Racializing processes designate “meaning to somatic characteristics” (Meer 2012, 6) and attribute particular tastes, desires, standards of public comportment, and sexual

tendencies as indicative of racial membership. In this way, politically necessary social taxonomies are produced between those who belong and those who do not, between those who can expect particular material privileges and resources allotted to them and those who cannot. It is a well-worn observation, but one that bears repeating: one generally defines what one *is* by first conjuring what one is *not*, a project that is constantly shifting and always incomplete. And while the concept of a monoracial state may have been new circa the late 19th century, racialization and racializing processes were decidedly not.

This, I argue, is where the specter of intermarriage and ‘miscegenation’ attains its overwrought importance. Political scientist Debra Thompson locates a number of concerns associated with regulation of interracial sexual relationships in both colonial and postcolonial, nation-state settings, including:

“...the transgression of gendered/raced social boundaries; the exposure of raced/gendered sexualities; the interlocking and mutually reinforcing nature of patriarchal, white supremacist and capitalist systems of domination; the threat of non-white access to white capital; the potential of mixed-race progeny; and the predicament of racial categorization precisely at the points at which categories come undone, classification schema crumble and ‘race’ is most clearly illustrated as a social and political construction with real consequences” (Thompson 2008, 3).

While Thompson is specifically focusing on the history of anti-miscegenation legislation in the U.S and Canada, the similarities are profound: all of the social and institutional concerns that she lays out are present in contemporary Israeli society and have been deeply formative of the structures of the modern nation-state. We discussed in the first chapter the material realities and discriminations facing those Jews and Arabs who enter into ‘mixed’ relationships, and the myriad institutions and organizations that have developed specifically to prevent these relationships. In the following sections, I will seek to locate these fears within the larger landscape of racialized hierarchy in Israel, going back as far as the tumultuous end of Ottoman rule in Palestine. Drawing from Thompson’s excellent summary, I will argue that surrounding miscegenation fears, or perhaps at the heart of them, is a constellation of other “points at which categories come undone and classification schema crumble” (Thompson 2008, 3), threatening to throw into chaos a highly precarious system of land ownership, privilege and power.

3.1 From Palestine towards Israel: Organizing Bodies in the 20th Century

During the late 19th century (the waning of the period of Ottoman rule), the Jewish population of Palestine was thought to be between 2% - 5% of the total population (McCarthy 1990, 10). This would change rapidly during what is known as the first *Aliyah* -the Hebrew term given to Jewish migration to the land of Israel/Palestine - which stretched from 1882-1903 and consisted of 25,000 Jewish immigrants, primarily of Eastern European origin. While Zionist thought was beginning to gain traction and followers throughout Europe at the time, and many of these first *'olim* were indeed ideologically motivated, the majority were primarily interested in escaping persecution in Russia and may not have had particularly strong ideological or nationalist sentiments (Harms and Ferry 2008, 53). Contrary to popular Israeli rhetoric, the Jews already living in Palestine at the time greeted the new *'olim* with suspicion and trepidation. As a small minority living in relative cohesion with their Muslim and Christian neighbors, they were concerned that the massive influx of new immigrants would unsettle their place in Palestinian society. Their concerns were realized during the second *Aliyah*, which was both qualitatively and quantitatively different from the first. Harms and Ferry explain:

“With focused intent the immigrants of the Second Aliyah continued what the earlier immigrants had inaugurated, somewhat feebly. They acquired as much land as possible so as to begin to ‘create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine.’ Through the ‘conquest of labor’, Zionists at the turn of the century applied a philosophy slightly divergent from many of the earlier immigrants, namely, an emphasis on establishing settlements that would operate exclusively on Jewish labor. In other words, the *fellahin* [peasant farmers or laborers] who had just been reduced to tenant farmers as a result of Ottoman land laws and Zionist land purchases would now be unwelcome on the land altogether” (Harms and Ferry 2008, 62).

To secure this policy, one of the first military organizations founded by the New Yishuv⁵ was *Hashomer* (‘the guard’). This group was primarily devoted to securing Jewish

⁵ The term given to Jewish settlers who, beginning in 1860 and continuing until the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, built new settlements outside the walls of the Old City (Jerusalem) and expanded, building exclusively Jewish neighborhoods and villages. The term includes members of the First Aliyah in 1882.

land ownership, an early suturing of land rights to racial hierarchy and Jewish ‘birthright’ (see Levy, 2014).

Here, it is important to note that while there are important differences between what secular Zionists and Orthodox Jews view to be the nature of what constitutes ‘Jewishness’, Zionist thinkers viewed *halakhic* prohibitions against intermarriage as a historically useful social prohibition that had conveniently preserved the racial ‘purity’ of the Jewish nation (Burton 2015, 75). This purity was, in the eyes of the European Zionist thinkers, to face an unprecedented challenge: the immigration, beginning in the late 1940s, of thousands of Jews from Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Yemen, and other Arab-majority countries to Israel. This immigration was very much a calculated part of the Zionist state-building project, as the gathering of the ‘lost tribes’ of Israel under the banner of nationalism was deemed both demographically and rhetorically necessary (Shohat 2006, 62). While the Sephardic/Mizrahi perspective on this history and its ongoing legacy is certainly not secondary, I will focus briefly on the problems this migration presented from the perspective of the Ashkenazi elite, who saw not the reality of a highly diverse (but primarily urban)⁶ immigrant community, but a flood of dangerously corrupting cultural, social, and racial elements.

In 1948, Ashkenazi journalist Arye Gelblum wrote of the Sephardim that they were “a race we have not known yet in this country...people whose primitivism is at a peak, whose level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance, and worse, who have little talent for understanding anything intellectual. Generally, *they are only slightly better than the general level of the Arabs, Negroes, and Berbers in the same regions*” (Gelblum 1949, emphasis mine). Here we see not only the racialized hierarchy that would come to define the experiences and life possibilities of the Sephardim in Israel, but also an attempt to parse the necessary difference between Jews and Arabs, at a moment when such a difference seemed tenuous yet was absolutely necessary to the political project at hand.

However, while it may be tempting to read Gelblum’s pontification as evidence of bourgeois confidence in their status as elite, I disagree. I see instead a fundamental insecurity, a fear of both contagion from external sources as well as from within that animates the need

⁶ Shohat notes that, despite popular (and still dominant) belief that the Sephardic/Mizrahi immigrants were poor, rural ‘cave dwellers’, the majority actually immigrated from cities such as Cairo, Baghdad, and Istanbul, were largely middle-class, and were certainly not strangers to ‘Western’ technologies, as was the common Ashkenazi belief.

to perpetually redraw and reproduce social taxonomies. Similarly, Shohat indicts the Israeli Zionist project in the following terms:

“The Zionist master narrative has little place for either Palestinians or Sephardim, but while Palestinians possess a clear counter narrative, the Sephardi story is a fractured one, embedded in both Jewish and Arab history. Distinguishing the “evil” East (the Muslim Arab) from the “good” East (the Jewish Arab), Israel has taken upon itself to “cleanse” the Sephardim of their Arabness and redeem them from their “primal sin” of belonging to the Orient” (Shohat 2017, 44).

While it is undoubtedly true that such a “cleansing” was deemed necessary by the Ashkenazi elite of the day, the universalism and self-assured modernity that Shohat attributes to the Ashkenazim, or at least to the Ashkenazi secular elite, “was less universal and less European in practice than it was in theory, shifting in response not only to the particularities encountered in the colonies but to reconfigurations of ideologies and practices some Europeans thought were their own” (Cooper 2005, 140). Shohat aptly recognizes that European identity was articulated in response to the particular experiences of colonialism (and thus was very much not a product of Europe alone), yet nevertheless portrays European racial chauvinism as wielded with confidence and certainty against Sephardic communities.

However, there is nothing obvious nor natural about racial membership or hierarchy, whether we call it European-ness, Jewishness, or whiteness; such categories are constantly in need of re-articulation. To believe otherwise is to risk accepting as a historical fact the self-reassuring European colonial narratives of ultimate knowledge and superiority. It is thus more productive to look at Ashkenazi discourses of racial purity and dominance as stemming from a fundamental uncertainty: further, it is this uncertainty that animates the specter of ‘mixed’ Arab/Jewish relationships and lends it an overblown potency. It is worth noting here that in the 1960s-90s (and to only a slightly lesser extent today) there was not only concern over Jewish/Arab intermarriage, but also over Ashkenazi/Sephardic intermarriage, as it threatened the “tainting of the Ashkenazi race” (Shohat 2017, 42). As late as 1983, liberal and self-proclaimed progressive Ashkenazi journalist Amnon Dankner wrote an article in *Haaretz* proclaiming that the Sephardim were not his “brothers” or “sisters”, and described being forced to have a conversation with them in the following manner:

“They place me in the same cage with a baboon run amok and tell me: OK, now you're together, so get a dialogue going. There's no alternative. Sorry, but he's biting my neck. How can I talk to him? He has a hatred that I am not equipped with. He has sharp teeth the likes of which I don't have” (Dankner, quoted in Shohat 2017, 42).

Here we see a clear equation of Ashkenazi Jewish status as whiteness, and an articulation not only of whiteness as rationality and proper public comportment, but of non-whiteness as animalism and barbarism. Dankner's righteous exasperation reads not only as racist, but more deeply as an attempt at self-reassurance: he has done everything he could (and, by extension, so have all well-intentioned Ashkenazi liberals), and the those on what he sees as the other side simply refuse to recognize his natural superiority.

Dankner's article makes clear the concern he feels that his rightful position at the top of a socio-cultural hierarchy is being threatened by corrupting elements from within; namely, non-white Jews. While a full historiography of the relations between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in Israel is well outside of the scope of this paper, his article serves as an example of how, as Ann Stoler explains, “the regulatory mechanisms of the colonial state were directed not only at the colonized, but as forcefully at the ‘internal enemies’ within the heterogeneous population that comprised the category of Europeans themselves” (Stoler 2002, 96). In the sections that follow, I will attempt to trace this constellation of factors as they have informed and produced understandings of Jewishness and fears of contamination, including miscegenation, in Israeli/Palestinian history.

3.1.1 Foucault and Biopolitics

It has become common in the social sciences to refer to the state's interest in producing the lives and cultivating the bodies of its citizens as ‘biopolitics’. However, while the term has indeed lent itself to excellent scholarship, I will decline from using biopolitics as an analytical term within this analysis as I believe that, for this particular project, the term eclipses more than it enlightens. In his critique of the Foucauldian theoretical framework, cultural theorist Alexander Weheliye notes a “truancy” in Foucault's written work around colonialism and race. As Weheliye points out, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, arguably Foucault's

most famous work (perhaps second only to *The History of Sexuality*), he mentions racism in passing as merely one social phenomenon amongst a long list of others (Weheliye 2014, 42). While he explores these topics in greater depth in *Abnormal* (1974-75), as well as at length in a series of lectures he delivered at the College de France in 1976 (Stoler 1995, 7), he there draws a difference between what he terms ‘biopolitical racism’ vs. ‘ethnic racism’ that I find to be historically problematic.

For Foucault, ‘ethnic racism’ appears as an ahistorical, apolitical, and natural hatred between phenotypically different groups, or ‘races’. Because Foucault argues that ‘race’ as a discourse is an invention of the bourgeois class of Europe during the 19th century, he refers to anything resembling racism before or outside of this context as ‘ethnic racism’, i.e any form of racialized hierarchy that existed outside of (and prior to) 18th century Europe. ‘Ethnic racism’ is then relegated to the apolitical realm of ‘other cultures’, having no historical significance for Foucault until it appears as a tool of the European bourgeoisie. As Weheliye summarizes, “Bare life and biopolitics discourse not only misconstrues how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human, it also overlooks or perfunctorily writes off theorizations of race, subjection, and humanity found in black and ethnic studies, allowing bare life and biopolitics discourse to imagine an indivisible biological substance anterior to racialization” (Weheliye 2014, 13). As such a biological sphere does not exist (phenotypical traits having no meaning outside of that which they are socially imbued with), and since the product of ‘biopolitics’ is first and foremost racialized hierarchies, it seems imprudent to use it as an analytical category rather than simply ‘racism’ or ‘racializing processes’.

3.1.1.1 The Colonial Debate

“To study colonization is to study the reorganization of space, the forging and unforaging of linkages” –Frederick Cooper, 2005.

Ann Stoler’s work focuses largely on colonial contexts, agents of empire, and the “uneven, imperfect, and even indifferent knowledge-acquiring machines” of colonial regimes (Stoler 2005). To use her framework as a means of shedding light on Israel’s relationship to the communities and individuals, both citizens and non-citizens, under its control is thus

controversial. ‘Colonizer’ is a label that is furiously rejected by the Israeli political right (and a large number of ‘diaspora’ Jews across the political spectrum), who cite, amongst other reasons, the centuries-long presence of Jews in historical Palestine as justification for the legitimacy of the modern state of Israel’s control over its current borders and the populations within.

However one chooses to argue a historical precedent for Jewish rule in Palestine, it remains a fact that the modern state of Israel exerts a long-standing military control over geographical territories and people who do not have full citizenship rights (*de facto* in some cases, *de jure* in others), to whom resources and privileges are unequally distributed, and who face “the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death”⁷: in other words, racism (Wilson-Gilmore 2007, 28). And while racism is by no means specific to colonial states alone, the careful maintenance of social categories -and of their positions within the structural hierarchy - is necessary for the justifying logic of the state. This includes not only people who have no legal rights under the state (such as the residents of Gaza) but also those who, legally speaking, have full rights as citizens. As reported by Pew Research Forum, 17% of Arab Muslim citizens of Israel (who primarily live in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights) reported being held for questioning by security authorities. 15% reported being banned from travel, and another 15% reported “being physically attacked because of their religion in the past 12 months.” 13% reported property damage on the basis of racist discrimination, and 37% of all Muslim Arabs say that they have experienced *one or more* of these forms of discrimination within the past 12 months (Pew Research Forum 2016). Accordingly, I concur with Nadia Abu El-Haj in her assertion that:

“Israel is a colonial state whose most fundamental terms of racial rule are structured by a distinction between citizenship and nationality, by the law of return and its implications for equalities and rights for Jews vs. non-Jews within the state and to the land, and by its continued occupation of the West Bank, Gaza,

⁷Wilson-Gilmore cites this positionality as a definition of racism, rather than something that rests solely on culture or phenotype. While prejudice based on phenotype remains an important element of racialization, this definition accounts for the capacity of racializing processes to extend beyond skin color, and thus provides a more productive framework for understanding racism and racialization within the Israeli context (where it is not uncommon for Jewish Israelis to be darker-skinned than Arab/Palestinians).

East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights” (Abu El Haj 2010, 29).

Thus, we return to Frederick Cooper, quoted at the beginning of this passage. To form Israel as a Jewish nation-state, certain linkages had to be broken: linkages between Jews and Arabs, between Arabs and the land of Palestine, between Sephardic Jews and their histories. Other linkages had to be forged: between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, between Ashkenazis and the land of Palestine, between Jewish identity and the right to resources. A great reorganization of land and capital along racial lines was also required, necessitating a vast security apparatus to regulate and enforce the segregation of space (See Tawil-Souri, 2016).

It must be pointed out here that, like all ongoing historical processes, the forging of these linkages, the attempts to separate Jews from non-Jews and to create and maintain politically necessary social taxonomies have been fraught with tensions, exceptions, and contradicting claims. For example, while land rights are now deeply sutured, both legally and in popular discourse, to Jewish identity and ‘blood’, Lital Levy notes the habit of early Jewish settlers of dressing in Bedouin drag as a means of proving their authentic connection to the land and its history (Levy 2014). And as Ashkenazi Jewish settlers were attempting to prove their authenticity by appropriating and performing ‘Arabness’, local Palestinian and Sephardic Jews were caught in a losing battle to prove that their native connection to the land and their linguistic connection with Muslim and Christian Palestinians was not a sign of their disloyalty to the Zionist project (Jacobson and Naor 2016). These are, of course, generalizations upon a much more complex set of claims and counterclaims to authenticity and to the right of inclusion in the burgeoning nationalist project. The point I wish to make is not simply that there was mistrust between different elements of what was at the time a loosely connected Jewish polity, but more generally, that what is considered ‘authentic’, much as what is considered ‘Jewish’, changes across political contexts and geographies – even within the physically small geography of Palestine/Israel. I argue that it is this insecurity that in large part drives the concern over interracial sexual relations and their theoretical product, ‘mixed’ children, who could and likely would make claims on the state – the social, legal, and political rights promised to its Jewish citizens - that it is not prepared to recognize.

The presence of such children would, in other words, make the maintenance of an already tenuous racialized hierarchy of power exceptionally difficult.

Ann Stoler argues that “what sustain(s) racial membership (is) a middle-class morality, nationalist sentiments, bourgeois sensibilities, normalized sexuality, and a carefully circumscribed ‘milieu’ in school and home” (Stoler 2010, 105). While Stoler was referring here to a different temporal and geographical context, I believe her assessment of racializing processes is a productive platform upon which to build an analysis of these processes as they have functioned from the early 20th century in Palestine until present-day Israel. In the sections that follow I will work through these factors systematically, offering examples of how they have maintained and continue to maintain racial categories in Israel.

3.1.1.1.1. Middle-class morality

The association of class, particularly the working classes, with racial degeneration has a long history spanning numerous historical and geographical contexts. As Anne McClintock summarizes, in 1842 Friedrich Engels declared upon his visit the mills and factories owned by his father in England that he had found in the workers “A physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and intellectually to bestiality.’ The working class is a ‘race wholly apart’, so that it and the bourgeoisie are now ‘two radically dissimilar nations, as unlike as difference of race could make them’” (Engels, quoted in McClintock 1995, 44). The slippage of class into race is not an accident, nor a peculiarity of Engels or even of Victorian England. The lower classes have, at least since the dawn of the industrial revolution and the simultaneous rise of Britain, France and Belgium as imperial powers, been seen as a dangerous subset of the population afflicted by both racial and gender degeneration. It was not uncommon in mid-19th century Britain for female domestic servants to be disparaged as “black races” or “primitives” (McClintock 1995, 44), much as it is not uncommon in 21st century Israel for working class Jewish Israeli women to be viewed by governing authorities and middle/upper-class citizens alike as degenerate and dangerously sexually drawn to Arab men (Hakak 2015). As Ann McClintock explains:

“Central to the idea of degeneration was the idea of *contagion*...the poetics of contagion justified a politics of exclusion and gave social sanction to the middle-class fixation with boundary sanitation, in particular the sanitation of sexual boundaries. Body boundaries were felt to be dangerously permeable and demanding continual purification, so that sexuality, in particular women’s sexuality, was cordoned off as the central transmitter of racial and hence cultural contagion.”

Women’s bodies as sites of potential racial ‘contamination’ is arguably a doubly-potent fear in contemporary Israel, informed as it is not only by social Darwinism or a “peculiarly Victorian paranoia about boundary order”, (McClintock 1995, 45) but by a *halakhic* tradition dating back to a shift in the rabbinic tradition in the 2nd century CE, when inheriting a Jewish soul became a matter of matrilineal descent.⁸ While religious discourses of blood and essence were both qualitatively and contextually different than 19th century discourses of eugenics,⁹ a complex combination of both inform fears of ‘contamination’ in contemporary Israel. These fears fall with particular gravity on working class women, whose bodies not only represent the critical site of transmission of a ‘Jewish soul’ but were also thought to be dangerously corruptible and aberrantly desiring if not properly cultivated and cordoned off. Sociologist Yohai Hakak traces the particularly fetishistic concern within the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament), as well as in contemporary Israeli social welfare institutions, with poor and working-class Jewish women:

“One of the issues that social services were highly concerned about was the relationships Jewish girls from low socioeconomic background, usually Mizrahi, developed with Arabs. *These acts were perceived as the most dangerous expressions of crossing religious and national borders, and as a sign of the ethnic proximity between Mizrahi Jews and Arabs, which in itself threatened the national, ethnic, and geographical separation between Jews and Arabs*” (Hakak 2015, 48. Emphasis mine).

Hakak further argues that these fears were exacerbated by the large-scale migration of Ethiopian Jews and Jews from the FSSR in the 1980s (Hakak 2015, 48). Having been determined by the state to have ‘Jewish ancestry’, and thus to be eligible under the Law of

⁸ For more on the history of Jewish matrilineal descent, see: Aaron Hahn Tapper, *Judaisms: A Twenty-First-Century Introduction to Jews and Jewish Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

⁹ Although there are numerous differences between 19th century eugenics and ‘premodern’ understandings of race, Nasar Meer challenges the Foucauldian claim that race is an *explicitly* secular and ‘modern’ phenomenon by noting that the term ‘race’ as defined in Sebastian de Covarrubias’s 16th century dictionary was a synonym for ‘blood’ and ‘religion’.

Return, these immigrants were nevertheless deemed *not* truly Jewish by the Orthodox rabbinate. Because the Orthodox rabbinate oversees and controls marriages, these immigrants, while considered Jewish by the state, are not permitted to marry other Jews in Israel (Hakak 2015, 49). This, in tandem with their economic marginality, renders them vulnerable to the scrutiny and policing of the state. I would extend Hakak's analysis further to say that these Jews, their complicated legal status and low economic standing, render the produced and highly contingent nature of Jewish identity disturbingly clear. While Hakak excellently points to the concerns that animate the specter of mixed relationships and traces why concern and over-policing fall so heavily upon the shoulders of working-class Russian, Ethiopian and Mizrahi women, he focuses exclusively on the period from 1980 until the present, and the state's most recent attempts to prevent such relationships. To avoid missing the larger picture or presenting fears of miscegenation as an outcome solely of the politics of the past few decades, a broader historicizing of discourses around mixed relationships and intermarriage is necessary.

3.1.1.1.1.1 Historicizing miscegenation fears: 'Frontier Neighborhoods' of the early 20th century

In their historiography of ethno-religiously diverse areas of late Ottoman/British Mandatory Palestine, Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor discuss several incidences of concern regarding the conversion of several young Jewish women to Islam or Christianity. They describe these incidences as "delicate matters" that were nevertheless discussed and debated publicly. The cases they examine involved women who were between the ages of 19-23 and were residents of the Jaffa municipality of Tel Aviv, which they refer to as a "frontier neighborhood" (a term they use to refer to ethnically and religiously diverse neighborhoods). Reported at the same time as these conversions was a rise in the number of Jewish women marrying non-Jewish men, suggesting that this was the primary motivating factor behind the conversions. It seems at times as though Jacobson and Naor accept as normative the narrative that Jewish women could not have desired to enter into marriages with non-Jewish men for reasons other than their desperate financial circumstances, lack of

a strong father figure, and the failures of “mothers [who] were often unable to support their daughters” (Jacobson and Naor 2016, 123). There is an arguably problematic rendering here of intra-racial romantic couplings as ‘natural’ or apolitical, as opposed to mixed marriages, for which the historians offer a tragic backstory as an explanation (they do not, in contrast, seek an explanation for why a Jewish woman might want to enter into marriage with a Jewish man). Despite this, their work represents a fascinating historiographic account of how the ‘problem’ of these relationships was dealt with during a time when the solidity of racialized categories was becoming increasingly politically urgent.

One particular case they examine involved a Yemeni-Jewish *mukhtar* (locally elected official), Moshe (Musa) Levi Nachum, who was elected to his position in 1925 in the Jaffa neighborhood of *Kerem Hatemanim* and was well-liked for his abilities to negotiate peaceful resolutions to both public and interpersonal problems (Jacobson and Naor 2016, 124). Having immigrated to Israel at very young age and living in poverty for most of his life, Levi nevertheless rose to social prominence in Jaffa and became a well-loved figure by the diverse community. Levi often undertook the task of dissuading both Jewish and Muslim Arab individuals from converting, thus using his position of authority to preserve social categories in a neighborhood that was, and remains today, a space that is viewed as fostering potentially dangerous mixing. Speaking both Arabic and Hebrew, Nachum represents a figure who easily traversed the boundaries between purportedly separate communities, and indeed challenged these boundaries by his very existence. It is thus interesting to note that he was tasked with maintaining these boundaries and enjoyed the trust of both communities in negotiating fair outcomes to sensitive local issues in a way that preserved a perception of separateness between the communities. More specifically, Nachum took upon himself the responsibility of regulating the sexual contact between members of purportedly separate communities or, as Jacobson and Naor describe, “fatherless [Jewish] girls, typically poor, who fell in love with Muslims” (Jacobson and Naor 2016, 123). While their word choice may indeed reiterate pathologizing and harmful discourse about mixed Arab/Jewish relationships, their work traces a thick and ongoing history of discursive slippage linking class, sexual deviancy, and racial degeneration. As Stoler succinctly explains:

“Discourses of sexuality do more than define the distinctions of the bourgeois self: in identifying marginal members of the body politic, they have mapped the

moral parameters of European nations. These deeply sedimented discourses on sexual morality could redraw the ‘interior frontiers’ of national communities, frontiers that were secured through – and sometimes in collision with – the boundaries of race” (Stoler 2010, 7).

These concerns over maintaining socially necessary boundaries thus predate the founding of the state of Israel, suggesting, as we will discuss further, that such social regulations cannot be easily swept under the category of governmentality or the ‘biopolitical’ concerns of the state. While there would not be an internationally recognized Jewish state in Palestine until 1948, the political concerns that animate the need for carefully delineated boundaries between differently-racialized communities today are in many ways similar concerns over community boundaries in Mandatory Palestine. As some scholars argue, these concerns even date back to the period of late Ottoman rule over Palestine, when the future of the land and the competing claims to legitimate rule over it wrought deep uncertainties and fears over conflicting histories and loyalties.¹⁰

3.1.1.1.1.1 Bourgeois sensibilities and normalized sexuality

We were in the Tel Aviv central bus station, a vast, labyrinthine structure infamous for various forms of petty crime, from pickpocketing to soliciting, to more salacious stories of human trafficking and girls gone missing forever. As we waited for our bus, a middle-aged man approached us and struck up a conversation. My friend, a light-skinned Ashkenazi Israeli who was most certainly more versed in how to handle street harassment in this particular social context than I, pointedly ignored him. I continued to answer his questions, until the conversation reached the point where he invited us to his house to meet “a good friend”. Snapping, my friend unleashed an assault in Hebrew and the man backed off, his hands held up in a theatrical surrender. As he left, my friend muttered, “God he was gross, and really ‘ars.” When I asked her to explain the term she had used, she translated it into English as “asshole”. Noticing a similarity to the British slang term ‘arse’, I took that to be the meaning until several years later, when I began this project.

¹⁰ For more on this, see Menachem Klein, *Lives in Common* and Lital Levy, *The Arab Jew Debate*.

The term '*ars*' (plural '*arsim*') is a racist and classist slur that is derived from an Arabic term meaning 'pimp' or 'bastard'. In Israeli slang, it has come to denote behavior and an aesthetic presentation associated with working-class Mizrahi Jews, almost exclusively used to denigrate dark-skinned Jews (yet not used across the board as a slur against *all* dark-skinned or Mizrahi Jews on the basis of skin color alone). Shortly after the incident at the central bus station, I was warned by a man I was dating – himself a Moroccan Jew but a member of a wealthy 'North Tel Avivian' family – that I should avoid going to the beach in Netanya (a small Israeli town where my relatives lived) because there were "too many '*arsim*'" and, by his calculation, I would be sexually harassed. As a Jerusalem Post article neatly summarizes, "You only have to go online on any given day on forums like Secret Tel Aviv to see people asking about bars, clubs or gyms where they can avoid *arsim*; or the inverse – people shamelessly warning about clubs, beaches and gyms that are 'full of *arsim*'" (Hartman 2016).

I was struck by the similarity of the language, by the apparent plasticity between the sexual 'threat' posed by Arab men and that by the '*arsim*', who were by definition Jewish men. After all, their social positions are not the same; on the contrary, Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews share legally the same rights as Ashkenazi and other light-skinned Jews, and by and large do not experience the same degree of structural racism and social discrimination as do Arab Israelis and Palestinians. While the perceived threat of men labeled '*arsim*' is framed in explicitly sexual terms, and draws from a long history of warnings against the supposed sexual threat against white, properly-desiring women, it should be noted that there is an accompanying slur used against women: *frechet*, or, women whose style, affect, and tastes are deemed lower-class and crude (as always, held in comparison with the tastes of upper-class Ashkenazim). While there are multiple and often contradictory images and acts that may be referred to as '*arsim*' in nature, Israelis seem to define it much as Justice Potter Stewart defined pornography in 1964: they know it when they see it. Despite this ambiguity, most Israelis would agree that it is a proximity to 'Arabness', an amalgamation of behaviors, tastes, and public comportment that place those Jews who embody them as uncomfortably close to being Arab.

Below is a transcript of an interview, posted on Youtube as a part of an “Ask an Israeli/Ask a Palestinian” web series, that I believe is instructive. The interviewer, who in the video identifies himself as a Canadian Jewish immigrant to Israel, asks numerous people on the street what they think of ‘*arsim*. One man, who identified himself as Ido, gave a particularly illuminating response:

TRANSCRIPT: “ASK AN ISRAELI”

IDO: ‘*Ars* comes from an Arabic word...a pimp. what makes someone an ‘*ars* in Israel doesn’t reflect that... ‘*Ars* is a pimp in Arabic. It is a word for a person who breaks the law. It is not about what the person looks like. We all came from...Most people in Israel connect with the Eastern mentality. Most Mizrahim came from Arab countries. In Arab countries people act like criminals like ISIS is doing now, with rapes and other things. They are called ‘*arsim*. The Ashkenazi elite invented terms for the Mizrahim such as ‘*arsim*, *vuzvuzim*...

INTERVIEWER: But ‘*vuzvuzim*’ means Ashkenazi.

IDO: There is another word...

INTERVIEWER: *Frankim* [also a term for Ashkenazi Jews].

IDO: Things like that. So, it was created like that from the word ‘*ars*. So today, a European person, who comes from let’s say, Germany, looks at someone Sephardic who comes from, let’s say Morocco, so he can call him ‘*ars*. It’s a nickname, but the idea comes from the concept of a pimp. That’s what ‘*ars* is.

INTERVIEWER: How is it used today? Let’s say, people came from...where is your family from? Morocco?

IDO: It doesn’t matter.

INTERVIEWER: Ah, Lebanon, you told me earlier.

IDO: My grandmother was from Lebanon; my grandfather was from Bulgaria.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so people came from Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, how did it translate to the Israeli reality? Being an ‘*ars*?

IDO: What Israeli reality? Israeli reality was formed by you coming here, me coming here, you came from the United States –

INTERVIEWER: Canada.

IDO: Canada, doesn't matter, you brought with you your habits... [proceeds to give examples of habits people might bring with them from various places]. We created an Israel that is a harmony of all these things. There are those who connect more with being an 'ars..

INTERVIEWER: Eastern?

IDO: Exactly, being Eastern. Everyone has a different name for it...Again, we are all mixed. Some like certain types of music, types of rhythms, others relate more to classics. Sephardic people even – but I wouldn't call them 'arsim, because they listen to specific music, because certain people listen to certain music, they are 'arsim. But there is no such thing as 'ars, because we are all human beings. There is no such thing as 'ars. Let's define "Western"... [seems to change topic]. Take for example an Arab, who doesn't act in any way Israeli, like a Palestinian. If someone sees him in the middle of Ramat Aviv Gimmel [an upper-class area of Tel Aviv], they will think he is an 'ars. Why? Because the way he looks is a reflection. He is dark, unshaven, his slang and shortening of words...It's like someone today coming from the Bronx to Soho. People will look at him like...as someone not connected to that place. Because this is one thing, and that is another (Gil-Schuster 2016).

Throughout, we once again see the slippage between the terms 'Mizrahi' and 'Sephardic', an interchangeability that points to their colloquial use not as precise indicators of an individual's heritage or ethnic group but rather as terms denoting racial categorization (Shohat 2017). Perhaps the most fascinating aspects of Ido's interview are the points at which he contradicts himself, and indeed seems to be aware of these contradictions. He states both that 'arsim and 'ars behavior are identified with, and perhaps constitutive of, Arabic culture, which he associates with crime, ISIS, and rape. However, he also asserts that "there is no such thing as 'arsim, because we are all human beings". In this way he points to the constructed nature of all identities, yet throughout seems to view culture as something fixed and fully determinate of what a human will become. He offers the example of "someone from the Bronx" coming to Soho, by which he implies the scenario of a Black person entering what he presumes to be a predominantly white space. This comparison further confirms the applicability of academic work on racialized hierarchies and whiteness in European/American colonial contexts to the context of Israel, as the plasticity of these racial categories becomes clear in Jewish Israeli understandings of political and social belonging.

Ido talks about the consequences of a person whose behavior or physical appearance is deemed out of place, a pertinent observation in a geographical space that is deeply physically divided on the basis of racialization. Yet he also argues that there is no inherent "Israeli reality" (meaning, I believe, an essential 'Israeli-ness'), because the state of Israel

was “formed by you coming here, me coming here...” in other words, immigration. He points out, indeed with great clarity, that a Palestinian man in the middle of an upper-class Ashkenazi-majority neighborhood would be called an *‘ars* not because of anything inherent about him, but because “he is a reflection” of a racialized assemblage, an embodiment of that which is deemed not Jewish. Ido seems to waver throughout, much like the Israeli state itself, between nationalist claims to liberal multiculturalism vs. essentialist and racist claims that certain bodies and populations are inherently more likely to produce violence and sexual deviance than others. In the next section, we will explore these competing claims further, alongside the consequences of the inevitable failure of holding both to be true in the same political space.

3.1.1.1.1.1.1 Nationalist sentiments and a carefully conscribed ‘Milieu’ in school and home

“It has always been like this; it is nothing new” – *Kamal Atila, an Arabic language spokesperson for the Ministry of Education, remarking on the Israeli education system.*

As detailed in chapter one, middle- and upper-class Israeli Jewish youth are carefully sequestered from the moment of birth until adulthood (and onward) into Jewish-only enclaves, with little possibility of ‘fraternizing’ or of cohabitating in any meaningful sense with Arab Israelis or Palestinians. Pew Research polling found that close to half of Israeli Jewish adults believe that Arabs should be expelled from Israel, with one-in-five Jewish adults stating that they “strongly agree” with such a plan. Pew also found that a full 67% of Jews stated that all of their friends were Jews (with 98% reporting that all of their *close* friends were Jews), compared to 38% of Muslims and 21% of Christians (Pew Research Forum 2016). This careful drawing of spatial boundaries becomes far more difficult to maintain in working-class communities, where Jews and Arabs are more likely to live in the same neighborhoods and partake of the same facilities (Hakak 2015, 50). This fact further stigmatizes the Jewish poor as a potential site of racial ‘contamination’, and indeed “associating with minorities” is directly defined as a symptom of psychological disorders by the Youth Protection Authority, a governmental body under the auspices of the Ministry of

Welfare. The Youth Protection Authority's website describes the children it deals with as such:

“Lacking socialization habits; criminal behavior; running away from home; vagrancy; associating with marginal groups (criminal gangs, minorities, etc.); initial use of psychoactive substances to the point of addiction; dropping out of educational frameworks; suicide attempts; sexual irresponsibility” (Ministry of Justice, Israel 2018).

With the exception of “suicide attempts”, these problems are disproportionately experienced by working-class and poor communities for a myriad of reasons, first and foremost amongst them social marginalization and inadequate (or rather intentionally limited) institutional support from the state. The Youth Protection Authority's characterization of mental illness is thus a classed one, wherein to be poor is both cause *and* symptom of psychological problems. Further, we see here again the assumption that to associate, particularly in a romantic capacity, with “marginal groups” (here a thinly coded term for Arabs, but wielded against Black African Jews as well), is in and of itself a psychological disorder. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is being pathologized as a psychological disorder with the intention of dissuading such relationships.

The Israeli public educational system is, for reasons both *de facto* and *de jure*, highly segregated. While Arabs are not explicitly or legally barred from entering Jewish schools, the rule that one must enroll only in schools within one's educational zone ties educational opportunity to area code within a highly segregated topography. This pattern of children attending “schools that reflect their heritage” holds even in statistically more diverse cities and neighborhoods (Schwartz 2016). While a small number of integrated schools do exist, they are generally private and thus available only to those who can afford to pay tuitions that are often prohibitively steep. As such, in Israel it is entirely likely, and indeed the carefully cultivated outcome, that the majority of both Arab and Jewish children will grow up having never met a child outside of their ethnic, religious and/or class group. But this is not a new development, and it should certainly not be assumed that an idyllic past of co-education between Jewish and Arab (Muslim/Christian) Palestinians existed before the creation of the state. During the period of the British Mandate, Arabs and Jews attended separate schools as part of the British government's assessment that schools should be divided by religious

affiliation and should be monolingual: Hebrew and French for the Jews, Arabic for the Arabs. Monolingualism subsequently became a Zionist goal, with Hebrew chosen as the national language for the nascent Jewish state. This was not only an attempt to combat the colloquial use of Arabic, but, as historian Liora Halperin explains, was especially fervently desired as an outcome for the new Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant population, most of whom came speaking German, Yiddish, or Russian as their first languages and were reticent to abandon this linguistic tie to their lands of origin (see Halperin 2015). Indeed, it can be argued that attempts to promote Hebrew as the singular national language was simultaneously an attempt to draw a clear boundary around the Jewish community and to produce Jewishness as a cohesive national identity at a time when “the symbolic weight of this new language diversity added to the practical considerations of immigrant absorption” (Halperin 2015, 223).

While I believe it would be a historical oversimplification, or at best romanticizing, to claim that the Ottoman empire didn’t care about separation between differently categorized bodies (the Ottoman metropole, Istanbul, was also both legally and spatially segregated along ethno-religious lines), they simply did not have the resources to regulate their Levantine territories in such a manner (see Ze’evi, 2006). Accordingly, cities like Jerusalem were painted as “teeming with different ethnic groups and religious factions speaking a cacophony of languages, a contemporary Babel [with an] endless variety of people” (Schneider 2013, 58). by both the British colonial authorities and by Zionists who used the purported “disorder and discord” of the urban center as evidence that no nationalist sentiments, and thus no basis for a nation-state, existed amongst the Arab majority population (Schneider 2013, 58). The British, in accordance with the particularities of their fetish for proper order in both public and domestic space, sought to arrange an educational system that would solidify distinctions between different religious groups and produce monolingualism within them, a decision that was lauded by Jewish, Muslim and Christian Palestinians alike. This decision contributed greatly to the fragmentation and racialized segregation of public spaces and laid deeply-rooted groundwork for the current Israeli educational system. Suzanne Schneider notes, with some irony, that “[British] officials spent the first part of the period arguing that a unified school system was undesirable and the final years lamenting the fact that it was no longer feasible” (Schneider 2013, 69). It is therefore little surprise when, asked about what appears to be the Israeli version of ‘separate but equal’ segregation in American schools until the late

1950s, people such as Kamal Atila, quoted at the outset of this section, would respond with the old historian's adage that there is "nothing new" under the sun (Schwartz 2016).

As should by now go without saying, policies based on the organizing philosophy of 'separate but equal' are as much of a conservative fantasy in Israel as they have been in other contexts. There is little equality to be found, with schools in poorer, Arab-majority or mixed neighborhoods receiving far less funding and support than their wealthier, Ashkenazi-majority counterparts. And despite linguistic differences – Arab-majority schools have classes taught primarily in Arabic, although Hebrew is a mandatory language (Arabic is not a mandatory language in Jewish schools) – all public schools have nearly identical state-mandated curricula. This policy has come under fire in recent decades for its calculated silence regarding the very social differences that the state seeks to reproduce. One such incident occurred around the adoption of a new civics textbook released in May 2016, titled *To be a Citizen in Israel*. As with all civics courses, and arguably all public-school systems, the intent is to produce properly citizens. The textbook, which will be translated into Arabic and mandatory in all schools, has been criticized for whitewashing Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestine as well as normalizing the supposedly vast 'cultural' differences between Jews and Arabs. Yet perhaps more interesting, or at least more surprising, is its treatment of diversity within the Jewish community. The textbook divides Jews into four categories: ultra-Orthodox, national religious, traditional, and secular. It recognizes that these identities are on a "spectrum", rather self-consciously using the parlance of 2016-era progressivism, and that it is "difficult" to demarcate these groups (yet the textbook, for some reason, chooses to do so). The book noticeably does not demarcate Jews on the basis of ethnicity, nor does it mention the historical hierarchization of these ethnic groups and the very real social consequences that accompany, and are indeed intentionally produced, by this process (Newman 2017).

To choose these particular distinctions along the lines of a religious "spectrum" is in line with what the Israeli state seeks to present, in accordance with the tenets of liberal multiculturalism, as its 'brand': a democratic and Jewish state within which there is no racism and the only distinctions that matter are those which one chooses oneself – religiosity. Yet there is a distinct slippage between religiosity and racialization in Israel as well, and the adoption of these categories as the preferred social distinctions to those of ethnicity may not

be as simple as the Ministry of Education would like to believe. Let us examine an incident that occurred in 2009 in the West Bank Jewish settlement of Immanuel. The Ashkenazi girls at the Beit Yaakov ultra-Orthodox girls' school stayed home for several days in protest against the Ministry of Education's decision to end segregation between Sephardi and Ashkenazi students at their school. In protest against the decision, an Ashkenazi resident of the settlement is quoted in *Haaretz* as saying "It's like putting Americans and Africans together. They can't study together with such huge mental differences" (Kashti 2009). The Beit Yaakov school had been ordered to integrate as the result of a High Court ruling, after which residents filed a complaint that the school was not complying with the ruling.

The case is interesting not because it is exceptional, but rather because it illuminates numerous competing claims. As is illustrated by the civics textbook, it is in the interest of the state to represent Israel as a 'colorblind' democracy in which all citizens are entitled to a set of inalienable rights. The High Court's ruling reflects this interest, and specifically went out of the way to say that the school's segregation was based on 'religious criteria' rather than ethnicity - and found that this nevertheless was also illegal. However, this finding on the part of the court flies directly in the face of comments made by members of the community involved. The likening (quoted above) of Ashkenazis to Americans and Sephardi/Mizrahi (the term here slips and thus denotes not actual heritage but skin color) to Africans is a direct invocation of discourses of biological racial difference, wherein racist histories of Blackness as inferiority, as forever anachronistically anti-time and anti-space, are directly and intentionally invoked. This comparison, between Americans as the supposed (white) apex of civilization and Africans (read: Black people) as "the final frontier" (Weheliye 2014, 15) of the category of the human, is not without precedent in the Israeli context: David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, referred to Moroccan Jews as "savages" and questioned their humanity by comparing them to Black Africans brought to the United States as slaves (Shohat 2006, 41). For the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox community to refer to themselves as "pure" thus represent *both* racial and religious claims to superiority that cannot be easily untangled from each other. As one father, described in the *Haaretz* article as Mizrahi, summarizes, "The Ashkenazis think they're more intelligent than we are, but what really bugs them is our skin color" (Kashti 2009).

At this point, the state finds itself in a difficult bind. It becomes apparent, first and foremost, that an educational apparatus intended to produce properly nationalist, properly desiring citizens is a perpetually incomplete project that cannot fully transcend the racialized hierarchies that are produced and maintained in Israel by numerous state institutions, including, ironically, the educational system itself. Recognizing this bind, the High Court was careful in its language to leave legal space for the ongoing segregation of Arab and Jewish Israelis without directly mandating it. To maintain this precarious balance, the Court had to be exceedingly cautious about setting a precedent against ‘religious discrimination’ as well, given that much of the logic justifying the separation of Jews and Arabs into different (and differently privileged) schools rests on the argument that it is not a racial but a religious distinction. The Ashkenazi families, regardless of how they chose to frame their arguments, were acting on the recognition of the racialized hierarchy by which privileges and resources are unequally distributed. Recognizing this hierarchy, the families involved demanded that the state recognize their rightful place within it, a demand made all the more urgent by their own marginalized status in contemporary Israel. As members of the ultra-Orthodox community, they themselves are racialized as different from secular, generally wealthier Ashkenazi communities who view the ultra-Orthodox as “cult-like” and whose practices, particularly regarding sexual behavior, are often portrayed in secular Israeli discourse as perverse (Bronner and Kershner 2018). On the other side, the Sephardic/Mizrahi families of Immanuel, taking the state at its word in its promise of equality across all social categories, demanded that such promises be met with tangible action.

I do not believe that it is coincidental that this battle for recognition took place within a geographical space already overdetermined by competing claims to legitimacy: Immanuel is one of many highly-controversial Jewish settlements in the West Bank, a heavily policed space that remains illegal according to international law and norms. The Israeli state pays stipends to Jewish families, largely Orthodox, to occupy these contested territories, thus making them attractive options for low-income Jewish families, many of whom are stigmatized by the relatively wealthier residents of Tel Aviv and Haifa. These are territories that are highly fraught with competing claims to the land, to belonging as citizens, and to the distribution of resources such as water and construction materials (See Tawil-Souri 2016). It is indeed fascinating to note the closeness with which debates over land ownership and access

to privileges and protections of the state are entwined with debates over physical intimacies and the categorization and containment of bodies within their appropriate space. As we move into the next chapter, we will explore further the rhetorical cross-pollinations between contested territory and contested bodies through an examination of portrayals of relationships between Arabs and Jews in contemporary Israeli literature and film.



4. TELLING A DIFFERENT STORY: MIXED RELATIONSHIPS IN ISRAELI LITERATURE

“We need other kinds of stories” – Donna Haraway

While no significant body of work exists in English on relations between Jews and Arabs in Israeli literature, there are several key sources that will serve as a guide throughout this chapter. Gilead Morahg’s work has been particularly illuminating for his examination of Arab characters in Israeli Jewish literature, whether positioned as romantically involved with a Jewish character or not. He summarizes:

“The fiction of the first seven decades of the Arab-Jewish encounter constitutes a hermetic body of works whose energies and concerns are consistently directed inwards. The focus is on the drama of internal Jewish experiences in which Arabs play a very minor role... Although the encounter with Arabs is generally recognized as having affected the changing nature of the Jewish experience in Israel, neither Arab individuals nor the Arab community as a whole are regarded as an integral part of this experience. Arabs are regarded as an external force impinging upon the central drama and are depicted as an abstracted human presence that must be reacted to but not accounted for” (Morahg 1986, 150).

His characterization of the period between 1948 and the present as “the first seven decades of the Arab-Jewish encounter” is certainly a questionable timeline, shutting out both literature from pre-state Palestine and the possibility that events that occurred before the declaration of the state of Israel may have molded the work of Jewish writers in addition to all that came after. He clarifies, however, that he is interested primarily in the literature produced by Jewish writers who found themselves as settlers of a new nation-state, and whose writing reflects both what they chose to highlight of these experiences, as well as some

interesting omissions. While the Jewish struggles of self-reinvention and the perceived shift from old to new – culturally, linguistically, and politically – is present in florid detail, “there remains an almost absolute disassociation between the works of the better writers of this period [the 1940’s and 50’s] and the actualities of Arab presence in the land in which their fiction is set” (Morahg 1986, 149).

In other words, when Arab characters are present it is in a highly abstracted sense. The figure of the Arab appears throughout Jewish Israeli literature not as human, but as a force or entity to be reacted against, the same way a writer might use a hiker’s encounter with a bear to symbolize the hiker’s spiritual growth. These characters, Morahg continues, are “abstractions whose characterization is limited to superficial externals... depersonalized figures who serve as schematic catalysts for the internal dilemmas of their Jewish counterparts” (Morahg 1986, 149). It is through the dilemma of encounter that the Jewish character comes to learn something, that his or her inner life is laid bare for the reader and advanced forward for the sake of the plot. And while Arab characters remained rare throughout the fiction of the 1960s and 70s, when they did appear, they were often written as physically incapable of speech. Two particular works of fiction can be cited as the primary works featuring an Arab character during this time: A.B Yehoshua’s *Facing the Forests* and Amos Oz’s “Nomad and Viper”. In *Facing the Forests*, the Jewish male protagonist develops a “nihilistic relationship” with a mute Arab man and his daughter, who chooses not to speak. In “Nomad and Viper”, a Jewish woman living on a *kibbutz* falsely accuses a Bedouin man of rape after fantasizing about him. The Bedouin man is presented as unintelligible, barely capable of speech, and certainly incapable of defending himself against accusation (Morahg 1986, 149).

It is perhaps arguable that these renderings were politically-charged statements about the silencing and whitewashing of the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs from their land, their history, and their futures. However, when we recall that the Arab characters in these stories are present largely to illustrate some fundamental truth about *Jewish* Israeli reality, a different picture emerges. The inability to speak becomes the inability to be fully human, a distinction that has long served the interests of colonial populations seeking to determine a moral and legal basis for land acquisition (see Weheliye 2014). While the Orientalist romanticizing and abstraction of Arabs as an authentic part of the landscape in the literature

of the 1940s and 50s represented the new Jewish settlers' desire to belong after a long and ongoing feeling of uprooted-ness, the silence of Arab characters in later fiction reflects, ironically, a growing recognition of Arabs as *not* merely a part of the physical landscape. They are there, and their 'silence' is both a projection of Jewish desire for the problem of their claims to the land to disappear and representative of a fear that there will always be something impenetrable, something unknowable, about them. It is this same fear that, to a certain degree, motivates the extensive security apparatus maintained by the Israeli state: the fear of an unintelligible or unknowable threat. The 'Arabs' in these stories are not by any stretch accurate portrayals of Arab individuals, or even of the larger Palestinian political sentiments of the day. Rather, they are embodiments of Jewish fears.

While a full examination of the history of Arabs in Israeli fiction is drastically outside of the scope of this chapter, a previous brief foray is necessary because, as with any canon, the archetypes, themes, and figures present in earlier works are built upon and echoed by that of later – and even seemingly unrelated – works. This is undoubtedly the case in certain works of contemporary fiction that approach romantic relationships or sexual tensions between Arabs and Jews. One example, Savyon Liebrecht's short story "A Room on the Roof", uses the figure of an Arab man – in this case a construction worker named Hasan who is hired by an Israeli Jewish woman to build an addition to her house - not as a character but as a flattened foil against which a Jewish woman's morality, self-image, and personal boundaries are tested. While their relationship is a constant shifting and renegotiation of a fundamental power imbalance – it is this that the Jewish protagonist finds both terrifying and irresistible – the reader has no insight into how Hasan understands this relationship or his position in relation to his employer. After she treats him disrespectfully, he refuses to continue working for her and disappears. In doing so, Hasan both confirms the woman's biases against him and removes himself from her control. Yet we do not know at what cost this came to him, nor what his reasons were for leaving beyond what the Jewish woman imagines them to be. It is indeed unclear if anything about their relationship, including the sexual tension between them, exists beyond her imagination (Liebrecht 1998).

And if narratives with complex Arab characters are rare, depictions of romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews are outstanding outliers. The aforementioned short story, while complicated by a taboo sexual tension, does not depict a romantic relationship

in the sense of a union or a partnership that two people enter willingly and out of mutual desire. In the following segments, I will explore three examples of contemporary works – two novels and one film – that present mixed relationships as complex and loving partnerships rather than brief power struggles or traumatic moments of “identity confusion”. While highly diverse in both style and content, all three works are centered around a Jewish and an Arab protagonist, their relationship to each other, and their negotiations of the responses of the individuals and institutions that form an alternately supportive and stifling world. I will conclude with a discussion of the public reception of one of the texts, Dorit Rabinyan’s *All the Rivers*, as it presents a particularly interesting case for our understanding of the nature of the threat posed by mixed relationships – even in purely hypothetical, literary form.

4.1 A Trumpet in The Wadi

The oldest work that I wish to examine is Sami Michael’s novel, *A Trumpet in the Wadi*. Born in Baghdad in 1926, Michael was a member of the Communist underground before fleeing Baghdad with his family in 1948 and arriving in Israel via Iran in 1949. Throughout his long literary career, he has written narratives based on his family’s time in an Israeli transit camp and his experiences as a member of the Communist party in Israel (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d). Myths of belonging – whether cultural, national, linguistic, or all three – as well as themes of alienation are central currents running throughout his body of work, as are his political convictions. He published *A Trumpet in the Wadi* in 1977, four years after the Yom Kippur War. The protagonist of the story is Huda, an Arab Christian woman living with her paternal grandfather, her mother, and her younger sister Mary in the *wadi*, an Arab-majority neighborhood of Haifa. Traumatized by a previous romantic relationship wherein her fiancé abandoned her with the excuse that she was sexually frigid, Huda experiences psychosomatic pain in her shoulder and has accepted that there must indeed be something physically wrong with her that prevents her from giving and receiving sexual pleasure. The plot begins when Alex, a Russian Jewish man who has recently immigrated to Israel, moves into the room above her family’s flat. Huda hears him playing the trumpet every

night and is captivated by the sadness of the melody. She slowly gets to know him, first when he hires her mother to cook meals for him, and later when she begins to give him Hebrew lessons. At first physically repulsed, she later begins to find him attractive, and they slowly commence a romantic and physically intimate relationship.

Michael positions Huda as a border figure, a person who already straddles two purportedly separate worlds and finds herself fitting easily into neither – much like Michael himself. She works at an Israeli-owned travel agency, speaks flawless Hebrew, and passionately reads Yehuda Amichai, a famous Israeli poet. Yet she is an Arab, lives in an Arab-majority neighborhood, and feels a deep responsibility to the community. Michael wisely does not romanticize or excessively dramatize this; rather, he shows how seemingly disparate desires, affiliations, or responsibilities may exist in a person without it being a point of personal “identity crisis”. Indeed, Michael is careful to illustrate that it is the political events occurring around them, the histories and competing claims that they were born into, rather than anything internal or psychological, that presents problems for Huda and Alex and ultimately dooms their relationship. For example, when Huda first proposes the possibility of a relationship between her and Alex to her grandfather, they have the following exchange:

“Grandpa, what do you think about an Arab woman with a Jew?”

‘Won’t work,’ he said.

I smiled with relief. ‘Then that’s that,’ I replied.

He took one of Mary’s cigarettes. ‘I didn’t say that. One of you will have to give in.’

‘He couldn’t be an Arab even if he wanted to.’

‘I know.’

‘So I must forget I’m an Arab?’

‘In time, he’ll forget that he was Russian. I forgot that I was Egyptian. But do you honestly believe you could be a Jew? The dogs on both sides will sing their teeth into you. Do you have the strength for that?’

I wasn’t blind. In a country torn by antagonisms and living in a state of war it isn’t possible to cultivate an oasis of love on the border between two nations seeking to strangle each other” (Michael 1987, 130).

Here we see an interesting recognition of both the contingent nature of racialized identity and of its rigidity. ‘Being a Jew’ or ‘being an Arab’ are talked about as things that theoretically could be chosen yet remain out of the grasp of the two main characters due to the political and structural circumstances surrounding them. Huda is capable of passing as

Jewish: her job, her accent, and her knowledge of normative Israeli Jewish culture render her – in theory – capable of being a Jew. Alex, however, “couldn’t be an Arab even if he wanted to.” Within the racialized hierarchy of the Israeli state, Alex will always be classified as a Jew and thus materially privileged over those classified as Arabs.

Despite the daunting challenges facing them, Huda and Alex plan to be married, a choice that Huda’s family meets with some trepidation but of which they are overall accepting. The reader is tempted to think that they have ‘beat the system’; or, that because Huda’s family in particular is loving and supportive, she and Alex will have a chance at a future together. However, Michael is quick to negate the hope that personal good intentions can overcome decades of political violence. Before they can be legally married, Alex is drafted to fight in Lebanon. He is killed, and the narrative ends with Huda talking to his grave, wondering how to raise their unborn child. She pontificates,

“If I bring him up in the Arab society, will I have to tell him, before he hears it from others, that he was fathered out of wedlock by a Jew? Or should I raise him in Jewish society?...You can imagine what my position will be when the time comes to send your son to another war. He will want to join an elite unit. All his life he will try to prove himself, because his mother is Arab, and he will be a stranger among both Arabs and Jews” (Michael 1987, 218).

Huda has the ability, or so she imagines, to choose how her son will be categorized. Despite this rare privilege, she sees in front of her only an array of bad options. As previously discussed, one of the primary concerns of the Israeli state in preventing mixed relationships is the prevention of “people whose cultural sensibilities, physical being, and political sentiments call into question the distinctions of difference that maintain the neat boundaries of colonial rule (Stoler 2010, 79). Huda herself calls these distinctions into question, and her son, by the nature of his birth, presents an even more problematic case in the eyes of the state. Anticipating this, the reader is left with uncertainty over which path Huda has chosen – and indeed whether she really has the power to choose at all.

4.1.1 Ha’Buah (The Bubble)

The title of this 2006 film, written and directed by Israeli director Eytan Fox, refers to the nickname for Tel Aviv, earned both for its comparatively progressive politics and social life and its claim to be untouched by the political reality outside of its borders. Fox, who was born in New York City to an influential, religiously conservative Jewish family, moved to Israel when he was two years old. He is openly gay, and his films often deal with themes of homosexuality, repression and militarized masculinity in Israeli culture. Fox is perhaps best known for his award-winning film “Yossi ve Jagger” (Yossi and Jagger), which tells the tragic story of two Israeli male soldiers who fall in love and must keep their relationship hidden. “Ha’Buah” opens with a scene at an Israeli checkpoint, where Palestinian men are being forced to lift their shirts in front of soldiers. One of the protagonists, Noam, is there as a soldier manning the checkpoint. The other, Ashraf, is one of the men being searched. When a woman goes into emergency labor, both Ashraf and Noam help her give birth to a stillborn child, and a fight breaks out over whether the Israeli soldiers killed the baby. We later discover that Noam lost his ID card in the chaos, leading Ashraf to sneak across the ‘Green Line’ to return it to him. The two go up to Noam’s roof, where they quickly begin kissing. They have sex for the first time framed against a cement wall, underneath graffiti that reads “love Tel Aviv”. Afterwards, Ashraf is confused when Noam refers to their coupling as “explosive”. “When you explode something, like a bomb?” he asks, and Noam counters him, saying “It can mean cool, too. Explosive, explosion, explode.” It is decided that night that Ashraf will not return to his home in the West Bank and will begin living with Noam.

Noam’s roommates question the decision to let Ashraf stay, but Noam convinces them by appealing to the threat of presumed Palestinian homophobia: “It’s not easy being gay over there.” His roommates, a straight woman named Lulu and a gay man named Yali, agree on the grounds that to take Ashraf in would at least be “doing something” (about the political circumstances between Israel and Palestine), and Lulu chides Yali for his initial hesitation, saying “all we ever do is talk”. It becomes clear that the Israeli Jewish characters in the novel are primarily leftists who are struggling to find a way to take meaningful political action and whose efforts, while well-intended, are often tone-deaf. At a meeting of an unnamed leftist organization of which the main characters are members, a young Israeli woman suggests an event titled “Rave against the Occupation.” The others are initially excited by the idea until it becomes clear that not only do none of them know any Palestinian

youths, but that there was little chance that anyone from the West Bank would be able to get the necessary permits to cross the border. They quickly turn against both the idea and each other, with one participant hissing to the others that they are shamelessly out of touch with “reality.”

Questions of what is ‘real’ vs. ‘unreal’ run throughout the dialogue. Ashraf is passing as an Israeli Jew by taking a Hebrew name and working as a waiter in a leftist-run cafe. In the same café, an interesting dialogue occurs between two patrons discussing life in Tel Aviv:

“Man: “They call it the Bubble because nothing here is real. Look around. These people have no connection to reality.
Woman: Kibbutz life is a bubble, too. West Bank settlements are bubbles. Who can say anymore what’s real and what’s a bubble?”

A bubble is figured by the man as a place outside of what is “real”. In her response, however, the woman extends the definition somewhat to any place that has drawn borders around itself, “airy, fragile, and vulnerable to the slightest outside force” (Koresky 2007). Bubbles, however, are porous and fragile. They are by definition transient and easily broken. When Ashraf is nearly outed as a Palestinian by a friend of Yali’s he returns to Nablus without saying goodbye to Noam, who subsequently falls into a deep depression. Fueled by the desire to see him again, Noam and Lulu disguise themselves as foreign journalists and go to Nablus, arriving on the day of Ashraf’s sister’s wedding. His sister at first suspects nothing, but soon after catches sight of Ashraf and Noam kissing and becomes enraged. She makes Ashraf promise to tell no one. A few days later, she is killed by Israeli forces, gunned down in her car. Ashraf is distraught, leading to the penultimate decision of the film: rather than allow his bereaved brother-in-law (who, the viewer is carefully informed, is a member of Hamas) to carry out a retributive attack, Ashraf agrees to do it himself.

In the beginning of the film, upon agreement that Ashraf can stay in the house with Noam, Lulu and Yali, Yali immediately asks him: “Tell me, what do you think awaits a gay suicide bomber in heaven? Seventy virgin twinkies or seventy muscle hunks?” While the exchange is meant to be playful, director Fox laces heavy-handed foreshadowing throughout the film that seems to serve no purpose other than to insist that Arab male bodies can only and always produce violence. The only other Arab male character in the film is Ashraf’s brother-in-law, a Hamas leader who is, of course, named “Jihad”. As critic Michael Koresky

argues in a review on Indiewire.com, the fact that Ashraf himself completes the prophecy hinted at throughout the film and becomes a suicide bomber, killing Noam in the process, “feels at once shocking and completely telegraphed, and it proves that he [director Fox] cares more about putting his characters through impossible situations than letting them figure out their problems for themselves” (Koresky 2007).

It is certainly arguable that the film’s foremost task is to hold a mirror up to progressive Tel Avivians by dismantling their perception of themselves as the inhabitants of a peaceful bubble: the violence of occupation can only be held at bay by good intentions and material affluence for so long. Despite this, the film cannot surmount the problematic flattening of Palestinian society as patently homophobic and Tel Avivian society as its progressive opposite. What begins as a radical story proposing a truly different possible future ends as a pinkwashed and racist reiteration of tired, contemporary tropes. The climactic scene of the film, in which Noam and Ashraf kiss as Ashraf denotates the explosive device strapped to his chest, ends with both of them dead and Yali permanently crippled. Received as a modern-day Israeli omeo and Juliet by most critics, it is hard not to detect a clear warning against transgression in the film: if you cross certain boundaries, you will get burned. Fox leaves us with a tragedy that undoubtedly would not have happened if the two main characters had simply stayed on their sides of the border.

4.1.1.1 All The Rivers

Israeli author Dorit Rabinyan’s 2014 novel, *All the Rivers*, is a semi-autobiographical account of Rabinyan’s own relationship with the Palestinian artist Hassan Hourani. Rabinyan, whose works include the bestselling novels *Persian Brides* and *A Strand of a Thousand Pearls*, weaves a narrative based on her own experiences but fictionalized in certain aspects: for example, she has been careful to inform the public that, unlike the female protagonist of her novel, her own relationship with Hourani was a platonic friendship. The novel is narrated from the perspective of Liat, an Israeli Jewish woman living in New York City while finishing a degree in translation. There, she meets and falls in love with Hilmi, a Palestinian artist who has been studying and showing his work in New York. The novel traces

the arch of their relationship, from its first days as an exciting friendship to its deepening into love, to the final, tragic end: both Hilmi and Liat return to Palestine and Israel respectively, where they have no hope of continuing a relationship. Hilmi, who has always wanted to see the Mediterranean coast that is blocked for him by the border wall, finds a way to circumvent it. Along with a group of friends, he drives to the coast and goes swimming in the sea at Jaffa. He calls Liat to surprise her, but she misses the call. A few minutes later, he drowns in the sea while trying to save a struggling friend.

Liat is obsessed with boundaries, and her love for Hilmi constitutes a crisis point for her. As Rabinyan explains of her writing process, “I had lately realized that I was not writing a love story but the story of a drawn-out resistance to love. My real subject was Liat’s fear that her Jewishness would dissolve into her partner Hilmi’s Arab identity” (Rabinyan 2017). Throughout the novel, Hilmi accuses Liat of holding him at arm’s length. She tells him that in her childhood she would walk home from school clutching a pin between her fingers to repel “Arab kidnappers.” While she finds the memory funny in retrospect, Hilmi does not. At one point, when they fight and Liat asks him to “disappear from [her] life for ten minutes”, Hilmi tells her that it feels as though she is still holding that pin, stabbing him with it whenever he gets too close (Rabinyan 2014).

Liat herself expresses bewilderment at her own responses, particularly to political questions. While she views herself as a progressive, she finds herself defending conservative, Zionist positions when discussing politics with Hilmi or his friends. Although Liat is never able to articulate why this is, Rabinyan draws the reader’s attention to the boundaries that Liat fears are dissolving before her eyes: when she is in Israel, surrounded by a Jewish milieu, there is no threat to the community she envisions herself as a part of and she can verbally transgress this community with relative impunity. Outside, however, at a point when she feels compromised by her own feelings, any further incursion upon the physical, legal, and discursive boundaries that have structured her life – and particularly arguments in favor of a binational state, a definitive dismantling of these boundaries – become unacceptable.

It is interesting to remember that *All the Rivers* is at least partially a true story. The narrative is based on Rabinyan’s own relationship with the young Palestinian artist Hassan Hourani, who drowned in the sea in Jaffa in 2004. In a lengthy farewell letter published in *The Guardian*, however, Rabinyan makes it clear that many, if not most, of the scenes that

occur between Hilmi and Liat were directly taken from her and Hourani's experiences together. She writes,

"The peace you dreamed of would be realised on the day when there arose, between the sea and the river, a binational state, common to both peoples. I remember how your eyes shone when you described it with broad gestures. Equal, free, without borders. For you it was exciting, the expression of a wish; for me it was a prophecy of doom that made me tremble" (Rabinyan 2004).

She and Hourani, it would seem, found themselves in the exact position into which she would later write Liat and Hilmi. It may of course be true that their relationship was strictly platonic, but her assertion of it as such functions as a means of distancing herself from her text and its narrative of a passionate love between an Arab and a Jew. Given the overwhelmingly negative response to the novel at both state and private levels, it is not surprising that Rabinyan sought to limit the backlash against herself personally, to distance her own private life from a narrative that had been swept up in miscegenation fears and turned into a straw man for the prevention of 'assimilation'. In 2015, the book was banned from Israeli public high schools. While the decision was made under the authority of the Ministry for Education, *Haaretz* reported that the decision fell largely to two senior Ministry officials, Dalia Fenig and Eliraz Krauz. In defense of their decision, Fenig penned a letter from which the following excerpt has been taken:

"The story is based on a romantic motif of impossible prohibited/secret love. Young people of adolescent age tend to romanticize and don't, in many cases, have the systematic vision that includes considerations involving maintaining the national-ethnic identity of the people and the significance of miscegenation...It should be remembered that the choice of studying the work is the teachers' and not the students. Intimate relations and certainly the open option of institutionalizing [a relationship] through marriage and having a family, even if it doesn't come to fruition in the story, between Jews and non-Jews is perceived among large segments of society as a threat to a separate identity" (Fenig, quoted in Kashti 2015).

There are many different narratives at work in this reasoning. First, young people and their purported tendency to "romanticize" are singled out as a dangerous point of entry through which a carefully assembled hierarchy of racial categories could be thrown into

disarray. That is, the need to properly cultivate the desires of children, both sexual and otherwise, is clearly evidenced here. Because “adherence to middle class sexual morality is one implicit requisite for full-fledged citizenship,” (Stoler 2010, 86) the book, deemed by the Ministry of Education to dangerously transgress these terms, could not be allowed to be taught in an institution tasked with producing the future citizens of the Israeli State. As Fenig’s statement clearly illuminates, “The consequences of mixed unions [are] collapsed into a single moral trajectory” ultimately leading to “national decay” (Stoler 2010, 87).

It is in suggesting the possibility of a different world – even one that was proven unsustainable – that renders the book dangerous in the eyes of Fenig and the Ministry of Education. It is interesting to note that the story does not actually portray the relationship between the two protagonists in a particularly positive light. While Hilmi and Liat meet and fall in love in New York City, their return to Ramallah and Tel Aviv respectively marks the end of their relationship – once relocated to its homeland, once planted in the unyielding earth, it cannot be sustained. Hilmi drowns as a direct result of crossing the border illegally and attempting to swim in the sea in Jaffa, an ending that seems such an obvious plot device that it is baffling that it is indeed a true story. The book also accepts the categories of ‘Jew’ and ‘Arab’ as timeless and natural, and accordingly any conflict between the two groups as such.

Yet the recognition that such a love can exist *even temporarily* is a dangerous implication because of how the two protagonists are portrayed. Liat is a middle class Jewish Israeli citizen who in all ways meets the standards of cultural competency and proper upbringing necessary for belonging. Her choice of romantic partner cannot be easily explained away by an inappropriate enculturation, bad parenting, poverty, ‘kidnapping’, or any of the other traditionally-sought sources of ‘contamination’. Similarly, Hilmi is both remarkable and threatening because he is not made legible through racist tropes of laziness, perversity, or violence. His existence, even in purely literary form, throws a wrench into any understanding of ‘race’ as a biologically determined set of behavioral traits as is propagated by the Israeli state. It is, in short, a recognition that racial hierarchies and their attendant racisms are not cultural or natural, but intentionally produced. It is this recognition, filtered through the “significance of miscegenation”, that the Ministry attempts to keep out of Israeli public education. After all, it is absurd to think that Israeli youth, be they Jewish, Arab, or

otherwise, would be unaware of the possibility that they might one day have the opportunity to choose a sexual partner outside of their own racial group. What may be less obvious, or rather what is made intentionally obscure, is the produced nature of these groups, and the way bodies are made legible and given different meaning as they enter and exit different geographies.

What the Ministry of Education is attempting to accomplish, then, is to reproduce knowledge of racial categories as “a given natural and/or cultural phenomenon and *not* an assemblage of forces that must continuously articulate nonwhite subjects as not-quite-human” (Weheliye 2014, 21). It is this articulation that characters such as Huda and Hilmi challenge, a challenge which is made even more unacceptable as it is framed through their sexual relationships with Jewish partners. In *All the Rivers* the perversity, latency and violence that is produced as inherent to ‘Arab culture’ and to Arab male bodies is fully absent in Hilmi, an absence that challenges a fundamental organizing logic of racialized hierarchies of power in the Israeli state. In short, the fate of Hilmi cannot be reduced to anything deserved, to anything he brought upon himself. He is not a terrorist, a “provocateur”, an Islamist, an abuser, a radical, or even particularly politically outspoken. Through his existence and his relationship to a Jewish woman, even in purely literary form, Hilmi challenges the racist and racializing logic by which the state classifies bodies.

In the conclusion of her farewell letter to Hourani, Rabinyan writes:

“You said that perhaps we should set up a sort of protest movement of friends. I would introduce you to all my Israeli friends and you would introduce me to all your Palestinian friends. We would throw a party, you said, turned on by the idea - parties! Later, all my friends and your friends would introduce each other to all their friends; the thing would grow and grow. People would learn to love each other, learn to forgive each other. There would be comfort, reciprocity, you will see, you said, taking another drag and exhaling the words slowly from your lungs. “It will change the situation, I am telling you, a movement like this could change the whole political map in the Middle East.” Then, throwing your head back, you burst out laughing” (Rabinyan 2004).

Whether Rabinyan’s relationship with Hourani was romantic or platonic is beside the point. As we will explore further, the fundamental threat posed by the text was in its exploration of

a possible world such as the one that Hourani proposed above, a world that would transcend and render irrelevant the “inclusionary myths and exclusionary practices” (Stoler 1995, 24). of the contemporary Israeli state.

4.1.1.1.1 Cultural competency and belonging

All three of these works deftly play with the reader/viewer’s assumptions of belonging. The three Jewish characters are marginalized in Israeli society to varying degrees: Alex is a poor Russian immigrant who cannot speak Hebrew, Noam is gay, and Liat, who seems to be both the most patriotic and the most normative, is Iranian-Jewish, as is Rabinyan herself. Rabinyan makes it known in the novel that Liat’s skin, an important marker of racialized identity, is darker than Hilmi’s, and at many points Liat draws connections between her parent’s Iranian heritage and what she assumes Hilmi’s cultural experience as a Palestinian to have been. It is important to note, however, that while colorism exists in Israel (and indeed in most national contexts), as discussed briefly in the previous chapter, the assignment of racial category is not determined in the Israeli context on the basis of physical attributes alone. Stoler makes an important point about skin color and classification:

“Racism is commonly understood as a visual ideology in which somatic features are thought to provide the crucial criteria of membership. But racism is not really a visual ideology at all. Physiological attributes only signal the nonvisual and more salient distinctions of exclusion on which racism rests” (Stoler 2010, 83).

Thus, while Rabinyan plays with the idea that Hilmi may be more capable of passing as white in an American context than Liat, belonging in Israel is determined by a web of cultural competencies, proper comportment and milieu, ability to speak Hebrew, normative sexual behavior, middle or upper-class status, as well as proper biological parents (not to mention the presumed quality of their parenting). Skin color is then viewed as an index, rather than a means of classification in its own right.

Language plays a critical role as well. The only way that Ashraf is able to hide in plain sight in Tel Aviv is through his carefully perfected Israeli Hebrew. He jokes at one

point that his uncle had warned the family about him, saying “be careful, this one talks like a Jew.” To “talk like a Jew” is an issue that arises between Hilmi and Liat and between Huda and Alex as well. Hilmi cannot speak Hebrew and Liat cannot speak Arabic, so the two meet on ‘neutral’ ground in English. One day, Liat hears Hilmi singing a song in Hebrew. The lyrics are a perverse version of a famous pop song that she enjoyed as a child. She is horrified to learn that Hilmi learned this song while in prison, where the guards forced the inmates to sing it in an effort to humiliate them. Liat thinks:

"How strange to suddenly hear the Hebrew erupt from his mouth...I try to drown out his version with the innocent lyrics of the original: *I have a little bird in me / a warm and distant melody / of summertime / of a thousand rhymes*... To hear that lovely Israeli song coming out of his lips, distorted so crudely, and to imagine him as a young kid, standing there frightened in the prison yard like a trained circus bear, singing for the soldiers' entertainment" (Rabinyan 2014, 67).

Her first response is anger at him: in hearing the warped version of the song she loved, she loses her ability to deny the cruelty he faced at the hands of the IDF and experiences this loss as a betrayal. His reality, and the reality of the occupation, is laid bare for her through her own language.

In *A Trumpet in the Wadi*, Alex and Huda meet as neighbors in a predominantly Arab neighborhood, a common experience for many new Russian immigrants. While Huda feels attracted to him, she is paralyzed by a past traumatic loss resulting in feelings of inadequacy and cannot approach him. When they finally meet, it is through language. Huda speaks Hebrew fluently; her favorite writer is Yehuda Amichai. This linguistic and cultural competency allows her to move through Jewish spaces, including her workplace, with an ease that Alex was promised as a ‘son of the Jewish homeland’ and yet did not find to exist in reality. Indeed at multiple points throughout the novel there is this visible shifting of the balance of privilege between them as they move through different spaces. In the neighborhood, which is owned by an Arab landowner associated with organized crime, Alex is advantaged– no one, not even the landlord, is willing to hurt him. However, his status as a Russian immigrant places him in one of the lowest classes of Jewish identity in Israel, and his poor Hebrew renders him ineligible for the kind of white-collar work that Huda has found. His earnings are meager to the point that Huda’s family regularly brings food upstairs to keep

him from starving. Despite this, when Huda and Alex take a vacation to Eilat with Huda's sister and her fiancé, they insist that Alex be the one to talk to soldiers and police, despite his limited ability with Hebrew: navigating Israel's highways is dangerous as an Arab no matter how good one's Hebrew may be.

In "The Bubble", Noam imagines his progressive community in Tel Aviv to be a haven outside of the political and structural realities of Israel. He offers his room to Ashraf without hesitation - ignoring the hesitation of his roommates - and reminding them that it is "hard to be gay over there [in Palestine]." What he never questions, and what indeed is never directly brought up in the film, is whether it is truly all that easy to be gay 'over here,' in Tel Aviv. Ashraf is clearly more skeptical of the utopian image of Tel Aviv as a bubble, and indeed his presence there begins to unravel the fantasy for Noam and his friends as well. It is necessary for him to pass as a Jew, something that his ability to speak flawless Hebrew partially enables. Yet passing is always an incomplete effort, one constantly determined by those around you and thus in perpetual need of reconfiguring. In one scene a man who Yali is dating expresses skepticism about Ashraf, saying that the pants he is wearing look "Arab". While Ashraf is clearly terrified that his cover has been blown, Noam laughs at this – they are, after all, Noam's pants that he has lent to Ashraf. Cultural competency is an intangible "multiplicity of individual ties" (Fichte, quoted in Stoler 2014), a complex constellation that, paradoxically, can be transgressed only by those whose belonging is already fully secured – and even then, there are clear limits. Noam can wear pants that look 'Arab': Ashraf cannot take that risk. Noam, however, steps outside of the bounds of acceptable transgression by falling in love with a Palestinian man. He pushes the boundaries too far and pays a terrible price for it.

4.1.1.1.1 Possible worlds

Across both texts, as well as in *The Bubble*, a commonality quickly becomes clear: for the narrative to resolve itself, for the book to end, one (or both) of the characters has to die. Materialist feminist scholar Rosemary Hennessy has argued against the decoupling of discourse from structure and material reality: even in purely discursive, literary form, these

authors remain trapped within the structural realities of Israeli society. Taking inspiration from literary scholar Ruth Ronen's application of "possible worlds" theory to literary criticism, David C. Jacobson posits that in narratives of romantic relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel, the author "presents to her readers a significant assessment of the possibility of closer relations between Israelis and Palestinians in the real world and the barriers to a fulfilling intimacy between these members of enemy groups" (Jacobson 2007, 34). To write a story based in a recognizably realistic Israel means that the writing of such transgressive relationships ends at a wall: like their real-life counterparts, the characters have no avenue to continue their romance past the initial, secretive, exciting beginnings. While the reality of most situations is that the relationship simply ends here, the symbolic death of one of the partners – usually the Arab, but not exclusively – reflects the frustration of possibility that these couples, as well as the writers themselves, feel.

In all three texts a particular space is rendered as exceptional, a neutral zone where the bounds of the conflict do not apply and the characters, or so they initially believe, can meet on equal footing. In *All the Rivers*, this space is New York City. In *A Trumpet in the Wadi*, it is the room on the roof of Huda's apartment, where Alex stays. In "The Bubble", as the title itself suggests, the city of Tel Aviv forms the shaky ground upon which Noam and Ashraf try to build a love that can last. These spaces are representations of possible worlds, of how relationships could play out if certain material circumstances were different. However, these possible worlds are tenuous, negotiated through exceptions and bound to fail. At an inevitable point, the text runs into reality. While New York provides the grounds of possibility for Liat and Hilmi's relationship, it is always fragile. In one instance, she and Hilmi have an interaction with a group of Israeli tourists on the subway: Liat becomes irrationally terrified that, somehow, they will know that she is a Jewish Israeli and that Hilmi is Palestinian. Similarly, she finds herself actively lying to friends and family, including acquaintances who live in New York, and becomes increasingly paranoid. New York itself proves to not be the dreamland that either she or Hilmi had imagined: it is an unusually cold winter, and both become both physically ill and homesick.

Huda and Alex's relationship similarly finds neutral ground in which to flourish in the form of the room on the roof that Alex is renting. Huda is drawn by the sound of Alex practicing his trumpet at night and imagines at first that the sadness with which he plays is a lament to

the girlfriend he left behind in Russia. Later, when he tells her that he is playing for her, his room becomes a place where they can love freely. However, incursions abound: Huda's family is tentatively supportive, but the room itself is contested by the landlord, whose henchmen regularly give Alex trouble. Sami Michael draws the reader's attention throughout the novel back to the door, the physical barrier between the room and the world outside: whether it is locked, whether it stands open, how Huda feels about knocking on it and entering, comes to symbolize the status of their relationship at that particular moment. When Alex is drafted to fight in Lebanon, the room is occupied only by his mother, a bitter, violent woman whose entry into their lives is a harbinger of the end of their relationship.

The scholar and writer Donna Haraway stressed the importance of "storying otherwise"; or, the need for new stories from which to build new worlds. In her words, "It matters to destabilize worlds of thinking with other worlds of thinking." I argue that the three texts we have analyzed here are exemplary of this. Each in their own way, they hold open a space, however small, to imagine how things might be different. They are not optimistic texts; after all, all three narratives adhere strictly to the realities of Israeli society (*All the Rivers* being the most direct example, as it is at least partially a true story). However, they do not directly portray reality as it is. Instead, they actualize a possibility of what could be, within the confines of current legal, social, and geographical terrains. The characters transgress these boundaries in ways that remain realistic, if not actually real. There is a noticeable sense of frustration connecting these works, particularly in the work of Sami Michael and Dorit Rabinyan: frustration with the way things are, with a lack of possibility, with the competing impulses to portray events as occurring in a world that is a realistic approximation of our own and yet simultaneously to offer an alternative. To story otherwise.

It is not a coincidence that, in all three texts, the story ends with the death of one or both of the protagonists. Having reached past the point of acceptable transgression, there is nowhere for the characters to go. From the standpoint of plot, the writers were unable to realistically write the ongoing possibility of such a relationship, unable to imagine how such a couple could live together without employing *deus ex machina* in the form of winning the lottery, running away together to a far-away country, etc. Further, given the narrative demand for a conclusive ending, a continuation of the trials, challenges, and negotiations required of maintaining a mixed relationship in the Israeli state is difficult to convey in literary form.

Seeking nevertheless to speak to these challenges, the authors chose death as a metaphor for the withholding of possibilities.



5. CONCLUSION: INHERITANCES

When I explained the subject of this paper to an Israeli friend, she told me she didn't understand what was so complicated about the subject in the first place. "People don't like it [mixed relationships] because it's like putting salt in water. Once you mix them, you can't tell where one ends and the other begins. And you've ruined both." While I initially found this comment offensive – imagining biracial or multiethnic children as "ruined water" being a particularly unappealing image – I later found this rendering useful to think with. It makes clear the desire to police interior frontiers, and the highly racialized nature of the terms of belonging. As I contemplated this, it also occurred to me that salt water is not "ruined" water at all. It is a life-giving substance for at least 15% of the world's organisms.

It was thus, when searching for a way to structure the vast amount of information, stories, and occurrences I had collected, I ultimately settled on a format modeled after the movement of a jellyfish, a creature that has thrived in salt water for at least 500 million years. This project began with a single comment and worked its way outwards, expanding and contracting as it moved forward. What begins first as a seemingly simple case of ethnic conflict or tradition expands outward onto the unsteady ground of group identity formation and the maintenance of racial categories within the context of a racialized nation-state. In chapter one we began with a contracted focus on individual cases, incidences, and occurrences that I believe are illustrative, and indeed evidence of, the specter of mixed relationships in Israeli society. These incidents resonate at deeply personal levels, as individuals are stigmatized, ostracized, punished, and in some cases physically attacked for their expressions of romantic attachment to the 'wrong' person. From these cases the story broadens again, blooming out from the lives of individuals into communal and then national fears about the nature of belonging, of who has access to resources such as land, water, access

to participation in the decisions of governance, and much more. I have tried to situate these concerns within their historical context, and to weave together both broad statements on the nature of racialized hierarchy without expanding into platitudes or overly-generalized formulas. Throughout I have drawn inspiration from the theoretical frameworks and observations offered by scholars such as Alexander G. Weheliye and Ann Laura Stoler, whose works are focused on different historical and geographical contexts. Despite this, I found that the structures, social organizations, and material and discursive histories that their works illuminate shared numerous points of similarity to the context of contemporary Israel, attesting to the plasticity of racialized hierarchy as a means of organizing settler-colonial governance and societies.

The flow of the story contracts again in chapter three, focusing this time not exclusively on individual stories that actually happened, but rather on those that perhaps could happen – in other words, narrative fictions. While artistic works that portrays mixed relationships with any complexity are rare to begin with, I chose to focus on three works in particular so as to give them the attention they deserve: Sami Michael's 1973 novel *A Trumpet in the Wadi*, Eytan Fox's 2001 film "Ha'Buah" (The Bubble), and Dorit Rabinyan's semi-fictitious novel *All the Rivers*, published in 2015. These works are highly different in form, content, tone, style, and just about every other conceivable criterion. In fact, the only theme that connects the three is the centrality of a mixed relationship; across all three texts, an Arab and a Jew fall in love and the plot builds outward accordingly. I originally approached these texts as examples from which to theorize about, or perhaps more honestly, to prove a point with. Yet I found that the texts themselves resisted my rather utilitarian approach: they were already theorizing, already critical thought experiments into whether and how a different world might be possible.

If one critical point around which the many events, fears, and attempts at world-making that constitute the specter of mixed relationships can be specified, I argue that it is inheritance. In the most obvious and deliberate sense, there is a concern over that which is inherited: blood, genetic material (of importance given the normative, if uneasy, acceptance of race as a biological category), social position in the form of class and gender, and the tangled web of sensibilities and desires that are presumed to accompany these positions. Inheritance here is understood not only as that which is given by a biological mother and

father, although that is indeed central to the more heteronormative fears surrounding mixed relationships. It is understood also as those traces which a community, a “proper milieu” in Ann Stoler’s terminology, and even a physical landscape can imbue in a person. As discussed in chapter one, far-right groups such as Yad L’achim locate their concerns at the precise intersection of different types of inheritances: “they are Jews, but they are raised as Arabs”. They have inherited Jewish lineage and its attendant legal privileges, yet they are also presumed to be inheriting Arab enculturation. They are salt water.

In an ongoing settler-colonial project occurring within a roughly 10,000 square mile strip of highly-contested land, inheritance matters deeply. Organized around a racialized hierarchy, who has the right to live where is a matter of inheritance upon which the continuity of the project that is Israel depends. Children, who inherit not only the genetic material of their parents but also their social position, serve as a potential point at which children who are not classified as properly Jewish might nevertheless inherit the right to land and the legal protections and privileges that accompany it.

To inherit the privileges of belonging in a conquered landscape is to inherit a history of violence, the disavowal of which is in no sense unique to Israel. The largely white community I was born into in the North American West did not question their right to own and occupy the land, and it was not until I was an adult and living on the other side of the globe that I learned I had spent most of my life on un-ceded Ohlone territory. Yet inheritances are complicated and multi-directional: to be born classified as a Jew is also to inherit an ongoing history of persecution, displacement and disaster. The often-cynical use of this by fear-mongering conservative parties in Israel does not alter the fact that this history is real and is felt intimately to this day. It is in recognition of this that I hope I have treated the subjects whose lives and motivations fill this project fairly. Further, I hope I have made it clear that, while individual actions and choices do matter, it is the organizing logic of the Israeli state and its attendant structures that have rendered the specter of mixed relationships a particularly deadly one. Vilifying individuals is counterproductive to the project of building a different future, to the possibility of telling different stories.

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