

Spring 2024

Israel's Unequal Inclusion: The Politics of Being an Occupier

Emily Hall Smith
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024



Part of the [Ethnic Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Smith, Emily Hall, "Israel's Unequal Inclusion: The Politics of Being an Occupier" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 277.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024/277

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2024 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Israel's Unequal Inclusion: The Politics of Being an Occupier

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Emily Hall Smith

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

Dedication

To my parents:

Thank you for always encouraging me to be passionate, and for teaching me that I have to care.

To the people of Palestine:

Thank you for existing and for showing the rest of us what love, perseverance, life, humanity, joy, and passion are.

Acknowledgements

To my Senior Project Advisor, Professor Pinar Kemerli, thank you for encouraging me and continuing to push me to my full potential. I have appreciated our chats and time spent together.

To my parents and inspiration, thank you for always being there. I cannot put into words nor thank you enough in my lifetime for the support you have given me during all of my time before, during, and after Bard.

To my Senior Project Board Members, Professor J. Andrew Bush and Professor Ziad Abu-Rish, thank you for providing helpful insights during important moments, and for also encouraging me to pursue my project.

To my boss and inspiration, Elmira Bayrasli, thank you for giving me advice, writing help, and projects to expand my knowledge of the world and to allow me to pursue what I am interested in.

To Bard Athletics, thank you for always being around to give me a laugh and a pat on the back, as well as offer a good distraction from my work.

To my longtime best friends from my hometown, thank you for being the best friends a girl could ask for and for always being there to celebrate our lives and accomplishments.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Israeli State Building and Orientalism.....	4
Chapter 2: The Mizrahim of Israel.....	23
Conclusion: Unequal Inclusions and its Adaptations.....	41
Bibliography.....	49

Introduction

Seventy-five years of settler colonial occupation of the Palestinian peoples have left devastating consequences for indigenous, Arab, Palestinian people, but to fully evaluate the extent of the consequences of Israel's settler colonial regime, it is essential to investigate how the regime of occupation affects other populations. To add crucial ideological ammunition to the argument against Israel's unjust occupation of Palestinian lands and people, I argue that Israel's regime has negatively impacted its own Jewish-Israeli population as well. Although Israel and its founding ideology Zionism have found a basis for their respective existence within the idea that they provide a form of salvation to all Jewish populations, they have not successfully provided that freedom to many population groups within Israel. Instead, settler colonial occupation has made sure that the nation of Israel has not only dispossessed and oppressed Palestinian people, but has also been unable to provide an equitable, supportive space for all Jewish people. Thus, in this paper, I evaluate the ways Israel has failed to provide salvation to a significant number of Jewish populations as a result of its settler-colonial interests.

Israel's settler colonial regime is largely a product of European Zionists like Theodor Herzl, who sought a territorial solution to the antisemitism that plagued the globe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, Israeli state-building tactics tended to emulate those utilized in Europe, including the use of Orientalist ideology to justify settler colonial occupation. Orientalism is understood as a set of beliefs and practices that have historically allowed many European nations to colonize regions of the "Oriental" world by positing themselves as superior and bound with the responsibility to "civilize" the indigenous

populations of the lands that they conquered. This ideology is intricately intertwined with Zionism when applied to Israel, and has worked to justify its settler colonial occupation.

Orientalism, and Zionism's historical reliance on it to effectively occupy historic Palestine, has, however, had destructive results for Israel's Jewish populations also, and especially those from the denigrated "Oriental" world. Arab, North African, and Middle Eastern Jewish populations of Israel were, and continue to be, affected by the anti-Arab sentiments shared by European Orientalism of the late nineteenth century, which were enshrined in Israeli society. The Orientalism which prevails in early Zionist ideology has adapted throughout Israeli history to manifest in strong, ethnically-based sentiments about Arabness. The narratives of de-Arabization that have accordingly taken root have had detrimental consequences for its Arab, North African, and Middle Eastern populations.

While Israel utilizes Orientalism to uphold its settler colonial regime, it sought to adapt its tactics for legitimacy as the international world moved towards liberalism, democracy, and a human rights-based normative structure. Therefore, Israel's supposed inclusion of all Jewish populations as a safeguard against widespread antisemitism, referred to within Zionist discourse as the "Negation of Exile," has become more and more essential to retaining Israeli legitimacy. It is of utmost importance that Israel has continually failed to include all Jewish populations properly within its state because of this exact reliance. Without actual salvation for all Jewish people within Israel's borders, Israel does not have the justification it requires to be legitimate in the eyes of Western nation-states.

Therefore it would be my goal in this project to examine Israel's historical negligence of the implementation of this reality through analyzing Israel's discrimination against, exploitation

and ignorance of its Mizrahi population since their arrival in the region. As I argue in the first Chapter, the Mizrahim were “unequally included,” within the Israeli nation, whereby their “inclusion” helped the Israeli state to assert its legitimacy as a safe haven for world Jewry, but while at the same time generating new inequalities compared to the non-Mizrahi Jewish populations of Israel. The second Chapter exposes Israel’s initial subscription to “unequal inclusion” of the Mizrahim which occurred even before its founding, when Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine during the early twentieth century. Jewish populations arriving from Yemen were exploited for their labor whereby their Jewish identities could be forged to potentially satisfy Zionist desires for a base of Jewish settlers upon which to build their state. Those same Yemenite Jewish people, as a part of the Mizrahim, were then excluded from the Israeli State Kibbutzim, cultural identity, and their heritages were erased from the registrar of Jewish memory within Zionist historiography.

Israel’s adaptation of the “unequal inclusion” of certain populations occurred when, in the context of worldwide homophobia among rising acceptance of same-sex coupledness within Western nations, Israel worked to emphasize its reputation of LGBTQ+ acceptance through propaganda campaigns. Meanwhile, Israel’s own, domestic LGBTQ+ population were and are still unable to marry within Israel in the eyes of Israeli authorities. Israel’s settler colonial existence has caused its need to preserve international recognition of itself as a “liberal democracy” to become more important than its own domestic environment, and thus Israel continues to be unable to provide salvation to world Jewry.

Chapter 1: Israeli State Building and Orientalism

The State of Israel was created using state-building methods characteristic of an ethno-settler colonial state while propagating an international image of inclusion of an, albeit domestically privileged, class of all Jewish populations. While the oppression and occupation faced by the indigenous population of Palestinian people is the target of most studies concerning Israel's occupation, and rightfully so, there are inequalities within Israel's supposedly privileged Jewish class also worthy of investigation. These inequalities are not only a product of Israel's settler colonial existence but further deny Israel of properly implementing its founding principles and programs, most of which imply that its existence protects all Jewish populations from oppression. Israel declared its independence and statehood in 1948, as a "Jewish state" which still promised "non-Jews 'full and equal citizenship.'"¹ The state's central political institutions were "established as democratic, including a representative parliament (the Knesset), periodic elections, an independent judiciary, and relatively free media."² Israel's declaration of independence attempted to signal, to the international stage, its liberal, democratic, and equitable interests. Zionists and the State of Israel understood that the state would have to legitimize itself as a nation-state, including its colonial endeavors, on a world stage in which the major powers of the United States and Europe were intricately involved in "modernization" initiatives with postcolonial, democratic sentiments. Israel's settler colonial occupation of historic Palestinian land threatens its legitimacy in this context and thus Israel has largely relied on its inclusion of

¹ Oren Yiftachel, "'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine," *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 7.

² Oren Yiftachel, "'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine," *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 7.

all Jewish populations for its legitimacy, but its ruthless program of settler colonialism of historically Palestinian land has made that goal impossible to achieve.

Israel's Orientalism & Settler Colonial Occupation

The settler colonialism of historic Palestine is an ongoing process, which requires its own discussion. As described by Sai Englert in *Settler Colonialism: An Introduction*, the colonizers, in this process of settler colonial occupation, “(aim to) make colonized lands their permanent home and in the process enter into a continuous and sustained conflict with the indigenous populations, whom they (attempt to) dispossess, exploit and/or eliminate.”³ While Englert’s claim references settler colonialism as a whole, his logic has clear applications to Israel’s colonization of Palestine. This understanding of settler colonialism accurately posits Zionists in Israel as a non-indigenous entity that has continuously attempted to replace the indigenous Palestinian population with its own Jewish population. The settler colonial nature of the State of Israel, has continually pushed Palestinian people to the margins of economic and social society, while forcing them off of their ancestral homelands through the capitalist accumulation of land. Coined by Gershon Shafir, in *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, the term ‘pure settlement colony’ is often used to describe the particular type of colonization in which Israel engages. This system of colonization pursues a “deliberate strategy of ethnic migration and settlement that aims to alter the country’s ethnic structure.”⁴ Through its dispossession of Palestine’s land and its declaration of itself as a state that allows privileged status for Jewish people, Israel has effectively altered historic Palestine’s ethnic profile, and

³ Sai Englert, *Settler Colonialism: An Introduction* (Pluto Press, 2022), 14-15.

⁴ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 2.

through this process, defined Israeli national identity through ethnic identities, or lack of Palestinian, Arab identity.

As a settler colonial state that works to eliminate the indigenous group through migration and settlement, Israel's occupation of historically Palestinian lands primarily affects Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim people who are indigenous to the land. There are several scholars who have done excellent studies to evaluate and understand the consequences of Israel's occupation on the indigenous population, but the question of how Israeli settler colonialism has affected Jewish residents of Israel has not been studied nearly as much. In this senior thesis, I address this question, especially with regard to the Arab, North African, and Middle Eastern Jewish populations of Israel. This population is known as Israel's Mizrahi population, but their classification as a cohesive group is due to their convergence in Israel and not because their cultural and historical backgrounds are cohesive or homogenous. Within this paper, I will predominantly refer to this population as Israel's "Mizrahi" population or Israel's "Mizrahim." Other scholars have referred to this same population by other names. For example, Ella Shohat, to whose work we will soon turn, refers to the Mizrahim as Israel's "Sephardi" population or the "Sephardim." I instead use the term Mizrahi to include all Jewish populations of Arab, North African, or Middle Eastern descent who have or intend(ed) to immigrate to Israel, though I have not changed the language of direct quotations from authors who utilize the "Sephardim" or similar terms to refer to the same population group.

Israel's settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine has created an environment in which certain populations in Israel (all of whom are supposedly united under one religion) face higher levels of discrimination and lower levels of inclusion than their counterparts. The way this

affects the Mizrahi population of Israel is largely determined by Israel's state-building, settler colonial practices, which are founded within and representative of European, Western practices, which "when it came to the non-European Other," were "Orientalist."⁵ As analyzed by Palestinian-American scholar Edward W. Said in his famous 1978 book, *Orientalism*, Orientalism has several definitions. As "a style of thought," it is "based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident."⁶ At the same time, however, Orientalism is "a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it."⁷ In short, Said writes, Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."⁸ Building on Said's insights, I see Orientalism to be central to imperialism and settler occupation, and allows European nations "a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans," with "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures."⁹ Orientalism has, in this way, provided the ideological background required by European states to colonize, "civilize," and subjugate victims of European imperialism.

With one of the most common targets, historically, being the region once encapsulated by the Ottoman Empire, Orientalism was an important tool utilized by Zionists in their settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine, and Orientalism targeted at this region of the world will be that which I investigate within this paper. Orientalism allowed colonizers the necessary

⁵ Gabriel Piterberg, "Domestic Orientalism: The Representation of 'Oriental' Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (Nov. 1996): 130.

⁶ Edward Said, *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 69.

⁷ Edward Said, *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 69.

⁸ Edward Said, *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 69.

⁹ Edward Said, *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 73.

authority to commit settler colonial occupation of an indigenous population in Palestine. It imagines the “Orient,” which, for my purposes, is the Middle East and North Africa, as a region of backwardness and incivility, and Europeans as the proper authority to solve that problem. In Palestine, Orientalist ideology was successful at providing the support needed by the Zionist mission to colonize the land of historic Palestine. Theodor Herzl, largely considered the father of Zionism, said that the Jewish state would serve as “the portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.”¹⁰ Herzl envisioned Israel to have a European, and thus, in the context of a Jewish State, Ashkenazi, identity; while he simultaneously rejected the Arabness of the region within which Israel was situated, characterizing it as “barbaric.” The Middle East is often subject to Orientalist assumptions which characterize it and its people as “backwards,” and thus Herzl’s comments with regard to the region and its people fit neatly into European, Orientalist narratives. This Orientalist sentiment also garnered support for Zionism within Europe, where the states with the most power within Europe and America were also adamant subscribers to Orientalist ideology. In order to generate support and legitimacy within Europe, as well as due to the fact that Zionism’s founders were Ashkenazi Jewish people, Israel’s state-building policies and Zionism were based on Orientalism. Orientalism has provided the tools for Israel’s settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine, while also affected those Jewish populations within Israel that are also from the “Orient,” or Mizrahi Jewish peoples.

Ethnic divisions between Jewish populations of Israel and the indigenous Palestinian population are essential to the Orientalist subjugation of Palestinian people which drives

¹⁰ Joseph Massad, “Zionism’s Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 54.

Zionism's settler colonial occupation. Within historic Palestine and in the context of Israel's settler colonial occupation of it, Orientalism operated as an undercurrent of an environment of ethnic supremacy for Jewish Zionists, whose leaders and representatives were European, in order to facilitate the settler colonial occupation of Arab Palestinian people. This same Orientalism would then allow for similar ethnic divisions to manifest within Jewish society and inevitably led to the discrimination faced by Mizrahi Israelis, who were, at least intended to be, included in Israeli society.¹¹ Debate about how Mizrahi Israelis fit into Israeli society mirrors European Orientalist discourse, and framed the "Mizrahi problem" "as a debate concerning the 'essence of primitivism,'" connecting Mizrahi Arabness with Orientalist assumptions (which were raised, originally, to subjugate the indigenous Arab, Palestinian population). Following Orientalist suit, the "solution" to this "problem" was "a strong infusion of European cultural values" that would "rescue the Arab Jews from their 'backwardness.'"¹² Though Zionism claimed to privilege populations on the basis of their religion, with Jewish people reaping the rewards of territorial occupation, the reality of its settler colonial occupation and the Orientalist ideology which allowed it to occur meant that ethnicity defined divisions, in practice.

While Arab identities were scrutinized in the context of Israel's Orientalist, settler colonial occupation of indigenous Arab Palestinian people, Jewish identities were, on the other hand, privileged, creating an environment in which Israel was simultaneously invested in "Judaization and de-Arabization."¹³ These processes inevitably affected relationships within the privileged Jewish class of Israel and created an environment of discrimination against Mizrahi

¹¹ Oren Yiftachel, "'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine," *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 10.

¹² Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 5.

¹³ Oren Yiftachel, "'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine," *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 7.

Jewish populations. The precedence of these divisions within Israeli society have been exposed a number of times. Perhaps most notably by former Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's statement decrying Arabness within the Jewish populations of the Jewish state. He said, "We do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are in duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant, which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as they crystallized in the Diaspora."¹⁴ Ben-Gurion's statements represent the general contempt held towards Arabness within Israeli society, and his accusations of the Levant as "corrupting" fit into the Orientalist convictions which justify Israeli occupation of Palestine – but this time they are directed at Jewish Israelis.

Israel's subscription to Orientalist narratives within its state-building mimicked the processes European nations and empires were implicated in during their settler colonial enterprises. However, during the time of Zionism's formation and the establishment of the State of Israel, there were newer understandings of democratic, liberal values that had to be factored into Zionist state-building practices. David Lloyd, Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, recognizes in his "Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel," "Israel presents itself as an exemplary and therefore 'normal' state predicated on the no less normal desire of a historical people for a homeland or a nation-state of their own – of which there were many examples in Europe in particular at the moment of Zionism's foundations."¹⁵ This presentation of itself can be seen clearly in Israel's founding "Negation of Exile" narrative, which implies the inclusion of all

¹⁴ Ella Shohat, "The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: The Case of the Mizrahim," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 6, no. 10 (March 1997): 6.

¹⁵ David Lloyd, "Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 62.

Jewish population in a homeland in historic Palestine, which according to Zionists, is the appropriate territory for world Jewry to self-determine within. Lloyd goes on to say that, “at the same time, Israel is no less an exemplary settler colony, typical of numerous settler colonies of which, again, nineteenth-century Europe had spawned numerous instances.”¹⁶ The settler-colonial elements of Israel’s nation-building processes defy the inclusion promised by the “Negation of Exile” and its implications for self-determination, which legitimize Israel’s existence. It is, however, not unique in this defiance, as Europe’s empires have practiced similar policies while involving themselves in the settler colonial occupation of other territories.

As the world entered the twentieth century, nonetheless, these processes departed from the defined norms of nation-building, because Western nations were beginning to lean more into liberal, advanced, human-rights protecting, democratic understandings of society, which did not necessarily allow for prescribed and defined settler colonial occupation. Lloyd claims that, “Israel seeks on the one hand to be accepted as one among the community of advanced democracies,” who now recognized the illegitimacy of settler colonial occupation. However, Lloyd explains that, considering this context, Israel “demands to be excepted from the norms of international law and human rights conventions on the basis of its peculiar destiny as a state in which ethnic nationalism and religious prophecy are enshrined” and which Israel “is called on to defend.”¹⁷ In other words, Israel largely depended on narratives like the “Negation of Exile” to legitimize its existence on the world stage and fit into a new, more democratic, and liberal norm. He concludes that narratives like this present “what is an entirely irresolvable contradiction

¹⁶ David Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 62.

¹⁷ David Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 65.

within the normally accepted terms of the liberal, secular state,” where certain populations are discriminated against because of Israel’s settler colonial occupation while it simultaneously utilizes narratives that do not align with that reality to legitimize itself within the chorus of “modern,” “democratic,” liberal, “postcolonial,” states.¹⁸

The Negation of Exile

The ideology of Zionism formed during a specific moment in European and Jewish histories, which allowed its legitimacy to manifest solely within Israel’s promise of salvation for Jewish people. Within Europe, nationalism was increasing in popularity and state-building practices were being experimented with. During the period covering around 1870 to 1914, “ethno-linguistic types of nationalism” were on the rise in Europe.¹⁹ Meanwhile, within Jewish histories, world Jewry faced oppression, persecution, and struggle in their home nations, as well as the very real threat of worldwide antisemitism. The “Negation of Exile” narrative, propagated by Zionists, offered tangible salvation to those suffering. This concept, naturally, became much more pervasive after the Holocaust. Thus, during this time and in the “context of state competition in Europe, and the proliferation of nationalisms in the eastern half of that continent, ‘the concept of a Jewish national state in its ancient homeland’ was able to gain acceptance from Europe and the United States.”²⁰ Support for Jewish nationalism and the need for a tangible Jewish community and space were largely in response to “the pogroms of 1881,” “specific

¹⁸ David Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 65.

¹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, “Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism,” *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 2.

²⁰ Anthony D. Smith, “Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism,” *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 5.

catastrophes, such as the Damascus Blood Libel of 1840 and the new political antisemitism in Central Europe.”²¹

Zionists of the late-nineteenth century hoped to find a territorial solution to the strife of world Jewry, and, in the context of European nationalism, liberalism, and self-determination, founded that solution in the “Negation of Exile (shelilat ha-galut)” principle.²² This “Negation,” however, for Zionists of the time, required the settler colonial occupation of the territory of historic Palestine by an ethno-nation made up of Jewish populations from all over the world. The Zionist version of Jewish history sees the Jewish populations outside of Israel as being in “diaspora,” and only Zionism “could offer a promise of collective restoration which was tinged with messianism and religious redemption.”²³ In other words, worldwide Jewish oppression and antisemitism that Jewish populations faced while in “diaspora” could effectively be solved, within a European-style state-building framework by the territorial acquisition and settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine. Zionism “managed to integrate the history of Exile into a territorial narrative by de-historicizing and essentializing it,”²⁴ in a process that connected Jewish populations’ salvation from oppression to the settler colonial occupation and territorial acquisition of historic Palestine. The “Negation of Exile” narrative allowed Zionist ideology to operate within a liberal, democratic, modern state-building framework and remain legitimate in the eyes of the international community, while engaged in settler colonial occupation.

²¹ Anthony D. Smith, “Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism,” *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 14.

²² Gabriel Piterberg, “Domestic Orientalism: The Representation of ‘Oriental’ Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (November 1996): 129.

²³ Anthony D. Smith, “Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism,” *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 16.

²⁴ Gabriel Piterberg, “Domestic Orientalism: The Representation of ‘Oriental’ Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (November 1996): 133.

The “Negation of Exile” narrative is a prominent theme used by Zionists to promote the legitimacy of its idea of building a Jewish state in historic Palestine and to coerce Jewish populations into subscribing to their method of salvation. Films, like “The Land of Promise” were shown in Europe and New York to Jewish people to encourage them to come to Israel, or, ideally, donate funds to the Zionist mission. The screenings were often accompanied by lectures that “would clarify the film’s message, or make specific a more general pitch.”²⁵ This film, along with many other Zionist propaganda films made post-1920 were created by the Jewish National Fund and the Palestine Foundation Fund, both of which largely contributed to Israeli state-building efforts in the form of assisting with the settlement of immigrating Jewish people.²⁶ Zionist literature, another tool used by Zionists to raise awareness and funds, confronted Jewish populations “with two mutually exclusive possibilities: to either endure the pain of the struggle for equality and social integration, or to cling to claims of superiority and the myth of exceptionalism.”²⁷ Zionist propaganda helped harness support for, and was inherently intertwined with, secular and political Israeli state-building, a state which would be, pragmatically, settler colonial in nature. To do so, it utilized the “Negation of Exile” narrative in this propaganda, furthering the Zionist connection between the settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine and the salvation of Jewish people from antisemitism.

Israel’s legitimacy has historically been founded on its theoretical subscription to offering salvation and protection to all Jewish peoples, in its “Negation of Exile” narrative, while also

²⁵ Hillel Tryster, “‘The Land of Promise’ (1935): A Case Study in Zionist Film Propaganda,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 2 (June 1995): 190.

²⁶ Hillel Tryster, “‘The Land of Promise’ (1935): A Case Study in Zionist Film Propaganda,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 2 (June 1995): 188.

²⁷ Kaleem Hawa, “Palestinian Literary Criticism in Ghassan Kanafani’s *On Zionist Literature*,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 52, no. 3 (September 2023): 86.

subscribing to the principles considered by the West to make up a legitimate state, like liberalism and modernity. However, its status as a settler colonial occupier of historic Palestine creates an environment of inequality, not only between Jewish people and indigenous Arab people but also within the Jewish population that the State claims to protect. The Mizrahi Jewish populations who have immigrated to Israel throughout its history, often coerced by the claims made by Zionists that Israel would offer them salvation, do not benefit from Israel's existence as much as their Ashkenazi, Jewish counterparts who immigrated to Israel from Europe and Russia. This is of particular concern because Zionism finds so much of its legitimacy on an international stage through its promise of salvation and equality to all Jewish people. Thus, my paper challenges Israel's attempts to ground its legitimacy, first and foremost, on its ability to provide a safe haven, equality, and freedom for, at the very *least*, its own Jewish citizens. Throughout its history, Israel has not offered true equality and freedom from oppression to all of its Jewish citizens, though it gains international legitimacy from the promise of doing so.

The "Negation of Exile" narrative propagated by Zionism, while being executed within a settler colonial state, pragmatically hurt several Jewish populations, as it did not allow equality and freedom from discrimination as it promises and bases its legitimacy upon. The implementation of this narrative required a distortion of Jewish history. Long-established religious practices provided a presence of shared memory, tradition, and connection within the Jewish community, which was and still is diasporic.²⁸ It is exactly that diasporic nature of the Jewish community that provides world Jewry's "rich variety of ethnic traditions, each of them combining Jewish rituals and beliefs with the customs and mores of the host society through the

²⁸ Anthony D. Smith, "Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism," *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 6-7.

ages – in Egypt, Babylonia and Persia, Spain, France and Germany, Poland and Russia, as well as communities further afield.”²⁹ In order to subscribe to the “Negation of Exile” narrative, “the cultural, social and political – that is, the historical – context of the various Jewish communities is displaced and rendered meaningless; the Exilic time(s) and place(s) themselves do not matter at all” and “what matters is the extent to which Jewish communities preserved and manifested the nation’s essence.”³⁰

The “Negation of Exile” narrative, as utilized and essentialized by Zionists, in systems of Orientalist, European state-building, required that Jewish desires for liberation from oppression in their own homelands be solved by this “Negation” and collective, territorial restoration in historic Palestine. Within the context of a settler colonial state, like Israel, Jewish populations were required to transform into “‘New Jews’ (later Israelis)” and “the ‘Diasporic Jews’ had to abandon their diasporic culture.”³¹ Without a narrative like the “Negation of Exile,” situated in the context of real, worldwide antisemitism, Zionists would not have been able to legitimately, in the opinion of the international community, erect a settler colonial state in historic Palestine. The systems and processes required to erect a settler colonial state, however, required Jewish populations to abandon identities that they had been building for two thousand years in diaspora.

Narratives like the “Negation of Exile” required a projected unity within the Jewish populations, who had realistically spent two thousand years in diaspora and thus were a far from homogenous group. It “collapses the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim into the single category of ‘one people,’” in order to maintain the legitimacy formulated by the “Negation of Exile”

²⁹ Anthony D. Smith, “Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism,” *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 7.

³⁰ Gabriel Piterberg, “Domestic Orientalism: The Representation of ‘Oriental’ Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (November 1996): 133.

³¹ Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews,” *Social Text* 75, vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 50.

narrative. But, at the same time, because of its existence as the settler colonial occupier of historic Palestine, indigenously populated by Arab, Palestinian people, “the Sephardi’s Oriental ‘difference’ threatens the European ideal ego which phantasizes Israel as a prolongation of Europe ‘in’ the Middle East, but not ‘of’ it.”³² Israel’s legitimacy in its occupation of historic Palestine is situated within an Orientalist imaginary which envisions the European – Ashkenazi here – identity as superior to the “Oriental,” which allows it to maintain its occupation. Because Israeli identity must nurture its European content in order to maintain its superiority, as well as the already ingrained Orientalist ideologies of the founders of the State of Israel, the identity of Israelis has been, decidedly so, Ashkenazi Jewish. Thus the formation of relative unity and homogeneity within the Israeli populace, as required by the “Negation of Exile” narrative, meant for Arab Jewish populations, abandoning their Arabness “for ‘their own good.’”³³

Israel as Unequally Inclusive

This Zionist narrative and historiography, based on the “Negation of Exile” while following the systems of European state-building in the context of settler colonialism, has ultimately produced an Israeli nation-state that excludes parts of its Jewish population from equal treatment – essentially defying the idea of the “Negation of Exile” and the propaganda surrounding it which, in theory, relies on total democratic inclusion and equality between all Jewish people within the state. This contradiction is not specific to the Israeli state, as other nation-states built within European processes of state-building similarly exclude population

³² Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 23.

³³ Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews,” *Social Text* 75, vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 50.

groups from total equality. In his “The Nation-State and Its Exclusions,” Anthony W. Marx theorized that nationalism in emergent states often internationally allows for exclusions in order to “manage diversity by manipulating and reinforcing difference.”³⁴ He goes further to say that the roots of this pattern began “at the very emergence of centralized states and proto-nations” in early modern Western Europe.³⁵ In this context “group consciousness” is “constructed by officials and elites, who use selective evocations of history to project an image of prior legitimacy and purposefully forget inconvenient images or experiences of past or present internal division.”³⁶ Emerging nation-states have historically required relative homogeneity in order to bolster social cohesion within the nation, however, this inherently excludes sections of the population who do not fit into the image of homogeneity propagated by officials and elites. This has thus resulted in the reality that most “States have not consistently incorporated all potential internal constituents, but instead have often purposefully excluded some, contrary to the presumed imperative for pervasive unity or ethnic homogeneity.”³⁷ Exclusion from a main, group identity within a nation is a common pattern that has emerged from the pragmatic execution of nation-building. To bolster images of social unity and national identity, particular aspects of the nation’s core group – a “core” determined by elite nation builders – are brought to the forefront of that national identity. In consequence, however, the perceived “other” vis-a-vis that identity, has the potential to be systematically excluded from the nation-state.

³⁴ Anthony W. Marx, “The Nation-State and Its Exclusions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (March 2002): 103.

³⁵ Anthony W. Marx, “The Nation-State and Its Exclusions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (March 2002): 111.

³⁶ Anthony W. Marx, “The Nation-State and Its Exclusions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 105.

³⁷ Anthony W. Marx, “The Nation-State and Its Exclusions,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 107.

The State of Israel allows for a distinctly acute version of this exclusion due to its status as a settler colonial state, its reliance on the total inclusion of all Jewish populations for its legitimacy, and the realistic heterogeneous character of its population of settlers. Zionism's intentions to create a nation whose constituency was determined by its Jewishness were professed by its Declaration of Independence and articulation of the "Negation of Exile" within it. This formed the primary system of exclusion utilized by Zionism, exclusion based on religion. The "Negation of Exile" narrative was escalated by the State of Israel's settler colonial existence on Palestinian land, which involved their intentional dislocation and occupation of Palestinian, Arab, Muslim people. Thus "their religion (Jewishness) was rapidly turning into a national marker in the international arena, which gradually conflicted with their affiliation with the Arab nation-state."³⁸

As a settler-colonial state in a historically Arab region, built within European systems of nation-building which were Orientalist and which aimed to displace indigenous Arab people through settler colonial occupation, there is an inherent Israeli bias towards the de-Arabization of domestic Israeli culture. Anthony Marx understands that racial and ethnic divisions have been the primary lines upon which exclusion has been determined. He writes that "race and ethnicity are projected and felt as more fixed, more prone to tension and distrust, more amenable to instrumental antagonism, even if they are constructed rather than ascriptive."³⁹ In other words, while race and ethnicity are often constructed within processes of exclusion, the lines of division that they present are seen as more fixed within society and are thus often subject to systemic

³⁸ Ella Shohat, "Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews," *Social Text* 75, vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 53.

³⁹ Anthony W. Marx, "The Nation-State and Its Exclusions," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 124.

efforts to exclude some populations based on those lines. In the case of Israel, racial and ethnic lines of division between Jewish people and Arabness were created within and integral to Israel's formation as an ideologically European settler colonial nation-state on indigenously Arab Palestinian land. The divisions between Arab and Jewish people were reinforced, within Israel, by the erasure of Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African Jewish histories within Zionist historiography. This process of demarcation was especially important in Israel because of the heterogeneity of the Jewish populations that were to be Israel's constituency – as world Jewry became increasingly heterogeneous due to the thousands of years spent in diaspora. It complicated, however, Israel's commitment to creating a territorial salvation for all Jewish people and the legitimacy the nation, itself, finds on an international stage, by way of its insistence on this commitment. Lines of division drawn in Israel's state-making processes were to be reinforced and adapted to keep up with changing values within the West, but ultimately have resulted in unequal statuses for Jewish populations of Arab, Middle Eastern, or North African descent, defying Israel's supposed democratic inclusion of all Jewish populations.

In this chapter, I argued that Israel's founding and legitimating principles of the "Negation of Exile" for all Jewish people have failed to come to fruition due to the nature of Israel's existence as a settler colonial state that follows the formal norms of modern state-building practices, which are often Orientalist. The "Negation of Exile" narrative found backing on the world stage because it supported settler colonial, Orientalist narratives which originated in Europe, as a state created by Europeans situated in the Middle East. The "Negation of Exile" narrative and the founders of Zionist ideology imagined world Jewry to be relatively homogenous, with the identity of that homogenous body being predominantly Ashkenazi,

European Jewish. The Orientalist nature of Zionism and Israel's settler colonial occupation created an environment of anti-Arab sentiment, in accordance with the norms of settler colonial enterprises, and lines of division were created on the basis of ethnic identity. Lines between a colonizer Jewish population and a colonized Arab Palestinian population, necessary for Israel's settler colonial occupation, evidently seeped through the lines of occupation to affect Zionist and the State of Israel's treatment of its Mizrahi population. As the international community of the West shifted its values towards a postcolonial future that requires states to uphold the values of democracy, liberalism, and equality, Israel's state and legitimacy building increasingly relies on its implied salvation for all Jewish populations and assumed equal treatment between Jewish populations (though concerns for the upholding of these values when it comes to colonized Palestinian people fall upon deaf ears). Thus discrimination towards Mizrahi Jewish populations of Israel offers a specific and often ignored experience.

The "inclusion" and salvation for all Jewish populations in Israel, promised by the "Negation of Exile," narrative is undone by the pragmatic happenings on Israel's soil. This is an inclusion, which for many Jewish populations, is unequal. To express this particular situation, faced by specific Jewish populations in Israel, I employ the term "unequal inclusion." This term attempts to describe the situation faced by those Jewish populations who have sought salvation in Israel, due to Israel's promises for an inclusive "Negation of Exile," but have been faced, instead, with discrimination by Israelis and the Israeli state on the basis of their ethnic identity, which they share with the expelled and occupied population. Meanwhile, their presence in the State is essential to Israel's legitimacy in the eyes of the West, where principles of liberalism, democracy, and a commitment to equality are tantamount to this legitimacy. The settler colonial nature of

Israel's existence denies those principles, not only to the colonized, indigenous, Palestinian population but also, to a lesser extent, to many Jewish populations whose inclusion allows for Israel's legitimacy. Using the "Negation of Exile" narrative to justify Israel's legitimacy continues into the present day, where the State's tactics have slightly changed and adapted to growing and different commitments to democracy and liberalism in the West. One of those commitments is a growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ peoples and communities, and thus Israel has co-opted this acceptance for its own legitimacy. Through propaganda campaigns, it harnessed a reputation of LGBTQ+ acceptance, meanwhile, its own community is often unable to acquire the same rights as their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts, including the right to marry. Thus, Israel's LGBTQ+ population and their "unequal inclusion" can be understood as a part of Israel's adapting tactics for garnering legitimacy. I now turn to the discussion of how "unequal inclusion" manifested in Israel, even before the State's founding, as well as how it has been adapted throughout Israel's history.

Chapter 2: The Mizrahim of Israel

Israeli society has allowed for an “unequal inclusion” of its Mizrahi population throughout the entirety of its short history. To understand the nature of this “unequal inclusion” and the ways it manifests itself in the lives of Israelis, it is essential to understand the history of Mizrahi presence in Israel. This history is one that simultaneously creates and reinforces the “unequally included” status of Mizrahi peoples while propagating an image of democracy and inclusion to the greater international community. Most recently, it has been recorded that “About 41 percent of Jews” in Israel “are Ashkenazi and about 43 per cent Mizrahi.”⁴⁰ While both groups share a similar proportion of the population, the Mizrahi population of Israel faces significantly larger levels of discrimination and “unequal inclusion.” In this chapter, I present the history of Israeli state policy towards its Mizrahi population. This history exhibits the discriminatory and exploitative nature of Israel’s institutions towards its Mizrahi population.

Israel’s history shows how discrimination against the Mizrahim is directly related to the occupation of historic Palestine and its indigenous Palestinian, Arab population, as well as the Orientalist ideologies which overlay much of Israel’s state-building. This “unequal inclusion” is denied by Israel’s founding principles, which imply that Israel provides salvation to all Jewish people, as well as its “Negation of Exile” narrative that is essential to Israel’s legitimacy in the world of Western, liberal, democratic states. Israel’s failure to provide such salvation erodes its very founding principles, and thus delegitimizes the state’s existence on the basis of its own rubric. In the words of an Israeli professor of political and legal geography, Oren Yiftachel, “levels of segregation and stratification between Jewish ethno-classes have remained remarkably

⁴⁰ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 6.

high” despite that country’s declared founding goal to gather and “integrate the exiles (mizug galuyot).”⁴¹

The Arrival of Jewish Peoples in Historic Palestine

At the time of Zionism’s formulation of historic Palestine as a potential place of territorial salvation for the Jewish people, Jewish people all over the world were experiencing antisemitism at the hands of their societies and governments. In light of Russian pogroms and antisemitism in Europe in the late 1800s, early Zionists lightly encouraged immigration to historic Palestine, which they called “Eretz Israel,” and saw as “a place of refuge for the masses of immigrants,” continuing to disseminate an understanding of Israel which subscribes to the “Negation of Israel” narrative.⁴² Early action within the Zionist movement was largely based on a capitalist accumulation of land within historic Palestine. As a result of changes in Ottoman land ownership laws during the second half of the nineteenth century, and later allowed by the British through their Mandate, wealthier Jewish people would buy up land in Palestine from absentee landowners – who owned Palestinian land but did not personally occupy it – with the intention of moving in once the land was cultivated.⁴³

Capitalists deeply involved in the Zionist mission, like Baron Rothschild who later handed his land over to the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) in 1900, bought up land with

⁴¹ Yiftachel, Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 16.

⁴² Margalit Shilo, “The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 597.

⁴³ Margalit Shilo, “The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 603.

the intention of employing Jewish workers.⁴⁴ These land purchases allowed for the creation of plantation-like agricultural settlements called the “moshavah.” When the JCA took over the settlements, they were far less involved in the pragmatic success of the individual Jewish peoples who lived in them.⁴⁵ Simultaneously, owners of land associated with the JCA and other Jewish landowners who had bought land from absentee landowners eventually realized that Palestinian Arab populations were better suited employees for those moshavah, and Jewish peoples struggled to make a place for their population in the labor market. Even so, Jewish immigrants continued to arrive in Palestine, often with the help of the Palestine Office, established in 1908 by the World Zionist Organization, or the WZO.⁴⁶ These migrants came in large enough numbers to be categorized, at least retrospectively, into “aliyahs,” which, in Zionist historiography, refers to groups of Jewish migrants who came to Israel.

Jewish immigrants who arrived in Palestine during the First, and more importantly, for my purposes, the Second Aliyah, which occurred between 1904 and 1914, were challenged by the region's conditions. The labor market that prevailed in Palestine at the time was not susceptible to these incoming wage laborers, despite already existing Jewish investment in the land and the economy. The incoming Jewish populations also expected a standard of living that was higher than that of the Arab populations already living in the region but were not nearly as well adapted to working in the sectors and environments available in Palestine.⁴⁷ Neither

⁴⁴ Yossi Katz, “Agricultural Settlements in Palestine, 1882-1914,” *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (Winter 1988 - Spring 1992): 64.

⁴⁵ Yossi Katz, “Agricultural Settlements in Palestine, 1882-1914,” *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (Winter 1988 - Spring 1992): 64.

⁴⁶ Margalit Shilo, “The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 608.

⁴⁷ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 50.

Arab-owned farms and plantations nor Zionist-Jewish moshavah were keen on employing Jewish populations.⁴⁸ Thus the early populations of Jewish settlers who came to Palestine during the First and Second “Aliyahs” and their Zionist supporters sought to exploit this labor market, or avoid it completely to “enable Jewish immigration and settlement and the development of a Jewish economic infrastructure.”⁴⁹

The Second Aliyah

To achieve the economic and political success that Israel has had since these early, struggling populations, the settlers of the Second Aliyah and the WZO introduced several different methods of labor market exploitation which would eventually result in the complete colonization of Palestine, as well as the “unequal inclusion” of Mizrahi Jewish people. During the Second Aliyah, Jewish workers and those committed to the Zionist cause desired the “pure settlement” of Israel, as they struggled to survive in the existing society and economy. The “pure settlement” of Israel, according to the WZO, would occur “once most of the land in Palestine was in Jewish hands, most of the population was Jewish, the Jews dominated the economy, especially agriculture, and the Jewish residents demanded autonomy.”⁵⁰ To do so, however, they first had to secure a place within a labor market that was not keen on including them. They not only had to transfer plantation employment from “the Arab workers” into the “hands of the Jewish workers,” and exclude Arab workers from the labor market, but also had to saturate the

⁴⁸ Yossi Katz, “Agricultural Settlements in Palestine, 1882-1914,” *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (Winter 1988 - Spring 1992): 68.

⁴⁹ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 7.

⁵⁰ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 154.

labor market with incoming populations of Jewish migrants to settle the land and become wage laborers.

The Palestine Office, largely responsible for much of the Jewish migration at the time, suggested that “Jewish labourers” were “the best human resource for settlement, and the better part of the Office's settlement efforts were directed toward this segment. The Office encouraged penniless young people, who were willing to work as seasonal labourers on moshavot and farms, to immigrate.”⁵¹ The office, with support from the WZO, sought for “the creation of a large Jewish presence, that is, the ‘demographic base’” for further settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine, and eventually the creation of a Jewish state.⁵² Jewish workers who had already landed in Israel, as well as those who immigrated as a result of these efforts, saw this goal as the basis for the erection of the State of Israel. Thus Jewish populations continued to immigrate to Israel, despite the harsh conditions.

Jewish laborers during the Second Aliyah had yet to establish a “demographic base” of Jewish people in order to facilitate the “pure settlement” of historic Palestine. In order to find a solution to this issue, the WZO, Jewish immigrants, Jewish landowners, and other Zionists looked to the populations of Jewish people who lived in Yemen. “Yemenite Jews were ideally suited to satisfy both nationalist and capitalist interests since they were Jewish workers who were to be paid Arab wages.”⁵³ In other words, Yemenite Jewish people could both work for cheaper labor prices than their Ashkenazi counterparts and, at the same time, contribute to Zionists’, and

⁵¹ Margalit Shilo, “The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 610.

⁵² Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 89.

⁵³ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 99.

the WZO's need for a demographic base of Jewish laborers who could survive, successfully and without leaving historic Palestine. As a result, a special Zionist emissary, Shmuel Yavne'eli, was sent to Yemen in 1911 to "hasten" the "Yemenite aliyah" to historic Palestine.⁵⁴ This Aliyah was unique because, "previously the Zionist institutions had refused to finance immigration and had agreed to encourage only those with financial means, or only the young, healthy and single; now the Zionist movement subsidized some of the travel expenses and organized the immigration of hundreds of penniless people including children and the elderly."⁵⁵

Jewish populations immigrating from Europe were not encouraged to immigrate in mass numbers and were informed that the Jewish population was to "be built slowly and carefully, according to the growing needs of the country."⁵⁶ This was due to the need for a separate economy for incoming Jewish populations, as required by Zionist's plans for settler colonial occupation. This separate economy, however, had to be created in an environment that was not susceptible to the Ashkenazi, Jewish populations who sought for a Jewish State. Many populations from Europe still arrived, however these populations were not encouraged to come in hoards as laborers, in the way that the Yemenite populations were. The invention of "aliyah" within the Zionist report largely began with the "aliyah" of Yemenite Jewish people brought to historic Palestine by Yavne'eli. This demonstrates, early within this analysis, the way that Zionists exploited the Mizrahim, and saw the population as a tool to be used to effectively occupy Palestinian land.

⁵⁴ Margalit Shilo, "The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 610.

⁵⁵ Margalit Shilo, "The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 610.

⁵⁶ Margalit Shilo, "The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 608.

The “solution” that the Yemenite Jewish populations were supposed to supply to Zionists attempting to colonize Palestine was, essentially, a failure. Yemenite Jewish populations were unsuccessful in replacing “the Palestinian Arab villagers in agricultural work,” and instead were “located, then, in-between the Ashkenazi and Palestinian Arab workers, adding a new tier to the labor market rather than occupying the lower one” and relieving the settler colonial entity from their need for the indigenous population, as they were expected to.⁵⁷ Thus, Yemenite populations became “marginal and burdensome social and economic elements,” who could not aid Zionists in the settler occupation of Palestinian land, and now competed for labor with the Ashkenazi Jewish populations immigrating from Europe.⁵⁸

The status of Yemenite Jewish populations, and later and as well as Mizrahi populations, was solidified during the Second Aliyah. The Yemenite Jewish populations could not displace Arab laborers within the existing labor market (which, during the Second Aliyah, still included Jewish people and Palestinian Arab people, as Zionists had not yet succeeded in their plans to create a “pure settlement” colony) and thus were largely unhelpful to Zionists. As Gershon Shafir notes in *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, the “status and class position of Jewish groups... was bound up, and maybe for some groups and strata still is, with the broader national conflict between Jews and Arabs, hence the dominant criterion of differentiation between ashkenazim and mizrachim turned on their respective ‘national value.’”⁵⁹

Not only were Yemenite Jewish people exploited for their abilities to work for lower pay and

⁵⁷ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 104.

⁵⁸ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 106.

⁵⁹ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 120.

were brought to Israel primarily for the capital gain of mostly Ashkenazi Jewish landowners and the resulting building of the Israeli state, but their value according to Zionists was diminished by their inability to satisfy the needs of the WZO and Zionists of the time.

The Second Aliyah, and the experience had by Yemenite Jewish populations during it, solidified a system of exclusion of ethnically Mizrahi Jewish peoples that would continue throughout Israel's history. Zionists were quick to toss aside Yemenite laborers once they failed to provide what they were intended to for the Zionist mission. The place of the Yemenite Jewish people in Israel during the Second Aliyah and onwards "was seen to be only in the moshavot where the displacement of Arabs was possible."⁶⁰ In other words, Yemenite Jewish people could only find work with employers who employed exclusively Jewish work forces and could employ Yemenite Jewish people in the positions that were taken by indigenous Palestinian people elsewhere. Zionism allowed for the influx of Yemenite Jewish people only during a time in which they could exploit Mizrahi labor for the purposes of securing a "demographic base" for later influxes of, primarily Ashkenazi, Jewish people.

Zionists would eventually turn to the kibbutz to create a separate economy for incoming Jewish immigrants, however this economy was not welcoming towards the Mizrahim. The kibbutzim, which means "gathering" in Hebrew, are "socialist," communal living situations which are unique to Israel, generally, and especially during the early years of Israel's existence, built around a farm or plantation.⁶¹ The composition of the kibbutz, especially during Israel's formative years, would establish the ethnic relationships that would characterize Israeli policy

⁶⁰ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 16.

⁶¹ Becky Sullivan, "What Is a Kibbutz? The Roots of Israel's Communal Villages Where Violence Raged," *Northeast Public Radio*, October 12, 2023.

towards the Mizrahim. “The national character of the kibbutz was its foundation and first *raison d’être* and determined its composition, and in part its structure. The kibbutz became the most homogenous body of Israeli society: it included almost exclusively Eastern European Jews, since it was unwilling to embrace Middle Eastern and North African Jews, and was constructed on the exclusion of Palestinian Arabs.”⁶² The kibbutz, as an homogenous body, further denies the ideas propagated by Zionism that kibbutzim are “exercises in radical democracy” which is propagated widely for the benefit of Israel’s legitimacy on the world stage, while in reality their exclusion of the Mizrahim in its democratic mission is representative of the State of Israel’s lack of equal treatment towards its Mizrahi population.⁶³

Ethnic divisions between the Mizrahim, of which Yemenite people are a part, and the Ashkenazim, first became evident during the State’s Second Aliyah, where Yemenite Jewish people were exploited for the benefit of later immigrations of Jewish populations, who would largely come from Europe. The Yemenite Jewish immigrants of the Second Aliyah, along with the other Mizrahi populations that would follow, were not included in Israeli society on an equal level as their Ashkenazi counterparts. Their ability to help Zionists would determine their value in Israel, as their Arabness, or closeness to Arabness, denied the value to the Zionist project created by their Jewishness. The de-Arabization required by Israel due to its settler colonial occupation of indigenous, Palestinian land was already in full force during the Second Aliyah and Mizrahi Jewish people would continue to face discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, and the threat that ethnicity posed to the Zionist state. These ethnic divisions manifest from the

⁶² Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 184.

⁶³ Becky Sullivan, “What Is a Kibbutz? The Roots of Israel’s Communal Villages Where Violence Raged,” *Northeast Public Radio*, October 12, 2023.

Orientalist ideology which backs Zionist occupation of indigenous Palestinian populations. These divisions defy Israel's founding principles, which require it to allow for territorial salvation and the "Negation of Exile" for all Jewish populations.

The Melting Pot Project

Israel's "unequal inclusion" of the Mizrahim continues and becomes relevant, again, at the time of Israel's founding in 1948. At the time, Israel, again, was looking for Jewish populations to form a "demographic base" for its colonization. From 1948 to 1956, 450,000 Jewish people from Asia and Africa and 360,000 Jewish people from Europe and America immigrated to Israel.⁶⁴ As soon as they arrived, the Mizrahi members of this influx were faced with discrimination, some even being sprayed with Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), a pesticide, upon their arrival in Israel to "disinfect and delouse them."⁶⁵ "The Zionist Association employers and the Ashkenazi landowners and their overseers treated the Yemenite Jews brutally, at times abusing even the women and children who labored over ten hours a day."⁶⁶ The Zionist association and those Zionists who had acquired economic strength early in Israel's existence, many of whom were Ashkenazi, as a result of racialized labor practices started during the Second Aliyah, tended towards the mistreatment of the Mizrahim, especially Yemenite Jewish people.

The Mizrahim were also known to be sent to one of the twenty-seven "development towns" that were created in the early 1950s. "These towns were mainly populated— usually

⁶⁴ Joseph Massad, "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 56.

⁶⁵ Joseph Massad, "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 56.

⁶⁶ Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 15.

through coercion—by Jewish immigrants and refugees from North Africa. During the same period large groups of Mizrahim were also housed in ‘frontier’ urban neighbourhoods, which were either previously Palestinian or adjacent to Palestinian areas.”⁶⁷ These development towns were also often located in “remote areas of the Negev and frontier areas.”⁶⁸ Thus in most places which the Mizrahim inhabited, they were “the target of Arab military attacks.”⁶⁹ The way that the Mizrahim was treated during the early years of Israel’s existence both reflects the ethnic divisions of Israeli society, starting with the struggle for labor during the Second Aliyah, and the way that the Mizrahim would continue to be delegated to lower positions in society and the labor market, by the Israeli government, which continually abated the socio-economic growth of the Mizrahim. Their placement in frontier zones also reflects the nature in which Israel attempted to “de-Arabize” its Mizrahi population and cause them to distrust and lose connection to their Arab identities, a process that was essential for the success of Israel’s settler colonial occupation.

The “melting pot” project is another integral part of Israel’s state building in the context of the settler colonial occupation of Palestine, and further, is clearly connected to Israel’s intentions to create a “Negation of Exile” for all Jewish people. The “melting pot” project itself, is defined by Ephraim Ya’ar, professor of sociology and anthropology, and head of the Steinmetz Center for Peace research at Tel Aviv University, in his “Continuity and Change in Israeli Society,” is “a social or political framework in which tendencies and processes occur that promote the blending of the groups belonging to it, especially in cases of immigrant groups with

⁶⁷ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 10.

⁶⁸ Joseph Massad, “Zionism’s Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 58.

⁶⁹ Joseph Massad, “Zionism’s Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 58.

different ethnic, national, religious, racial, or cultural backgrounds.”⁷⁰ This definition applies to its existence in Israel, where it attempts to create a society that includes all Jewish populations, in accordance with the “Negation of Exile.” However, practically the processes that took place in Israel were assimilatory in nature and would force the erasure of Mizrahi culture.

The “melting pot” project was formulated by the Israeli Labor movement in the 1950s. The Labor Movement, itself, was closely related to the Second Aliyah and the tendencies and structures of society that were adopted during that time. Ya’ar accurately identifies that under these circumstances, “the concept of assimilation is no less, and perhaps more, relevant to describing and understanding the phenomenon of immigrant absorption than the idea of the ‘melting pot.’”⁷¹ He points to different parts of Israeli society where this assimilation is clear. For example, when it came to the structure of the family in Israeli society, “the expectation was that with the passage of time the structure of the Mizrahi family would become similar to that of the Ashkenazi family.”⁷² The Israeli education system also became a tool for the enforcement of assimilation and the de-Arabization of Jewish history. In Israeli schools, all children – Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, and Palestinian – “are condemned to study a history of the world that privileges the achievements of the West, while effacing the civilizations of the East. The political dynamics of the Middle East, furthermore, are presented only in relation to the fecundating influence of Zionism on the pre-existing desert.”⁷³ The education that Israel provides enforces Zionist

⁷⁰ Ephraim Ya’ar, “Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 92.

⁷¹ Ephraim Ya’ar, “Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 93.

⁷² Ephraim Ya’ar, “Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 101.

⁷³ Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 7.

narratives of history which sees Jewish history of the West, Europe, and America to be most representative of Jewish history, while furthermore injecting narratives that legitimize their settler colonial occupation of Palestine.

Later generations of Israelis continued to adapt this prejudice to the changing state. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a rejuvenation of “Mediterranean music,” or music associated with an Arab and North African past. This rejuvenation, however, was only allowed into the mainstream Israeli culture once the artists “assimilated elements of Israeli-Western music into the songs and ditties that they wrote and played. As a result of this process, their music became a growing part of the mainstream of Israeli pop music, tending to blur the boundaries between the two.”⁷⁴ This satisfies the Zionist cultural frame, which puts Western and European culture and values as superior while claiming there is an equal fusion of the various Jewish cultures. In reality, for all of its history, “Israel has maintained a definite Western orientation in the three main dimensions of activity of the society and the state – political, economic, and cultural.”⁷⁵ This orientation is largely based on Israel’s use of Orientalist Western state-building practices in the context of extreme settler colonial occupation. This orientation also inherently denies the reality of the “Negation of Exile” for all Jewish peoples and instead, pragmatically, offers superiority to Ashkenazi Jewish populations.

⁷⁴ Ephraim Ya’ar, “Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 96.

⁷⁵ Ephraim Ya’ar, “Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 115.

Creating a de-Arabized Mizrahi Jewish Identity

The State of Israel's treatment towards its Mizrahi population is discriminatory and has developed its national identity without consideration of that Mizrahi population, defying its own promises of negating the exile of those Jewish populations. These dynamics can be understood as part of Israel's state building practices as a nation accepted within a modern, democratic, liberal international community while still operating on the basis of the settler colonial occupation of historic Palestine. While Ashkenazi Jewish people found a pseudo-salvation in this territorial acquisition, Mizrahi Jewish peoples have faced discrimination, racism, and a forced separation from their Arab identities. In her "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victim," Ella Shohat, a prominent Israeli-American scholar explains that Israel was, "for persecuted Ashkenazi minorities a certain solution and a quasi-redemption of a culture" but was, "for Sephardim the complete annihilation of a cultural heritage, a loss of identity, and a social and economic degradation."⁷⁶ Israel's state building and legitimizing initiatives, like the "Negation of Exile," the Yemenite charter of the Second Aliyah, and the "melting pot" initiative all enforce and represent the racism and Orientalism which underlines all of Israeli statehood.

The roots of Israeli racism and anti-Arab sentiment are based within the reality of Israel's existence as a settler colonial occupier of Palestinian land. Its origin within Europe, which encourages Zionism's Orientalist ideology combined with its need to occupy and expel the Arab Palestinian population has created an environment of de-Arabization which inevitably affected not only Arab Palestinian people, but the Mizrahim within Israel. The first instance of encounter between the Mizrahim and Ashkenazim on the soil of historic Palestine exemplifies Ashkenazi

⁷⁶ Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 20.

exploitation of the Mizrahim in an effort to satisfy settler colonial goals (“pure settlement”) and subsequent enforced degradation of value of Mizrahi people and culture, in the Kibbutzim and during the melting pot initiative.

Ethnic divisions were solidified between the Mizrahim and the Ashkenazim during this initial instance, where Arab people and Arabness were the obstacles to Zionist occupation. In his *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, Gershon Shafir describes that, “Palestinian workers, standing between the Jewish workers and their ability to attain satisfactory wage levels, became the target of the Jewish workers’ struggle and being an ethnically different group, the opposition of the Jewish workers to them was formulated first and foremost in national and ethnic terms even if ultimately it was not national differences that were the formative causes of their conflict.”⁷⁷ Ethnic divisions are already prominent factors that determine the position of individuals within Orientalist ideology (whether one is part of the “us” or “them”) but, in the case of Palestine and because of the particularities of Israeli settler colonial occupation, ethnic divisions were even more important to Israel’s goals. Zionists first saw Arab Palestinian people as a burden, barring them from securing employment, which solidified Orientalist convictions about Arabness. These convictions, unavoidably, have seeped into relations between Jewish people within the country.

While the Israeli state is undeniably settler colonial, in an era in which the West is invested in liberal, democratic, inclusive ideals, the idea that Israel is inclusive to a relatively homogeneous world Jewry has gained importance. This profession of “unity” began with Israel’s “Negation of Exile” narrative and has been continued by its “melting pot” initiative. As this

⁷⁷ Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996), 58.

“unity” and homogeneity was formulated while being situated in the Israeli state, where ideologies of Orientalism and de-Arabization were consistently pervasive, the melting pot initiative encourages Jewish populations to adopt values and practices from the dominant Ashkenazi culture.”⁷⁸ These values are manifest in the structure of Israeli society, for which the results of the “melting pot” demonstrates, tends towards an Ashkenazi-based culture. This ideology denies Mizrahi Jewish populations of connection with their culture, as it threatens Zionism’s ability to gain legitimacy from the supposed homogenous population for which it has provided the means for self determination and security. The Mizrahi Jewish person threatens this ability, as well as Europe’s fantasies concerning Israel, which see it as a “prolongation of Europe ‘in’ the Middle East, but not ‘of’ it.”⁷⁹ There are many elements of Israel’s statehood, largely built using European and Western state-building practices in the context of violent settler colonialism, which create an environment in which Mizrahi culture is denied and assimilation is deemed the proper way to handle the cultural differences between the many populations of Jewish people congregating in Israel. This allows for, and benefits from, the erasure of Mizrahi culture and history.

Ethnocracy and Unequal Inclusion

The reliance on ethnic divisions to maintain Israeli legitimacy in its regime of settler colonial occupation has led to Israel’s existence as an “ethnocratic regime.” Coined by Oren Yiftachel, in his “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” ethnocratic regimes

⁷⁸ Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 216.

⁷⁹ Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 23.

are “states that maintain a relatively open government, yet facilitate a non-democratic seizure of the country and polity by one ethnic group.”⁸⁰ Yiftachel applies this logic specifically to the case of Israel, where the core ethnic group at hand is the Israeli Ashkenazim. He claims these regimes are “supported by a cultural and ideological apparatus that legitimizes and reinforces the uneven reality. This is achieved by constructing a historical narrative that proclaims the dominant ethno-nation as the rightful owner of the territory in question.”⁸¹ Israel’s narrative of the “Negation of Exile,” and the way it has been incorporated into Israeli society through the melting pot initiative which requires an erasure of Mizrahi culture has created an environment of “unequal inclusion” for Mizrahi Israelis. The treatment of Yemenite Israelis during the early years of Israel’s formation expose the pervasiveness of Orientalist narratives within the Zionist ideology and their solidification during this era. Orientalist narratives that allow for Israel’s settler colonial occupation of Palestinian people influenced the nature of state building that occurred in Israel and, thus, de-Arabization became essential for Israel’s legitimacy. This de-Arabization has inevitably affected the populace inside of Israel’s borders, as seen by the experience of the Yemenite Jewish populations, and Israel as an “ethnocratic regime” where the Ashkenazim are a privileged population group. Meanwhile, Israel gains legitimacy from its supposed inclusion of all Jewish populations within its “Negation of Exile” narrative.

In his “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” Yiftachel recognized the effect of Orientalism on the formation of the Ashkenazim as Israel’s core ethnic group. He notices that “there is a clear nexus connecting the de-Arabization of the country with the marginalization of the Mizrahim, who—culturally and geographically—have been positioned

⁸⁰ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 1.

⁸¹ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 5.

between Arab and Jew, between Israel and its hostile neighbours, between a ‘backward’ Eastern past and a ‘progressive’ Western future.”⁸² Yiftachel recognizes the connection between de-Arabization, resulting from the Orientalist nature of Israel’s settler colonialism, and the “unequal inclusion” of the Mizrahim. Israel’s reliance on Orientalist ideology to colonize the indigenous Arab, Palestinian people has in turn affected its own Jewish constituents, who, if ethnically Arab, are “unequally included” on the basis of their ethnicity. While it is important to acknowledge here that “the depth and extent of discrimination against Palestinians and Mizrahim has been quite different” and Mizrahi Israelis are still “active participants in the oppression of the former,” it is clear that the oppression of Palestinian people requires and creates an environment of anti-Arab sentiment that have damaged the lives of Mizrahi Jewish peoples.⁸³ These consequences not only expose Israel’s inability to properly include even its privileged Jewish population, fully, in its society, but also the potential for an increased level of oppression and subjugation that could lead to a form of apartheid within Israel’s borders. Thus, not only does Israel’s settler colonial occupation of Palestinian people and land negatively affect Palestinian populations, but also ethnically Arab, North African, and Middle Eastern Jewish populations of Israel.

⁸² Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 16.

⁸³ Oren Yiftachel, “‘Ethnocracy’: The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine,” *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 16.

Conclusion: Unequal Inclusions and Adaptations

Israel's "unequal inclusion" of the Mizrahim in Israel exposes its inability to create an inclusive, equitable salvation for all Jewish people. Israel relies on those promises, as asserted by its "Negation of Exile" narrative, to legitimize itself as a liberal democratic nation-state. This narrative was effective in garnering the support of the international community, especially as a result of antisemitism worldwide, and within circumstances where European Orientalism provided the ideological justification for the colonization of the region inhabited by indigenous Palestinian people. Israel's status as a state whose existence is reliant on its continuing settler colonial occupation of Palestinian land, has consistently produced "unequal inclusion" of its Mizrahi populace – a group that shares similar ethnic identities with the oppressed Palestinian populations but is included on account of their religious identity.

Throughout this paper, I have examined the Israeli state policies towards its Mizrahim, or those Arab, North African, and Middle Eastern Jewish people, and identified the historical method of "unequal inclusion," that expands to labor exploitation and forced assimilation. These policies were implemented at the expense of the actual needs of the Mizrahi Jewish populations and to further consolidate the Zionist state, its Ashkenazi ruling class, and their ability to continue a ruthless settler colonial occupation.

As I conclude my argument, I would like to underscore the persistence of, and evolutions in, Israel's attempts to garner legitimacy by propagating its inclusive nature (at least for its Jewish populations), while being unable to actualize an inclusive environment within its borders. Israel has continued its legacy of "unequal inclusion" of certain Jewish populations with the "unequal inclusion" of its LGBTQ+ population – a claim that Israel often highlights as part of its

preferred international image on the world stage despite the fact that LGBTQ+ populations in Israel do not have the same rights as their straight, cis-gender counterparts.

The LGBTQ+ in Israel

Israel's settler colonial occupation of Palestinian people has the potential to strip it of its legitimacy on the world stage, especially as nations in the West, from which Israel gets much diplomatic and financial support, become seemingly more invested in the morals of democracy, liberalism, inclusion, and human rights protection. Thus, Israel has been forced to turn to other practices for the garnering of its legitimacy, which have included the "Negation of Exile" examined earlier, and, more recently, the propaganda campaign called "pinkwashing." Defined by Haneen Maikay, cofounder of the queer Palestinian organization Al Qaws, "pinkwashing" is "the cynical use of gay rights by the Israeli government...in order to divert attention from Israeli...occupation and apartheid, by promoting itself as a progressive country that respects gay rights, and, on the contrary, portraying Palestinian society and Palestinians as homophobic."⁸⁴ In Israel, this manifested in what Jasbir Puar, Professor and Graduate Director of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University, referred to, in her "Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel," as the 'Brand Israel' campaign.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry launched a "large-scale, massively funded 'Brand Israel' campaign" in the early 2000s with the intended goal of curating and promoting the reputation of Israel as a haven for LGBTQ+ people in the Middle East.⁸⁵ The project targeted cities in the West

⁸⁴ Saffo Papantonopoulou, "'Even a Freak Like You Would Be Safe in Tel Aviv': Transgender Subjects, Wounded Attachments, and the Zionist Economy of Gratitude," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1-2 (Spring 2014): 279.

⁸⁵ Jasbir Puar, "Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel," *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (August 2011): 137.

like New York City, Toronto, and London, where values of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people became popular along with a new era of democracy and liberalism, and where Israel saw that it could gain acceptance as a result of its own promoted reputation.⁸⁶ Israel utilized “pinkwashing” to gain legitimacy on the world stage and advertise itself as open-minded, accepting, and liberal, and queerness has come, in Israel, to ““stand for democratic liberalism.””⁸⁷ Like Israel’s subscription to the “Negation of Exile” theory, its subscription to the acceptance of same-sex coupledness is more about Israel’s attempts at garnering legitimacy than its actual commitment to equally include Jewish people of all ethnic origins within its borders, including queer Jewish people. In concluding my analysis, I therefore would like to address “pinkwashing,” as a means of Israel’s continuing “unequal inclusion” policies utilized as part of its state building. This short analysis will not however address the concerns of, for example, Israel’s Trans community, though “pinkwashing” also affects the Israeli Trans community.

The status of Israel’s LGBTQ+ community is one of “unequal inclusion,” like the Mizrahim, yet, like Israel’s “inclusion” of the Mizrahim within its LGBTQ+ community is a strong and widely recognized marker of Israel’s legitimacy in the eyes of the world’s liberal nations. Though in comparison with many of its neighbors, Israel is relatively more accepting of LGBTQ+ people, it is worth noting that same-sex marriages are still impossible to perform in Israel, as a result of the State’s complete exclusion of secular marriage. While a 2006 Supreme Court decision gave Israelis who married their same-sex partner abroad the right to register with

⁸⁶ Jasbir Puar, “Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (August 2011): 137.

⁸⁷ Jasbir Puar, “Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (August 2011): 136.

Israeli authorities and thus harness legitimacy,⁸⁸ marriages within Israel are only recognized if they are performed according to the “laws of a ‘recognized religious community.’”⁸⁹ As of now, no recognized religions in Israel allow homosexual marriages, and thus, homosexuals cannot marry, in the eyes of Israeli law. As noted by Zvi Triger, a professor of Law at Haim Striks School of Law, in his “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” it “is humiliating to be excluded from the exclusive group that is eligible to marry in Israel, and it is also a costly option, as well as bureaucratically burdensome. Furthermore, in times of international travel restrictions, due to COVID-19 for example, this option is completely unavailable.”⁹⁰

While it is possible for same-sex marriages to exist in Israel, they are not equally available to all Jewish members of Israeli society either, as it requires one to have financial and legal means to travel abroad to attain. Furthermore, until the end of last year – in a decision that occurred during Israel’s most recent siege and genocide on the Gaza Strip and thus should be subject to further examination, especially in the context of “pinkwashing” – same-sex couples were only able to adopt “children with special needs or older children” while “healthy” or “young” children were “reserved for married couples.”⁹¹ Even considering the most recent change in law which allows same-sex couples to adopt under the same circumstances as heterosexual couples – which only came as a result of the Israeli public challenging the

⁸⁸ Zvi Triger, “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 11.

⁸⁹ Zvi Triger, “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 8.

⁹⁰ Zvi Triger, “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 12.

⁹¹ Zvi Triger, “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 4.

government, and thus cannot be considered an action of the Israeli state alone – Israel’s support for LGBTQ+ people has been far from inclusive or especially progressive.⁹²

Israel’s choices concerning economic and legal policy concerning its LGBTQ+ community are also illustrative of its intentions to justify its legitimacy on the world stage while disregarding any action to provide actual, pragmatic support to its LGBTQ+ community. For example, in 2016, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism “announced a plan to invest 11 million Shekels to promote gay tourism to Israel overseas” and subsequently came under fire by its own LGBTQ+ community because the government “had only allocated 1.5 million Shekels in funding to actual Israeli LGBT groups for the year.”⁹³ Meanwhile, Triger identifies, none of the rights that same-sex partners and parents have under Israeli law were voluntarily awarded by the legislature.⁹⁴ Israel’s position of “reluctant acceptance” of same-sex couples, as coined by Triger, posits them as “unequally included” in Israel’s society.⁹⁵

As the world develops and “modernizes,” Israel’s methods for legitimization must also evolve, and I argue that “pinkwashing” has emerged as a strategy within this context and to respond to this continuing need. Israel requires alternative routes for legitimacy because of its violent settler colonial occupation of indigenous Arab, Palestinian people and their lands, which positions Israel as illegitimate. Thus, the State has consistently emphasized a version of Israel that imagines itself as a modern, democratic, inclusive place of salvation for all Jewish people, in

⁹² Anita Gould, “Israeli Supreme Court Rules LGBTQ+ Couples Can Adopt Children,” *Watermark Online*, January 2, 2024.

⁹³ Satchie Snellings, “The ‘Gayfication’ of Tel Aviv: Investigating Israel’s Pro-Gay Brand,” *Queer Cats Journal of LGBTQ Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019), 39.

⁹⁴ Zvi Triger, “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 1.

⁹⁵ Zvi Triger, “The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel,” *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 2.

a world where Europe and the West at large acknowledge the prevalence of worldwide antisemitism. However, as demonstrated throughout this paper, this has never been the reality for the Mizrahi Jewish populations of Israel, who have been systematically oppressed and exploited throughout Israel's history.

In the present day, when much of Europe, but at this point, more importantly, Israel's chief ally, the United States, has acknowledged the need to provide the world's LGBTQ+ community with some form of salvation from homophobia, Israel has again co-opted this need to support its legitimacy and acceptance among the US and Europe. Domestically, however, Israel does not have an extraordinary track record of inclusion and provision of rights for LGBTQ+ peoples, but it has spent money and resources, in campaigns like 'Brand Israel,' on propagating the idea that they have to the international community. It is especially effective in the context of the US and Europe's continued subscription to Orientalist ideologies, which allow Israel to emphasize the difference between its own provisions of rights to LGBTQ+ people to further serve its mission of legitimacy.

Israel exists as a settler colonial state, engaged in the occupation of indigenous Palestinian lands and people, and thus utilized the principles of Orientalism, which, in the context of Palestinian occupation, solidified in the form of simultaneous de-Arabization and Judaization. These processes created an environment of "unequal inclusion" of Mizrahi Jewish people, who were accepted based on their Jewish identities, but not their Arab identities. Even so, to legitimize itself, Israel propagates an image of progressive Jewish inclusion, and the provision of a "Negation of Exile" for all Jewish populations. Israel's disregard for its early Yemenite populations, its exploitation of their labor, their discrimination from the Kibbutz,

shows instead their forced and unequal assimilation, not equalizing inclusion. As Europe and the US have become increasingly focused on values of democracy, liberalism, and inclusion – at least in discourse if not in reality – Israel found a new route for legitimization in the propagation of an image of itself that promises to provide salvation for predominantly Jewish LGBTQ+ people.

Yet, like its promises of including all Jewish populations, Israel has failed to include all Jewish LGBTQ+ people and has, again, left a section of Israel's population "unequally included." Israel's LGBTQ+ people are not even able to legally marry, and yet, the nation is considered by many to be a haven for LGBTQ+ people. Israel has time and time again failed to properly support all members of its population, which likely derives from the fact that it remains a state built on Orientalist tactics of European state-building and colonization and dispossession of other people. But, because Israel garners most of its legitimacy for its very existence from this inclusion, it is disconcerting that they are wholly unable, and often unbothered, to provide it.

Israel's status as a settler colonial occupier of Palestinian people and land will always be the distinguishing feature of that state. Because it was founded utilizing European, imperialistic values of Orientalism to justify its settler colonial occupation of indigenous Palestinian people, those Orientalist values have permeated the imagined boundary between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian people, and led to the "unequal inclusion" of Israel's Mizrahi population. Mizrahi human rights lawyer, Netta Amar-Shiff, insists, correctly, that "Israelis' future is bound up with Palestinians' future, as the prolonged conflict puts both populations in danger."⁹⁶ She goes on to acknowledge that she knows that "if Palestinians are not safe, I won't be safe. It's either mutually

⁹⁶ Sigal Samuel, "The Untold Story of Arab Jews — and Their Solidarity with Palestinians," *Vox.Com*, April 11, 2024.

assured destruction or mutually assured salvation.”⁹⁷ Amar-Shiff’s observations are accurate, and reflect the anti-Arab sentiments which affect both populations, and are a product of Israel’s settler colonial occupation. Thus, in this light, I maintain that the only proper way to ensure salvation for all Jewish people within Israel’s borders and beyond is the dismemberment of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian people and lands, and thus the termination of the ethno-religious settler colony of Israel, in favor of a secular, truly democratic state, which provides equitable salvation to all, Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi people within its borders.

⁹⁷ Sigal Samuel, “The Untold Story of Arab Jews — and Their Solidarity with Palestinians,” *Vox.Com*, April 11, 2024.

Bibliography

- Englert, Sai. *Settler Colonialism: An Introduction*. Pluto Press, 2022.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2x6f052>.
- Gould, Anita. "Israeli Supreme Court Rules LGBTQ+ Couples Can Adopt Children." *Watermark Online*, January 2, 2024.
<https://watermarkonline.com/2024/01/02/israeli-supreme-court-rules-lgbtq-couples-can-adopt-children/>.
- Hawa, Kaleem. "Palestinian Literary Criticism in Ghassan Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature*." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 52, no. 3 (September 7, 2023): 83–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0377919X.2023.2254104>.
- Katz, Yossi. "Agricultural Settlements in Palestine, 1882-1914." *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (Winter 1988 - Spring 1992): 63–82.
- Lloyd, David. "Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel." *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 59–80.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2012.10648826>.
- Marx, Anthony W. "The Nation-State and Its Exclusions." *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 103–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/798096>.
- Massad, Joseph. "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 53–68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2538006>.
- Papantonopoulou, Saffo. "'Even a Freak Like You Would Be Safe in Tel Aviv': Transgender Subjects, Wounded Attachments, and the Zionist Economy of Gratitude." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1–2 (Spring 2014): 278–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2014.0002>.
- Piterberg, Gabriel. "Domestic Orientalism: The Representation of 'Oriental' Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (November 1996): 125–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530199608705629>.
- Puar, Jasbir. "Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel." *Feminist Legal Studies* 19, no. 2 (August 2011): 133–42.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-011-9176-3>.
- Said, Edward. *The Edward Said Reader*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Samuel, Sigal. "The Untold Story of Arab Jews — and Their Solidarity with Palestinians." *Vox.Com*, April 11, 2024.
<https://www.vox.com/world-politics/24122304/israel-hamas-war-gaza-palestine-arab-jew-s-mizrahi-solidarity>.
- Shafir, Gershon. *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*.

- Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996.
- Shilo, Margalit. "The Immigration Policy of the Zionist Institutions 1882-1914." *Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 3 (July 1994): 597–617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209408701013>.
- Shohat, Ella. "Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews." *Social Text* 75, vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 49–74.
- . "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims." *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (Autumn 1988): 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466176>.
- . "The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: The Case of the Mizrahim." *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 6, no. 10 (March 1997): 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10669929708720097>.
- Smith, Anthony D. "Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism." *Israel Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537129508719376>.
- Snellings, Satchie. "The 'Gayfication' of Tel Aviv: Investigating Israel's Pro-Gay Brand." *Queer Cats Journal of LGBTQ Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.5070/Q531045991>.
- Sullivan, Becky. "What Is a Kibbutz? The Roots of Israel's Communal Villages Where Violence Raged." *Northeast Public Radio*, October 12, 2023. <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/12/1205284601/what-is-a-kibbutz-the-roots-of-israels-communal-villages-where-violence-raged#:~:text=The%20word%20itself%20means%20%22gathering,historically%20centered%20around%20collective%20farms.>
- Triger, Zvi. "The Reluctant Acceptance of Same-Sex Unions and Parents in Israel." *National Taiwan University Law Review* 16, no. 1 (2021): 1–34.
- Tryster, Hillel. "'The Land of Promise' (1935): A Case Study in Zionist Film Propaganda." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 2 (June 1995): 187–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439689500260131>.
- Ya'ar, Ephraim. "Continuity and Change in Israeli Society: The Test of the Melting Pot." *Israel Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005): 91–128. <https://doi.org/30245886>.
- Yiftachel, Oren. *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- . "'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine." *Constellations* 6, no. 3 (1999): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00151>.