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Chosen and Imagined: Racial and Gendered Politics of Reproduction in Palestine and Israel

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies with a Specialization in Critical Gender Studies

by

Bayan Abusneineh

Committee in charge:

Professor Curtis Marez, Chair  
Professor José Fusté  
Professor Dayo Gore  
Professor Shaista Patel  
Professor Sherene Seikaly  
Professor Gershon Shafir

2022

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University of California San Diego

2022

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Palestinians in Palestine and in the diaspora fighting for freedom. Without their fierce strength, beautiful collectivity, and tenacious desire for liberation & self-determination, I would not be here. I also dedicate this to my family – who repeatedly remind me that education is a tool of self and collective liberation; my supportive partner in life, Hamza – whose perfect timing into my life created an abundance of light and regenerated a new meaning of love and commitment; and this beautiful life inside of me – who has given me the strength during the last stretch of this project and has helped me discover an untapped courage inside of me that I never knew I had. They are everything to me and more.

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I began this project on the land of the Kumeyaay people in La Jolla, California, and as I finish it, I write on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Apalachee Nation, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, the Miccosukee Tribe, and the Seminole Tribes, in Tallahassee, Florida. While I write this in Redeye café, I am aware that Palestinians are similarly actively resisting and fighting to remain on their lands from Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, to Al-Khalil, to the Gaza Strip.

I am immensely grateful for the support and fellowship I have received over the last several of years, which sustained and brought this project to life. I would like to express my gratitude to the Marye Anne Fox Endowed Fellowship Fund and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation in Gender Studies, whose dissertation fellowships afforded me the time to complete my dissertation the past couple of years. I must also thank the Palestinian American Research Center, the Department of Ethnic Studies, and the Black Studies Project at the University of California, San Diego, for awarding me research and travel grants to be able to travel to Palestine and Israel to conduct the archival research for this project. These fellowships made it possible for me to make the many connections that I have made while on my trip to Palestine. While abroad, I have made many connections with faculty, student, and community members who have shaped my project in so many exciting ways. I especially want to thank faculty and community members in Birzeit University and Bethlehem University in the West Bank. I also want to thank the staff who assisted me in navigating the archives at the Central Zionist Archives and the Birzeit Archives at Birzeit University, who helped me navigate archival sources in both Hebrew and Arabic, both of which continues to be a life-long learning process.

I honestly could not say that I would be here without my brilliant and supportive committee. Entering UC San Diego, after the passage of the BDS resolution in the American Studies Association, boycotting the academic support for Israeli institutions, I knew immediately I wanted my chair, Curtis Marez on my team. His unwavering support for Palestine showed throughout his support for my work, where he always made himself readily available to meet with me, carefully read and edited all my chapters, and checked in with me regularly. His strong nomination letter helped fund me my dissertation years, including receiving the prestigious Marye Anne Fox Endowed Fellowship and meticulous support. Dayo Gore, who initially began as one of my co-chairs, challenged me in ways to branch outside of my field, and engage strongly with the field of Black Studies. Her expertise in Black feminist theory and historical methods has challenged me to contextualize Palestine in a global way. Not only did she push me intellectually, but was always ready to support me materially, providing opportunities for funding that not only helped pay for rent, but intellectually pushed me in rigorous ways, including the invaluable work through the Black Studies Project. So much gratitude for Shaista Patel and Jose Fuste for enthusiastically joining my committee and supporting my project from my first mentioning it. Shaista's work and practice on thinking about race relationally, and constantly thinking about our complicity in other forms of violence including structures of anti-blackness and settler colonialism has been foundational to my pedagogical and research practice. I owe so much gratitude for Jose for stepping up and supporting my political work and research on Palestine within the department. I am also indebted to the guidance of Gershon Shafir who wholeheartedly supported my project. It is incredible to have cultivated a relationship with someone who not only is such an important figure to the field of Palestine and Israel Studies but has repeatedly showed up for me in material

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another meaning of a feminist collectivity. There is much to say about one of my best friends, Keva Bui, but their collegueship, and more importantly, their friendship, has been one of my most vital sources of encouragement. I truly would not have gotten through my exams, my first publication, and my defense without them.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Chosen and Imagined: Racial and Gendered Politics of Reproduction in Palestine and Israel

by

Bayan Abusneineh

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies with a Specialization in Critical Gender Studies

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Curtis Marez, Chair

*Chosen and Imagined: Racial and Gendered Politics of Reproduction in Palestine and Israel*, traces how Israel manages, subjugates, and seeks to erase populations deemed threatening to the modern nation-state and its pursuit of homogeneity through racial and reproductive violence. This project aims to unravel Israel's pronatalist fertility regime as co-

produced simultaneously by ongoing histories of Zionist settler colonialism, Islamophobia/Orientalism, anti-Semitism, and anti-blackness. Employing an interdisciplinary and transnational methodology, *Chosen and Imagined* combines archival research, oral history, testimonials, film and media analysis, to reveal the state's efforts to deploy reproduction as a path to become part of the civilized, modern, and "superior" West. Through an analysis of a state sponsored child kidnapping and adoption campaign, forced sterilization, family separation and anti-miscegenation laws, and deployment of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), I examine how discourses around reproduction are couched within eugenics. By critically engaging with critical race and settler colonial studies, Palestine studies, and reproductive histories, my project complicates traditional discourses of Israeli settler colonialism, which typically configure a relationship between the Native (Palestinian) versus the Settler (Israeli), by highlighting nuances within the figure of the settler/Israeli. For instance, I trace how Israel's reproductive management of Black and Arab populations aids in the formation of a new European/Ashkenazi Israeli identity, the idealized subject who must be protected against abject, racialized populations.

## INTRODUCTION: Race and Reproduction in Israeli Settler Colonialism

In early May of 2015, the Israeli government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, passed a proposal declaring that the state will pay up to \$3,500 grants to African refugees to encourage them to leave Israel. According to Netanyahu, this move was designed to protect the “Jewish and democratic character” of the Israeli state. This proposal, which Netanyahu’s cabinet voted unanimously to support, allocated NIS 440 million total to manage the situation of the African asylum seekers for that year, with most of the money going towards a new carceral detention center in the Negev for asylum seekers, and the remaining money to be spent on “increasing the personal safety” in south Tel Aviv, where many African migrants live. Later that year in October of 2015, the Israeli police repeatedly shot and killed 29-year-old Eritrean national Haftom Zarhum. Zarhum was in the Beersheba bus station, the capital of the Negev, to renew his work visa, when the news reported that an Israeli soldier was killed by what the media referred to as an “Arab citizen of Israel.” Zarhum was falsely identified as the Arab assailant and was shot by three members of Israeli security forces.

After being shot by three Israeli security forces, an Israeli mob proceeded to beat Zarhum’s already wounded body, shouting “Death to Arabs!” and “Arabs out!” According to the graphic footage of the incident, members of the mob are seen, one by one, kicking Zarhum, throwing a bench at him, and pinning him to the ground with a chair.<sup>1</sup> This mob included members of the Israeli security forces, prison officials and soldiers both in uniform and in civilian clothes. After the final beating, Zarhum’s lifeless body laid on the ground, bleeding, for 18 minutes. Even after the paramedics showed up to help take Zarhum to the hospital, the Israeli mob prevented them

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<sup>1</sup> “CCTV Footage: Shot Eritrean Asylum Seeker Beaten, Untreated for 18 minutes,” *Haaretz*, last modified January 21, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-video-shows-shot-eritrean-beaten-untreated-for-18-minutes-1.5392268>.

from taking him. 16 minutes after the final shot, a police officer walked over to check the wounded man to see if he had any explosives or weapons on him, before allowing the Magen David Adom paramedics to evacuate him. This scene is reminiscent of a different context, in Ferguson, Missouri in the summer of 2014, where Michael Brown's body remained on the ground for four hours after police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed him.<sup>2</sup>

The murder of Haftom Zarhum by not only the Israeli security forces, but the individual civilians and soldiers who contributed to his death, reflects a collective anti-black and anti-Arab ideology on the part of the state and its citizens. Zarhum's murder is an example of how logics of anti-blackness<sup>3</sup> become intertwined with the logics of Zionist settler colonialism and the dispossession of native Palestinians, brought forth by the fact that Zarhum was killed on the accidental basis that he was Arab. While not collapsing the experiences of Eritrean migrants with Palestinians, I argue that the Zarhum reflected an immediate threat to the Jewish state, whether or not he was Arab. For instance, only four of the Israeli participants, including an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldier and a prison guard, were charged with the lynching<sup>4</sup> of Zarhum. Out of the four, two signed a plea deal; Evyatar Damari and David Moyal received four months in prison and

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<sup>2</sup> Julie Bosman and Joseph Goldstein, "Timeline for a Body: 4 Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>

<sup>3</sup> My use of 'anti-Blackness' comes from the literature that theorizes the structural subject position of 'Black', tied to African Slavery. While Israel represents a more contemporary state, not tied to African Slavery, I argue that Zionism emerges from the ideological and geographic Europe, which benefitted materially from the violence and profits of African Slavery. I use 'anti-Blackness' to conceive of the ways that Israel racializes Afro-descendant populations under its direct control, most notably Ethiopians, whom I argue are racialized as 'Black'. As an ideological project of Europe and supported by the US, which benefitted ideologically and profitably from African Slavery, I argue that Israel reproduces similar language, practices and policies of 'anti-Blackness' seen in the US and Europe, though also having a different relationship to 'Blackness'. While focusing primarily on reproductive violence and Ethiopian women, I argue that Israel's relationship to a 'gendered anti-Blackness' is manifested differently towards its various Afro-descendant populations, including Afro-Palestinians, Ethiopians and African migrants from Sudan and Eritrea seeking asylum in Israel. I expand on this more in my third chapter, "'Zionism is a Form of [Anti-Black] Racism': Ethiopian Immigration, Sterilization, and the Depo-Provera Affair."

<sup>4</sup> Time Hume, "Israel: 4 Charged in 'lynching' of Eritrean migrant mistaken for terrorist," CNN World, last modified January 13, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/01/13/middleeast/israel-charges-eritrean-migrant-beating/index.html>.

100 days of community service respectively. The two others - IDF soldier Yaakov Shamba and prison warden Ronen Cohen - were acquitted on the basis that it was the 8 gun shots that killed Zarhum, not the beating. After his trial, Shamba expressed: "I have nothing to be regretful for. If it happened again once, twice, twenty times, I would act exactly the same twenty times."<sup>5</sup> I argue that Zarhum's blackness and migrant status already marked him as disposable, especially given Israel's larger policies to mass deport East African migrants and detain them in one of the largest detention centers in the world. It did not matter whether Zarhum was Arab or a terrorist, his blackness had already marked him as never belonging to the Israeli state.

These racial politics in Israel and Palestine ground my dissertation, *Chosen and Imagined: Racial and Gendered Politics of Reproduction in Palestine and Israel*. *Chosen and Imagined* traces the history of how Israel manages, subjugates, and seeks to erase populations deemed threatening to the modern nation-state and its pursuit of homogeneity and construction of a normative body politic through practices of racialization and reproductive control. This project aims to unravel Israel's pronatalist fertility regime as co-produced simultaneously by ongoing histories of Zionist settler colonialism, Islamophobia/orientalism, anti-Semitism, and anti-blackness. Zionism did not emerge out of a vacuum, but rather, Zionist pioneers eagerly established a nation-state for Jews to escape European persecution by embedding in Israel similar racial ideologies prominent in Europe, and reproducing the polarized binaries of the superior, enlightened West and the inferior, primitive East. The "West" refers to a "historical, not a geographical, construct," that describes a society that is "developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern."<sup>6</sup> The concept of the

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<sup>5</sup> Almog Ben Zikri, "Four Israelis Indicted in Lynching of Asylum Seeker in Be'er Sheva," *Haaretz*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-4-indicted-over-be-er-sheva-lynching-1.5389851>

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" in *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2018), 142.

“West” in the context of nation-state formations did not reflect an already established western society, but rather, “it was essential to that very formation of that society.”<sup>7</sup>

While the case of Zarhum’s murder is not directly one of biological reproduction, it suggests some of the complexities of race, blackness, biopolitics, and reproductive politics in Israeli settler colonialism. The extrajudicial violence and mob killing of Hartom Zarhum based on his blackness, is inextricable from the state sanctioned, legalized, and quotidian reproductive control in the ongoing history of Zionist settler colonialism. This rise in hate crimes and racialized mob violence against East African migrants is similarly fueled and legitimated by Israeli government officials and policy makers. For instance, a couple years earlier, Likud-Party member Miri Regev referred to refugees from countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan as a “cancer.” She later apologized for making this statement – not to the African asylum seekers but to Israeli cancer survivors, apologizing for comparing them to Africans. The Minister of Internal Affairs Eli Yishai, whose job it was to determine entry into Israel and grant citizenship rights, argued that Israel “belongs to us, to the white man” and that he would use “all the tools [necessary] to expel the foreigners, until not one infiltrators remains.” He later told the newspaper *Maariv*, that “the infiltrators [African refugees] along with the Palestinians will quickly bring us to the end of the Zionist dream.”<sup>8</sup> The racialization of African migrants as “infiltrators” alongside the elimination of Palestinians to create the Zionist state guides this project. Black feminist scholars have been at the forefront of analyzing race, blackness, and reproduction as integrally connected aspects of the state and extralegal administration of life and death in the creation and maintenance of the modern nation. This work pushes me to ask: How might the power of antiblackness be at play in Israel’s

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Max Blumenthal, *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel* (Nation Books, 2013), 68.

ongoing project of eliminating Palestinian presence from the land? How might this extend towards how Anti-Semitism and Anti-Arabness function through the logic of elimination?

### **The Zionist Settler Colonial Project**

From its onset, Zionist pioneers were aiming at creating a settler-state in Palestine. By framing the Zionist project in Israel and Palestine as a settler colonial practice, rather than simply a nationalist ideology fundamentally alters the understanding of the role, function, and goals of biopolitics and population management. In their groundbreaking comparative analyses of settler societies, including the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Israel and Palestine, Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis distinguish “settler societies” from “colonies of exploitation...whereby the appropriation of land, natural resources and labour entailed indirect control by colonial powers...”<sup>9</sup> For settler colonialism, on the other hand, the principle objective of governments and settler-citizens is the acquisition of land for permanent occupation and domination. This required descendants of Europeans in their expansion to become and remain politically dominant over indigenous peoples.<sup>10</sup> The construction of these settler societies was not simply about the movement of capital and building of overseas empires, but of settlers and other types of migrants settling into territories with pre-existing ‘indigenous’ societies, requiring their removal or elimination. This resulted in “physical and cultural genocide, alienation of indigenous land, disruption of indigenous societies, [and new] economies and governance” by settlers, who intend to transplant their own societies and governance.

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<sup>9</sup> Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, “Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies – Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies,” in *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*, ed. Daiva K. Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (SAGE Publications, 1995), 1-35.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Rather than a singular event, settler colonialism requires the displacement and subordination of the indigenous groups occupying desired lands and seeks to replace them with a different society. As Theodor Herzl, the founding father of political Zionism, wrote in his utopian novel *Altneuland*: "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct."<sup>11</sup> In the context of Israel, the ideology and political movement of Zionism subjects Palestinians and Palestinians to ongoing structural and violent forms of dispossession, land appropriation and erasure in order to construct a new Jewish state, or what Palestinians have called the "ongoing Nakba."<sup>12</sup> Settlers use various direct and indirect modes of violence, masked by ideologies including modernization, militarized genocide, cultural erasure through biological or cultural assimilation, containment through segregation and separation in the public space, and body politics. Salamanca et al emphasize that the Zionist goal is to control and attain the maximum amount of land, while displacing the indigenous Palestinian population who pose a problem or threat to the Jewish state. Fayeze Sayegh observed how Zionism differed from other settler colonies, and materialized in a "winner takes all model" where the Jewish state cannot be built so long as Arabs continue to live in Palestine:

Other European settlers could co-exist with the indigenous populations – whom they would exploit and dominate, but whose services they would nevertheless require and whose continued existence in the coveted territory they would therefore tolerate. But the Zionist settlers could not countenance indefinite co-existence with the inhabitants of Palestine. The Zionist colonization of Palestine was essentially incompatible with the continued existence of the native population in the coveted country.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (WLC, 2008); originally published in 1902

<sup>12</sup> Omar Salamanca et al., "Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1-8.

<sup>13</sup> Fayeze Sayegh, "Zionism Colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 206-225.

The destruction of historic Palestine required the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, including the infamous Plan Dalet,<sup>14</sup> a blueprint that required Zionist militias to invade and destroy Palestinian towns and villages. One of these major atrocities included the massacre of Deir Yassin in April of 1948, where 90% of Palestinians were driven out due to military pressure and psychological warfare – many Palestinians fled out of fear. This process of cleansing also necessitated changing the historic Arabic names of geographic sites and replacing them with modern Hebrew names, often biblical names, to present European colonialism as a continuation of an ancient Jewish ownership of the land.<sup>15</sup> This constructed myth of a Jewish “return” after years of exile was necessary for Zionists to see historic Palestine without its indigenous inhabitants. This also necessitated the processes of Judaisation or de-Arabisation (or de-Palestinisation) – the systematic erasure of expelled Palestinians and their destroyed villages and towns from Israeli official and popular history. Zionism continues to deploy numerous tactics, including transfer, a Zionist euphemism for the deliberate and sometimes random, “plethora of legal, military, and economic tactics to expel Palestinians,” along with current forms of aerial and maritime bombardment, massacre and invasion, home demolitions, land theft, identity card confiscation, racist laws and loyalty tests, the wall, the siege on Gaza, and cultural appropriation, among others.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Nakba in 1948 is not simply a *precondition* for the creation of Israel, but is manifested today in the continuing subjection of Palestinians by Israelis to annex as much land as possible.

Recent scholarship in Black studies and Native/Indigenous studies have made claims to exceptionalism that leave the two fields at an impasse. Binary and dichotomous analyses often

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<sup>14</sup> Plan Dalet was a set of guidelines worked out by the Haganah (Zionist paramilitary group) in 1948, to take control over and declare a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine. Plan Dalet called for the conquest of Arab towns and villages inside and along the borders of the area allocated to the proposed Jewish state in the UN Partition Plan. The population of conquered villages were set to be expelled outside the borders of the Jewish state.

<sup>15</sup> Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (Zed Books, 2012), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

dominate settler colonial studies, obscuring the complexity and interdependence of their social, economic, political, and ideological relations. Settler colonialism is often treated as a “stand-alone analytic” that is often isolated from imperialism and differential forms of racialization, reproducing a form of “colonial unknowing” – “the mutable historicity of colonial structures and attributing finality to events of conquest and dispossession.”<sup>17</sup> Settler colonial histories, conditions, practices, and logics of dispossession and power must necessarily be understood as relationally constituted to other modes of imperialism, racial capitalism and historical formations of social difference.”<sup>18</sup> Tiffany Lethabo King’s *The Black Shoals* uses the shoal – an offshore geologic formation that is neither land nor sea – to imagine the relationship between Native genocide and Black enslavement, arguing that Settler Colonial Studies typically privileges the settler’s relationship with the land rather than the violent processes of the human’s self-making. Following her lead, I argue that Israeli settler colonialism demonstrates a clear example of this intertwining, as the figure of the Israeli sovereign (re: European) subject is bound up through the violent management and control of Black, Arab, and Jewish bodies. Centering the study of settler colonialism in Israel and Palestine reveals the ways that the Zionist settler colonial project did not neatly create a settler v. native binary. By centering the history of immigration in Israel – particularly, as they intersect with reproductive control against Ashkenazi, Mizrahi/Sephardi, and Ethiopian Jews, and Palestinians - I present a nuanced and complicated analysis of the figure of the settler and how reproductive control becomes part and parcel of Israel’s settler colonial project. Racism is integral to Zionism, and we see this not just in the treatment of Palestinians, but in how they treat Jewish people of European, Middle Eastern and African descent.

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<sup>17</sup> Tiffany Lethabo King, “New World Grammars: The ‘Unthought’ Black Discourses of Conquest.” *Theory & Event*, 19 (2016).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Centering Race in Israeli Settler Colonialism**

The frenzied "Scramble for Africa" of the 1880's stimulated the beginnings of Zionist colonization in Palestine. As European fortune-hunters, prospective settlers, and empire builders raced for Africa, Zionist settlers and would-be state-builders rushed for Palestine. However, before they were set on Palestine, Zionists considered other locations for their colonial enterprise, one of the most famous being the Ugandan Scheme, proposed by Political Zionist Theodor Herzl at the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1903. Herzl had been approached the year before by the infamous imperialist and Colonial Secretary of Great Britain Joseph Chamberlain, who had a vested interest in the ongoing settlement of the African continent and pillaging of the continent's resources. The Uganda plan – the proposition to create a Jewish homeland in a portion of British East Africa (modern-day Kenya), was proposed as a temporary refuge for Jewish people to escape rising antisemitism in Europe. Although this plan was never realized and was staunchly opposed by members of the Zionist organization, it offered Africa as an alternative to Zion; Palestine maintained historical and biblical justifications as the "Land of Israel" that Zionists needed to fulfill a Jewish homeland. Although Zionists did not move forward with the Uganda Proposal, it still conjoined the Jews with European colonizers, whose settlement in Africa would facilitate the region's colonization by white people... and revealed the mental mechanism and colonial discourses that characterized Herzl's method of progression towards his final goal – a Jewish state based on a discourse of enlightenment, modernity, and nationalism.

The 1948 establishment of Israel as a settler colonial state led to the dispossession and expulsion of more than 750,000 Palestinians, more than 150,000 internally displaced within the borders of the new state. Zionism is an ideology and political movement that subjects the land of Palestine, and Palestinians, to structural and violent forms of dispossession, land appropriation,

and erasure in the pursuit of a new Jewish state (what Palestinians call the “ongoing Nakba”). Since 1948, Israel has attempted to create a Jewish majority population in at least two significant ways: Firstly, Israel immediately instituted the Law of Return in 1950, which automatically grants every Jewish person in the world the right to Israeli citizenship and nationality. It asserted that: Every Jew has the right to immigrate to Israel. However, the way it defined who was a “Jew” was lenient, and included non-Jewish spouses of Jews, their children, and their grandchildren. The Law of Return was extended to Jewish people from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, but it excluded Jews from Ethiopia. Secondly, leaders did not rely simply on immigration law to increase the demographics of the Jewish population. This symbolic reproduction of the Israeli Jewish national collectivity depended on the availability of people “of the right kind” to “man it.” For instance, after Israel’s declaration, first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion writes that “the increase of Jewish birthrate is not an imperialist need, but rather an essential component on the survival of the [Jewish] people... any woman who does not have four children as much as it depends on her is betraying the Jewish mission.”<sup>19</sup> Native Palestinians, on the other hand, are characterized as an undesirable problem population whose fertility and reproduction are highly threatening. Through Israeli discourses, images, and media, Palestinians are often represented as breeders, irrational out of control reproducers, and that there is a strong connotation that “they need to stop breeding” to maintain Israel as a progressive, modern, and developed nation. However, as my work reveals, non-European Jewish groups, Jews from the Middle East, and Ethiopia, similarly pose a threat to a European (white) Jewish ethnic collectivity and their reproductive bodies must similarly be contained. However, the root of this racialization against

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<sup>19</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (University of California Press, 2002).

Middle Eastern and African Jews is similarly entangled with the racialization of the European Jewish body and the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European Jewish settlers began heeding the call of the Zionist movement, which positioned itself as a refuge from centuries of anti-Semitism, persecution, and genocide. Despite being geographically, linguistically, and culturally divided, Zionists proposed that Jewish people were indeed a race; however, they classified them as a low and racially degenerate race, but capable of uplift. They proposed that securing Jewish autonomy and creating a state in which they were the majority would uplift or normalize the Jewish race. The racialization of the Jewish subject as the “internal other” is inherent to the political project of the West, specifically Europe, and is similarly imbricated in structures of antiblackness and Islamophobia. Zionist theorists such as Arthur Ruppin, Theodor Herzl, and Max Nordau believed that the Jews of Europe were physically and morally weak, parasitical, feminine and without roots, proposing that the “muscular Jew” should replace the meek and sickly Jew. The very nature of Israel relies on the status of Jewish people as debilitated to justify its existence, demonstrating how eugenics coincided with the Zionist movement. Disability Studies activist Liat Ben-Moshe writes that “physical labor, return to nature and fitness, conquest of the “wilderness” (with Palestinians in it) and military power were seen as the antidote to the scholastic Diaspora Jew. The logic was that Zionism can instill that discipline, mental agility, and physical strength to produce stronger, more physically fit, and confident Jewish bodies, necessary to reverse the long-held representation of the weak and overly intellectual Jew.

Zionists faced the dilemma of salvaging Jews while still salvaging the idea of Europe – “a Jewish Palestine had to be a European Palestine.”<sup>20</sup> Although they knew they could not assimilate

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<sup>20</sup> Sherene Seikaly and Max Ajl, “Of Europe: Zionism and the Jewish other,” *Europe after Derrida: Crisis and Potentiality*, ed. 120–133.

into Europe as Europeans, they still sought to be a part of it, requiring their physical departure from its shores.<sup>21</sup> Through this process, the Jew could finally be part of, even if not in, Europe. Rather than challenge this discriminatory and racist ethos that excluded them from integrating into Europe, Zionists internalized these ideologies to gain acceptance within Europe. It was “well before and leading up to Israel’s establishment [where] Zionists established an ethno-national mythology of a new and universal Jew who was white and European”. As a result, the Zionist movement tried to erase the “ghetto Jew” by creating a “New Jew” through the racialization of Black and Arab Jews. This “New Jew” is predominantly embodied in the trope of the pioneer: secular, strong, masculine, healthy and physically perfect. It is through this control over and creation of a normative Jewish collective “European Jewish body” that I situate the history of eugenics in Israel. Arthur Ruppin called for the ‘purification of the “Jewish Race”’ and stated that it was ‘desirable that only the racially pure come to the land [of Israel]’. Throughout his writings, Ruppin explicitly “emphasized the superiority of the Ashkenazi Jews to the Sephardic and Oriental Jews, in terms of intelligence, creativity, mathematical ability, agility, imagination and hygiene,” arguing that ‘with proper treatment [they] could become a new, productive Jewish-Yemenite type, capable of serving the new nation that was evolving.’<sup>22</sup> Thus, the thousands of Yemenite and Mizrahi immigrants who arrived simultaneously with immigrants from Europe remained in a subservient social position in Israel. As Ella Shohat argues, the creation of their identities as “Mizrahi/Sephardi” aided in Zionist discourse, which contended that European Zionism “saved” Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews from not only the harsh rule of their Arab “captors” but took them out of their primitive conditions of poverty and taught them to assimilate into a more “modern, western

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>22</sup> Etan Bloom, *Arthur Ruppin and the Production of Pre-Israeli Culture* (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2011), 198-199.

society characterized by tolerance, democracy, humane' values."<sup>23</sup> As a result, the Mizrahim, were expected to appreciate and uphold Zionist ideals and be grateful for Israeli policies rather than be critical of them. Early sociological research marks the Mizrahim as the "problem community" that could not achieve modernity "due to their inability to internalize such categories of thinking." In fact, they were racially constructed as being biologically inferior, often being referred to as "black" and "primitive" by many Zionist theorists. It was "the Jew from the East... that would pose one of the greatest threats to the rehabilitated, and now supposedly European, Jewish body."<sup>24</sup>

While Ruppin believed that Middle Eastern Jews could be transformed into 'New Jews', he outright dismissed the presence of Ethiopian Jews, claiming that they are: "[N-words], who came to Judaism by force of the sword in the sixth century B.C. They have no blood connections to the Jews ... [Therefore] their numbers in Palestine should not be increased."<sup>25</sup> Most of the Ethiopian Jewish population currently residing in Israel today are immigrants or descend from immigrants from Ethiopia who immigrated to Israel through two major Israeli covert operations – Operation Moses and Operation Solomon – which similarly constructed the "heroic Zionist narrative." The prevailing racial and colonial construct around "Black" blood becomes echoed years later during the 1990s, where it was found that the National Israeli blood Bank routinely destroyed blood donated by Ethiopian Israelis because of fear that it was contaminated with the HIV virus that causes AIDS. This blood ban continued until 2016.

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<sup>23</sup> Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," *Duke University Press: Social Text*, 19/20 (1988), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Sherene Seikaly and Max Ajl, "Of Europe: Zionism and the Jewish other," *Europe after Derrida Crisis and Potentiality*, ed. 120–133.

<sup>25</sup> Etan Bloom, *Arthur Ruppin and the Production of Pre-Israeli Culture* (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2011), 198–199.

## **“Be Fruitful and Multiple”: The Reproduction of a National Jewish Body**

In January of 2021, Israeli news magazine *Haaretz* published an article entitled “Israel’s Population is Growing at a Dizzying Rate. Is it Up for the Challenge?”<sup>26</sup> According to the article, Israel’s population is growing at two percent per year, four times the average of just 0.5 percent in other developed countries. Part of why Israel’s population growth is exponentially increasing at faster rates than other countries is due to its high fertility rates. For instance, Israel’s current fertility rate of almost 3.1 children per woman is the highest by far, of any country in the 37 member OECD. Israel, in fact, prides itself on its high reproduction rates, where it has been at the forefront of reproductive technologies, from egg freezing to In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF). In fact, IVF is state subsidized to all its Jewish citizens, for up to 8 rounds. While these technologies have aided many women and couples in having children, treatments such as IVF, are still invasive and medicalizes women’s bodies, their hormonal makeup, and their monthly cycles. These attitudes about reproduction can be traced back to the establishment of the state of Israel and what scholars have termed Israel’s pronatalism. However, Israel is not simply concerned with increasing its demographics of Jewish citizens, to outnumber Palestinians, but with increasing a particular type of Jewish collectivity.

Like other settler colonies, the Zionist settler colonial project is ultimately premised on demography. The process of Judaisation and de-Arabisation necessitated a fruitful and healthy reproduction of a Jewish settler body while restricting that of Palestinian reproduction. In today’s ongoing Nakba, more than six million Palestinians have been displaced by Zionist violence, living in scattered refugee camps across the world. There are approximately five million Palestinians

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<sup>26</sup> Meirav Arlosoroff, "Israel’s Population is Growing at a Dizzying Rate. Is it Up for the Challenge?" *Haaretz*, January 4, 2021. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-israel-s-population-is-growing-at-a-dizzying-rate-is-it-up-for-the-challenge-1.9410043>

officially registered with the United Nations. In 2013, Israel celebrated its Jewish population passing the symbolically significant six million mark: “It’s a great joy to know there are more than six million Jews in Israel, equivalent to the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust” highlighted Dina Porat, the chief historian of Yada Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust museum and the head of the Kantor center for the study of contemporary European Jewry.<sup>27</sup> This symbolic number is not only significant in relation to the Shoah (the Holocaust), but illustrates Israel’s ongoing demographic struggle to consolidate a Jewish majority.

While reproduction has been associated all but exclusively with women’s bodies and the domestic realm, including private issues of fertility, childbearing, and motherhood, *Chosen and Imagined* draws on feminist and anti-racist scholars who argue that these discourses of reproduction have contributed to larger structures of racism, nation-building and imperial expansion.<sup>28</sup> The embodiment of space has long been a concern of feminist scholars, who have drawn attention to the ways in which women’s bodies have been constructed as a symbolic national symbol in a variety of contexts, as “biological reproducers of member of ethnic collectivities.”<sup>29</sup> Scholars have argued that Black, native, and other racialized women’s reproductive bodies, identities, and sexualities have historically been commodified, sterilized, and subjected to state control to advance scientific research and medical testing; to expand chattel slavery, colonialism, and imperialism; to assert political claims to land and labor; and to extend labor and life in the Western world. In this study, Israel’s management of reproduction, expands the topic of fertility to encompass an ensemble of discourses, state and individual practices, and collective fantasies of

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<sup>27</sup> Harriet Sherwood, "Israel's Jewish Population Passes 6 Million Mark," The Guardian, January 1, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/01/israel-jewish-population-six-million>

<sup>28</sup> Alys Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproduction: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Sage Publishers, 2012).

which modern notions of race, gender, and sexuality have been given form and meaning through the logics and language of reproduction. This study on reproduction in Israel extends the work of feminist scholars on what Alys Weinbaum has dubbed “the race/reproduction bind” – that is the inextricable interconnection of race and reproduction in the creation and maintenance of the modern nation-state. In the context of Israeli settler colonialism, reproduction is always already a “racial project,” structured by and interpreted through systems of racial meaning and racial making. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian writes: “It is the obsession of the occupiers and their bureaucracies and bureaucrats with the intimate details of who is sleeping with whom, who is marrying whom, who is giving birth, and whose children are to be recognized.”<sup>30</sup> *Chosen and Imagined* brings forth an understanding of race and reproduction as integrally connected aspects of the Israeli state and extralegal administration of life and death of both Jewish and non-Jewish people in Israel and Palestine, whose ultimate purpose is to produce a (white) universal Jewish subject.

In settler colonial contexts, biopolitical surveillance and control over women’s bodies and reproductive capacities are intimately tied to the eliminatory policies that seek to destroy native peoples to replace them with a settler entity.<sup>31</sup> Reproductive politics are thus always concerned with the biopolitical, which is a framework used to examine the strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority of knowledge, power, and the process of subjugation. Michel Foucault argues that the state’s management of populations is not only disciplinary, as he argues in his work *Discipline and Punish*, but to “make life and let die.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance, and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al, “Sexual Violence, Women’s Bodies, and Israeli Settler Colonialism, *Jadaliyya*, November 17, 2014. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31481>.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (Picador, 2003), 1-336.

Biopolitics entails the administration of the processes of life at the aggregate level of life processes, which includes monitoring the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, and the fertility of a population. This is distinguished from disciplining, which operates at the level of the individual. In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault argues that eighteenth-century Europe signaled a shift from sovereignty to territory in the disciplining of the population, where “the old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplemented by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.”<sup>33</sup>

While biopolitics is useful in theorizing sociopolitical life and reproduction, Alexander Weheliye argues that it “misconstrues how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human.”<sup>34</sup> Reproduction and biopolitics have been mobilized to produce a same (white) or ethnically marked body in colonized spaces, in the case of Israel and Palestine, rendering Black and Arab subjects abject or unwanted. Patrick Wolfe writes that “race is colonialism speaking.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, race and racism are central to the discussion of biopolitics as a technology of colonial power and population management in Israel and Palestine. Race becomes fundamental to the rule of life and death, particularly, in the management of intimacy and the body and in valuations of what constitutes the human, not quite human and nonhuman.

Israel was founded on a racialized colonial logic that constructs Palestinians as dangerous, backwards, and primitive, and in need of modernization from a more pristine group. Rhoda Kanaaneh traces the history of Zionism’s preoccupation with demographics from the era of the British mandate, where the British Colonial Administration set up central offices to organize

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke University Press, 2014), 1-224.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4, (2006): 387:409.

official registration of birth and annual censuses. With these structures already in place, the newly formed Israeli state used these as technologies of state management of populations, but one that was based on a settler colonial movement. For example, to encourage Jewish birth rate, a pronatalist award was introduced in 1949 for “heroine mothers” who bore a tenth child. However, it was discontinued after it became clear that the majority of those who claimed the award were Palestinian women. To maintain the nature of the Jewish State, David Ben Gurion stated that “any future prenatal incentive, must be administered by the Jewish agency and not the state, since the aim is to increase the number of Jews and not the population of the State.”<sup>36</sup>

Scholars such as Susan Kahn and Sigrid Vertommen have called the technologization of reproduction in Israel as “pronatalism” and speculate that Israeli reproductive policies and attitudes are devised as a state agenda to alter the demographics of the Israeli Jewish population. Vertommen argues that the intimate connection between reproductive and demographic policies is made visible in Israel’s regional and global role of Assisted Reproductive Technologies. She situates Israel’s pronatalist reproductive health policies alongside the Law of Return, which grants every Jew in the world the right to Israeli citizenship and nationality and denying Palestinian refugees their right to return to create a Jewish majority.<sup>37</sup> I read Vertommen’s work, and specifically her analysis of reproductive technologies as a method of increasing the Israeli population, alongside Meira Weiss’s *The Chosen Body*, who argues that a particular population, or particular body(ies), is constituted through the deployment of reproductive technologies in Israel. Weiss explores how “the chosen body” is constituted through the rejection of people with

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<sup>36</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Sigrid Vertommen, “Babies from Behind Bars: Stratified Assisted Reproduction in Palestine/Israel.” In *Assisted Reproduction Across Borders: Feminist Perspectives on Normalizations, Disruptions and Transmissions*, edited by Merete Lie and Nina Lykke. Routledge. 207-218. 2016.

physical and intellectual disabilities, through frequent abortions, and how these iterations of the body are used to create social and cultural meanings of Israeli society. According to Weiss, Israel leads the world in fetus diagnostics, where Israeli society at large has preferred abortion in cases of mild impairment, as well as in relatively low risk cases, such as five percent risk of mental retardation. This desire for what she refers to as the “idealized, male, chosen body” is rooted in a deep structure that attempts to define a “core collective identity in Israeli society.”<sup>38</sup> This dissertation builds on Kahn, Vertommen, and Weiss’s scholarship, by centering the study of how race and colonialism are constructed through immigration, technology, and iterations of the disabled body.

By placing into conversation Palestine Studies, Black feminist Studies, and Settler Colonial studies, this dissertation exemplifies my commitment to interdisciplinary and transnational methodologies, drawing from historical and cultural studies. As a project that connects disparate people, places, and ideas – as well as multiple historical formations such as settler colonialism, migrations, and slave trades – *Chosen and Imagined* requires this approach that thinks not only across time and space, but across archives, methods, and disciplines. I have visited and collected archival materials from institutions in the United States, Israel, and Palestine. Given that these documents are subsumed in state secrecy, omission, and power, being from settler colonial states, I read these documents as cultural texts, paying attention to the document’s historical and discursive context, symbolism, metaphors, repetitions, and themes. To do that, I similarly examine cultural objects, such as newspapers, films, short documentary series, art pieces, novels, and testimonials. This approach does not foreground comprehensiveness or give a full historical account but allows me to examine the relationality and differentiation of peoples, cultures, and

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<sup>38</sup> Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society*, (Stanford University Press, 2002).

societies, as well as the convergence and divergence of ideas, concepts, and themes. *Chosen and Imagined* does not follow a singular narrative, rather, the entangled lives and histories of individual people or stories that I piece together to tell a larger narrative around reproduction and nation-building in Israel.

Dorothy Roberts reminds us that the history of eugenics did not simply function “in the service of a biological struggle between nation-states,” but functioned to maintain the racial, gender, and class order within the nation. *Chosen and Imagined* seeks to retell the history of eugenics in Israel and Palestine to illustrate how biopolitical control of the intimate, surveillance, and control over Jewish and non-Jewish Palestinian reproductive bodies become critical to nation-building in Israel, and its formation as a European nation in the Middle East. While these stories have been told in isolation from one another, bridging them together allows for an understanding of how reproductive control becomes central to the creation of racial and colonial categories in Israel and Palestine. Piecing these stories together retells this history of Israeli eugenics as a structural and ongoing issue, that is necessary to maintain Israel as a white, settler colonial nation.

Chapter one, “Reproducing the ‘New Jew’: Early Discourses of Race and Disability in Israel” examines historical and contemporary Zionist discourses around the establishment of the Jewish state and early pronatalist policies around reproduction. Through an engagement with literature around the history of anti-Semitism and a close reading of archival documents that focus on health of babies and mothers, I argue that Zionists’ panic around low fertility evolved into eugenics discourses around producing a healthy, racially white (Ashkenazi majority), and abled collective body. Building on Lee Edelman’s argument about how the future of the state is always conceived through the figure of the Child, I analyze how early Zionist discourses, policies, and procedures around reproduction reproduced similar tropes of anti-Semitism that Eastern European

Jews experienced in Europe, around race and disability. These discourses operated simultaneously with imagining Palestinians in racialized, ableist and contradictory terms - debilitated, non-existent, and a physical threat to the Israeli state. The second half of this chapter situates contemporary discourses around Israel's recent "baby boom" - how despite the world's birth rate plummeting, Israel's birth rate continues to grow. This is all due partly to its growth in its citizen's use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs). Israel's pro-natalist policies has been institutionalized through multiple funds and committees, providing monetary incentives for large families, alongside social benefits for mothers and child allowances. Israel is the only country in the world where in vitro fertilization (IVF) is almost entirely state subsidized. The use of fetal diagnostics is also state subsidized, where close to 60 percent of pregnant women in Israel undergo some kind of diagnostic test before delivery. In many of these cases in which a fetus has a mild physical or intellectual impairment, doctors will recommend abortion to the woman. The second part of this chapter analyzes how the fear and panic around Jewish degeneracy has manifested through the use of these reproductive technologies.

Chapter two, "Where are our Children?" Testimony, Hauntings, and the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair, 1949-1960" contextualizes the family separation, state-sponsored kidnappings, and adoption of over 1500 children from families of Yemenite, Mizrahi (Arab-Jews), and Balkan immigrants during the 1950s and 1960s. In this chapter, I read online testimonials put together by the Amram Association, of doctors, nurses, and Mizrahi families inflicted by this large-scale kidnapping and adoption campaign, as a form of counter memory that shifted public discourses, knowledge, and policies around Jewish immigration to Israel. The Amram Association collected, archived, and opened these testimonials to the public to combat the silences surrounding the Yemenite Children Affair, but also help locate and reunite the families and kidnapped persons.

Through a close and cultural reading of some of the testimonials from the archive, I argue that racialized discourses around Arab-Jewish mothers as “bad mothers” coincided with ideas of fitness for Jewish citizenship.

Chapter three, “‘Zionism is a Form of [Anti-Black] Racism’: Ethiopian Immigration, Sterilization, and the Depo-Provera Affair,” analyzes the coerced injections of the contraception Depo-Provera against Ethiopian immigrants to Israel, also known as the Depo-Provera Affair, to think about the larger relationship between race, blackness, and coloniality in Israeli settler colonialism. In 2013, then Israeli Deputy Health Minister Yaakov Litzman admitted that doctors in transit camps in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and absorption centers in Israel administered Depo-Provera contraceptive shots to Ethiopian immigrant women without their consent. Depo-Provera is a contraceptive injection that contains the progesterone hormone, typically administered once every three months. The injection prevents pregnancy by stopping the production of progesterone and estrogen, which in turn inhibits ovulation and prevents the lining of the uterus from being prepared to accept a fertilized egg. The controversy around the Depo-Provera Affair first emerged in 2008, when Sebba Reuven interviewed thirty-five Ethiopian women awaiting immigration to Israel. Israeli investigative journalist Gal Gabbay included some of these stories in the television documentary report “Where Did Our Children Go?” (2012, my translation), which aired on the Israeli Educational Television Program Vacuum, sparking national outcry and protests. Based on interviews with Ethiopian and Ashkenazi activists in Isha L’Isha, a reproductive rights organization in Heifa, immigration and absorption documents from the Israeli State Archives, and the film “Where Did Our Children Go?”, I examine the discourses around the Depo-Provera Affair as a state management project whereby Israel dictates who must live and who must die, to analyze how the production of Israel as a sovereign nation and white-settler subject, depends on the

abjection of Black people, and by extension, the African continent. To tell this story, I return back to several key moments including the 1950s-1960s known as the “Golden Age,” where Israel’s key leaders David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir sought to fortify Israel’s relationship with newly decolonized African nations, by sending thousands of Israeli experts to 33 African states, offering aid and technical knowledge, including military training, regional planning, agriculture, legal work, and community services; the height of the South African apartheid, which signified a key moment in which Israel’s support for the apartheid movement led to a cut in diplomatic ties with the African countries; and lastly, the height of the famine in Ethiopia during the 1980s, whose images of devastation and destitute led to the creation of Israel as the benevolent rescue of the Ethiopian people.

Chapter four, “Policing the Palestinian Body: The Intimate Politics of Marriage, Death, and Birth,” takes seriously reproductive violence against native Palestinians against Israeli settler colonialism. While much has been written about this form of violence against Palestinian women, my intervention is that I demonstrate that this is done in three different ways. Firstly, I explore the way that Israel has historically depended on and currently depends on spectacularized forms of violence via military and discursive violence from the Israel Defense Forces, since before the state’s establishment. In the second part of this chapter, I examine how the 2003 Citizenship and Entry law impacts the intimate and reproductive lives of Palestinians, including their prenatal/postnatal care and the complications of passing down the Jerusalem ID. These policies are part of a larger strategy to annex more Palestinian land. Lastly, I explore the experiences of Palestinian pregnant women to think about carcerality and reproduction in the context of Israeli settler colonialism. In this last section, I demonstrate this through a cultural reading of Mai Masri’s film, *3000 Nights*, which depicts the story of a Palestinian women named Layal, who is arrested

and false accused by the Israeli Defense Forces of helping a teenage boy suspected of attacking a military checkpoint. While in prison, she gets pregnant and is forced to give birth and raise her son Noor behind bars, where her loyalty to motherhood is tried against her loyalty to her nation.

## CHAPTER ONE: Reproducing the ‘New Jew’: Early Discourses of Race and Disability in Israel

In 2003, Dr. Tal Biron-Shental, an obgyn at Meir Hospital located in Kfar Sabar, Israel, announced that she has succeeded in keeping ovarian tissue from aborted fetuses alive in a laboratory for several weeks. By adding a specialized hormone treatment, she argued that, despite its ethical concerns, it was theoretically possible to turn the immature eggs into mature ones that could be used in in-vitro fertilization procedures.<sup>39</sup> Ten years later, in 2013, Dr. Eliezer Shalev, in the Technion Israel Institute of Technology, reported on the possibility of creating human eggs from the amniotic sac tissue. These reproductive advances in Israel are not limited to eggs. Dr. Jacob Rosen, the head of one of the largest private sperm banks in Israel remarks that “super-sperm” donors – male donors of tall, in their twenties, ex-soldiers and have passed rigorous genetic testing - are becoming rare.<sup>40</sup> Less than two decades ago, one in ten men qualified as super-sperm donors; today, only one in 100 pass the test, indicating that the quality of sperm is decreasing at alarming rates for unknown reasons, ranging from carrying cell phones in front pockets to estrogen found in Israel’s water and milk.<sup>41</sup> In 1991, when Hadassah Sperm Bank director Ruth Har-Nir helped establish the sperm bank, it rejected about a third of the applicants for low quality. Using the same standard today, it would reject more than 80%.<sup>42</sup>

These are a few among the many scientific advances around reproduction in Israel. Israel has long been at the forefront of reproductive technology, from egg freezing to in-vitro fertilization (IVF). Israel is the only country in the world where IVF is almost entirely state subsidized for its citizens. This level of public funding, which is not affected by the patient’s marital status, sexual

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<sup>39</sup> Paige Comstock Cunningham, “IVF & the New Eugenics,” *Everyday Bioethics*, accessed June 18, 2020. <https://everydaybioethics.org/resource/ivf-new-eugenics>

<sup>40</sup> Edmund Sanders, "Israel sperm banks find quality is plummeting," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed June 17, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/health/la-xpm-2012-aug-15-la-fg-israel-sperm-20120816-story.html>

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

orientation, or whether they have children from previous relationships, is a unique Israeli phenomenon. While Israel is constructed as a hub for women to receive cheap or state subsidized IVFs, there are differences in how women's reproductive experiences materialize. This research is also attributed to Israel's attitudes towards having children. Journalist Edmund Sanders writes that "fertility is a major issue in Israel, where memories of the Holocaust are fresh and having children is an entrenched part of Judaism."<sup>43</sup>

As important, these reproductive advances can be attributed to Israel's political and historical context of increasing the number of Jewish citizens against Arabs and Israeli settler colonialism. This chapter examines the historical and contemporary Zionist discourses around the establishment of Israel to argue that Zionist's panic around low fertility evolved into eugenics discourses around producing a healthy, racially white, and abled collective body. Along with annexing Palestinian land, I argue that the Israeli body has been regulated to form a "new person" predominantly embodied in the trope of the pioneer: secular, strong, masculine, healthy, and physically perfect.

### **Israeli Pronatalism Policy During the Early Years of Statehood**

In the year 1936 when rioting broke out in the country, and at the beginning of the War of Liberation when thousands of refugees left their homes in search of security and shelter, followed later by the flood disasters in the suburban quarters, WIZO's members came to the rescue of those who needed them. Infants and small children took refuge in its institutions. Temporary buildings were erected and in them WIZO's members worked for some time as volunteers. WIZO cared both for children and adults and was the first institution to render immediate assistance to the needy, tackling its job with vigour and determination.

The first branch of WIZO was opened thirty-two years ago in Jerusalem, after the First World War. A large section of the Yishuv then lived under poor conditions, most of the people having a primitive living standard. The infant mortality rate was very high, and the future looked dark and gloomy. A small group of women, however, decided to improve matters. With a small budget, they set about making

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

plans for the creation of children's institutions. Baby homes were opened as well as milk distribution centers for the help of pregnant mothers. The light of instruction and care began to shine through the darkness of the Jerusalem lands. Soon the work was extended to other towns. Branches spring up overnight in various parts of the country and thousands of women were instructed in the ways of education and mutual assistance and in the upbuilding of the land.<sup>44</sup>

The Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) was founded in London by members of the Ladies' Committee of the Zionist Federation of Britain. During this time in London, the Zionist movement was becoming more widespread; however, women at this time were not encouraged to contribute beyond joining fundraising campaigns and supporting activities. WIZO offered an opportunity for women who felt marginalized by Zionist organizations to get involved, mostly focusing on assisting women and children immigrants. WIZO's founder and first president Rebecca Sieff, born Rebecca Marks, realized that there needed to be a space for women to become involved with the movement. During the First world war, she joined the Manchester Daughters of Zion and raised funds for the Polish Jewish Relief. In 1917, after the Balfour Declaration, she later formed the "Ladies Committee" of the English Zionist Federation, alongside like-minded women. Through working with the English Zionist Federation, she connected with other female Zionist groups and reached out to the Council of the EZF to allow the formation of a separate women's federation which would incorporate the existing small women's groups (in the EZF).

The organization ultimately believed that for a Jewish state to succeed, Zionism – the movement to establish a state solely for the Jewish people – must support and uplift women and children. The establishment of WIZO and the centering of women and children demonstrates how the figure of the "Child" became central to Zionist discourse and the founding of the state of Israel. I contextualize WIZO's mission as part of what Lee Edelman (2004) refers to as "reproductive future," which is that futurity – an investment in and attention to the future or futures – is almost

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<sup>44</sup> WIZO Papers, Central Zionist Archives, 2019

always figured in reproductive terms: We cannot “conceive of a future without the figure of the Child.”<sup>45</sup> In *No Future: Queer Theories and the Death Drive*, Edelman (2004) examines how reproductive futurism is deeply embedded in the ideology and political discourse of heteronormativity. He argues that many political struggles are defined by the idea of creating a better future, where “fighting for our children” becomes the vehicle to accomplish this.<sup>46</sup> “For politics,” writes Edelman, “however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child.”<sup>47</sup> However, early and contemporary Zionist discourses of the formation of the Child in Israel is interwoven with eugenics ideology.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European Jewish settlers began heeding the call of the Zionist movement, which positioned itself as a refuge from centuries of anti-Semitism, persecution, and genocide. Despite being geographically, linguistically, and culturally divided, Zionists proposed that Jewish people were indeed a race; however, they classified them as a low and racially degenerate race, but capable of uplift. Zionist theorists such as Arthur Ruppin, Theodor Herzl, and Max Nordau believed that the Jews of Europe were physically and morally weak, parasitical, feminine and without roots, proposing that the “muscular Jew” should replace the meek and sickly Jew.

The state of Israel is often situated as a model of rehabilitation from two debilitating conditions: The statelessness of the diasporic Jewish people and the genocide of the Holocaust. Historically, Zionism sought to change or rehabilitate the Jewish people from their seemingly

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<sup>45</sup> Lee Edelman. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 3; Emphasis in original.

debilitated and fragmented state in the diaspora into a new and healthy nation in Palestine. Theodor Herzl, one of the leaders of political Zionism, argued that securing Jewish autonomy in Palestine would “normalize” the Jewish nation and counter their status as marginalized and “abnormal” in Europe. He believed that anti-Semitism was “a comprehensible response to a specific social irritant, rather than as a symptom of Europe’s continuing anti-Jewish pathology.”<sup>48</sup> Jasbir Puar mobilizes the term “debility” as a disruption of the category of disability, arguing that while “some bodies may not be recognized as or identify as disabled, they may well be debilitated, in part by being foreclosed access to legibility and resources as disabled.”<sup>49</sup> While disabled is often regarded as a terminology rendered visible by the state in medical terms, for Puar, debilitation is a status that is often produced by the state, and cannot be recognized as a disability. While Puar develops her theorization of debilitation in relationship to Israel’s attacks on Palestinians, I mobilize debility to think about how the state similarly racializes Jewish people as debilitated to justify its existence in historical Palestine. Zionism as an ideology sought to transform Jewishness into a national identity and national body politics and body type. Given Zionism’s emphasis upon redeeming the pathological state of Diaspora Jews, the concept of race and disability figures as a prominent cultural signifier that marks many aspects of the Zionist project.

In every settler society project, settlers perceive the country as a “new world - available not only for immigration, but also for establishing a ‘new and better society.’”<sup>50</sup> With the Israeli settler colonial project, this “new society” was perceived at the same time to be a rehabilitation of an old one - the biblical Judaic state - and the “New Jerusalem” was going to be built in the land of “Old Jerusalem.” In *Der Judenstaat*, Theodor Herzl proposed that Jewish people would never

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<sup>48</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (WLC, 2008); originally published in 1902

<sup>49</sup> Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Duke University Press, 2015), xvii.

<sup>50</sup> Nahla Abdo and Nira Yuval Davis, "Palestine, Israeli and the Zionist Settler Project" in Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies* (SAGE Publications, 1995)

fully assimilate into European culture given their minority status, so the solution to discrimination and anti-Semitism is for Diaspora Jews to create a state in which they were the majority. The survival of the state of Israel depended on the European Jewish majority. Although during this time, no formal Israeli fertility policy had been codified, Israel found ways to promote Jewish over Arab population growth through various means, including immigration law, economic incentives, targeted modernization programs in Arab communities, and creating governmental coverage of reproductive health services for its citizens. Thus, it is no coincidence that the subject of reproduction has always been and continues to be central to Zionist ideology and the Israeli settler colonial project. In this case, national reproduction became bound up with the female body as the source of biological and cultural reproduction, making it a national imperative or obligation for Jewish women to essentially birth the nation.<sup>51</sup> The responsibility of bearing healthy, physically fit children “for the glory of the state of Israel” was historically placed on women, especially European (Ashkenazi) Jewish women. For many Jewish women, the revolutionary turn of Zionism culminated in a return to traditional gender roles of mothering. For instance, David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, writes in his autobiography that “For the survival and security of the State of Israel, a higher birthrate and increased immigration are essential.”<sup>52</sup> He even “likened Jewish women with less than four children to draftees who evade military service.”<sup>53</sup> Because Israel was founded as a dual Jewish and democratic state, Ben-Gurion was not able to advocate for pro-natal laws that explicitly favored Jews over Arab non-Jews, so he placed the responsibility

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<sup>51</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (University of California Press, 2002)

<sup>52</sup> “Be Fruitful and Multiply”: The Role of Israeli Pronatalist Policy in the Pursuit of Jewish Demographic Dominance in the Holy Land” (The Yale Review of International Studies, 2018) <http://yris.yira.org/essays/2385>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

of demographics on the wealthy and influential Jewish Agency, “setting a precedent of crafting legislation that introduced a Jewish population preference indirectly.”<sup>54</sup>

The 1950 Law of Return was one of the first piece of legislation to promote the Jewish population. It asserted that: “Every Jew has the right to immigrate to Israel.” However, the way it defined who was a “Jew” was lenient, and included non-Jewish spouses of Jews, their children, and their grandchildren. The Law of Return to enable Jewish Aliyah, or Jewish immigration, was extended to Jewish people from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, but it excluded Jews from Ethiopia.<sup>55</sup> Early leaders did not rely simply on immigration law to increase the demographics of the Jewish population. This symbolic reproduction of the Israeli Jewish national collectivity depended on “the availability of people ‘of the right kind’ to ‘man it.’”<sup>56</sup> During the period of Zionist settlement and up until the early 1960s, the major form of the supply of “human power” to the Yishuv (the Zionist settler society) has been made through immigration of Jews into Israel. As the objective conditions of this immigration dwindled, the Israeli Jewish national reproduction came to rely more on Israeli-born babies.<sup>57</sup> Israel’s leaders also legislated pronatalist economic incentives which targeted Ashkenazi Israelis while avoiding any obvious ethnic discrimination. In 1962, Ben-Gurion established the Committee for the Problems of Natality, chaired by Italian-Jewish economist Roberto Bachi.<sup>58</sup> The Bachi Committee<sup>59</sup> reported what they considered two “troubling” trends. Firstly, the birthrate of Arabs exceeded the Jewish one, and second, the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> This is the subject of my third chapter. Ethiopian Jews were not recognized officially as “Jews” until 1978.

<sup>56</sup> Nira Yuval Davis <https://libcom.org/library/jewish-collectivity-national-reproduction-israel-nira-yuval-davis>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> “Be Fruitful and Multiply”: The Role of Israeli Pronatalist Policy in the Pursuit of Jewish Demographic Dominance in the Holy Land” (The Yale Review of International Studies, 2018),

<sup>59</sup> In 1962, Ben-Gurion appointed a committee officially called the Committee for the Problems of Natality. It consisted of eight members, most of whom were senior government officials and only one was female. The primary purpose for the committee was to consider the general demography of Jews worldwide and recommend ways to increase high fertility levels with family welfare.

Mizrahi, who were considered the poorer, less educated, and more religious Eastern Jews, were reproducing at faster rates than the Western Ashkenazim. While the committee could not limit Mizrahi birthrates, its members instead argued for increased economic assistance and incentives for large families in order to “improve the financial and educational status of the Mizrahi and to encourage the wealthier Ashkenazim to bear as many children as they could reasonably be expected to support.”<sup>60</sup> Although the social welfare for the Mizrahi was positive for the country, there are quotations from contemporary politicians that revealed how the committee’s proposals were primarily designed to achieve the latter goal of increasing the Ashkenazim birthrate. For instance, in a 1964 Knesset debate regarding the child allowance program, Minister of Labor Yigal Allon stated, “[I] only state with utmost regret that the birthrate among the veteran sections of the Jewish population in Israel and among the Western immigrants is amongst the lowest in the world.”<sup>61</sup> The Israeli government expected that all Jews, especially those more advantageous and wealthier (which were often Ashkenazim) to undertake “internal Aliyah” - to procreate abundantly in Israel – so as to secure the nation’s future as a Jewish state.

As a part of its nationalized healthcare system, Israel instituted a pronatalist policy that limited or refused coverage of procedures and medications, including birth control, that discouraged childbirth. The 1962 Bachi Committee also found that the concerning gap in birthrates between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews was partially due to the Ashkenazim having higher rates of abortion and contraception use compared to other ethnic Jewish groups.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Israel imposed significant restrictions and bureaucratic barriers to abortion access. Abortion, although widely practiced and not commonly prosecuted, was illegal in Israeli until 1976, when a law was

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 2018.

passed permitting an abortion upon the formal agreement of a three member committee.<sup>63</sup> Thus, if a woman wanted to apply for an abortion, she would be required to submit a written request to the committee, appear before a hospital panel to argue her case, and pay a fee of 400 NIS, which is not covered by insurance. The committee would grant her permission for the procedure if she is either 1) below the age of 18 or above the age of 40, 2) if the pregnancy is derived from a relationship prohibited under the penal law (adultery), is incestuous, or is out of wedlock, 3) if a dangerous complication for the fetus or the mother has arisen.<sup>64</sup> The Israeli national health insurance will only cover abortion expenses for girls under the age of 18, medical emergencies of the mother or her fetus, or in the case of rape and incest; otherwise, during this time, abortion was either illegal and/or costly for the majority of Israeli women who sought to undergo the procedure; this resulted in an unregulated underground abortion network that “has been estimated to provide at least half of the nation’s abortions each year.”<sup>65</sup> As a result of these policies, abortions have become stigmatized, resulting in lower rates of Jewish abortions each year. Aiding this stigmatization, in the 1980s, Minister of Health Haim Sadan proposed that “all Jewish women considering abortion be forced to watch images of mangled and dead fetuses in addition to pictures of Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust.”

The rise in abortion restrictions during the early years of Israeli statehood was meant to increase the birthrate of Jews, in particular the Ashkenazi population, while simultaneously working to curb Mizrahi and Arab-Israeli births. Feminist studies scholar Shellee Colen and others have used the term “stratified reproduction” to describe contexts where certain groups of people

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<sup>63</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (University of California Press, 2002)

<sup>64</sup> *Israel: Reproduction and Abortion: Law and Policy* (Law Library of Congress, 2012), 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered.<sup>66</sup> During the early years of Israeli statehood, when Ashkenazim comprised most of the population, contraception, oral and otherwise, was not covered under the Israeli national health insurance program. However, by the 1980s, Israeli women enjoyed almost “universal access” to birth control, despite contraception not being free, as other health care services and medications are under the Israeli socialized medical system. In fact, scholars such as Jaqueline Portugese argue that during the 1980s, the leniency among Israeli leaders in contraceptive provision and accessibility was a targeted effort to reduce the high birthrate among poorer immigrant Jews from the Middle East and North Africa and to limit their growth relative to Israelis from European origin.<sup>67</sup> In addition, family planning techniques, including contraception, were readily introduced to Arab-Israelis and Mizrahi immigrants.

### ***Altneuland*, Zionism, and the Jewish Question**

The novel *Altneuland* was written in the early twentieth century by the Zionist ideologue Theodor Herzl, one of the primary founders of political Zionism. Published six years after, *Altneuland* is a fictional expansion of Herzl’s vision set forth in his political pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat*, or “The Jewish State,” which called for an independent Jewish State as a solution to the rise of anti-Semitism and pogroms in Europe. Scholarly work has tended to situate *Altneuland* within the utopian tradition, emerging in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and North America. In fact, in the novel Herzl directly makes references to Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* and Theodor Herzka’s *Freiland* (1890), both of which are described as “rosy clouds.”

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<sup>66</sup> Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, (University of California Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Jacqueline Portugese, *Fertility Policy in Israel: The Politics of Religion, Gender, and Nation* (Praeger Publishers Inc, 1998)

According to Herzl, in *Looking Backward*, Bellamy envisions a “noble communistic society” where “all may eat as much as they please from the common platter. The lamb and the Wolf feed in the same pasture... the wolves are no longer wolves, and human beings no longer human.”<sup>68</sup> In *Looking Backward*, the protagonist, a young man named Julian West from Boston, Massachusetts, suffers from insomnia and is regularly put to sleep by hypnosis. One day, in the year 1887, Julian is hypnotized and falls asleep in his basement. He is awakened in the year 2000 by a physician named Dr. Leete, where he finds himself in a new America, a socialist utopia, where the means of production and distribution are no longer privately owned, but rather by the public as a whole; commerce, money, and other aspects of the state have been abolished. Herzl emulates this style of narration in *Altneuland*, where the protagonist departs a social reality and returns to it after many years have passed, only to find out that it has changed completely. In *the Jewish State*, Herzl distinguished his future novel from Bellamy and Herzka, consciously avoiding socioeconomic strategies that may appear “utopian,” and rather realistic. In the preface of *Der Judenstaat*, he states: “I must, in the first place, guard my scheme from being treated as Utopian... I would obviously have done nothing to be ashamed of if I had described a humanist Utopia...but this plan is by no means one of those lovely Utopias produced before and after Sir Thomas More.”<sup>69</sup> However, six years after *The Jewish State*, it became clear that Herzl’s writings reflected a utopian scheme. While Herzl was inspired by both utopias, he still found them “naïve” and sought a different plan for the Jewish State, one that reflected a “European enclave planted in the Middle East.”

As a Jewish nationalist movement, Zionism emerged as a solution to the “Jewish Question,” or the “Jewish Problem,” as it is sometimes referred to, concerning the political, legal,

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<sup>68</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (WLC, 2008), p. 145; originally published in 1902

<sup>69</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896)

and national status of Jewish people in Europe. The “Jewish Problem” is grounded in two notions – that Jewish people were spread out in different countries all over the world, especially Europe, and that in each of those countries, Jewish people constituted the minority. The term “Zionism” is attributed to an Austrian Jewish writer, Nathan Birnbaum, as the Jewish longing for a return to Zion – the biblical synonym for Jerusalem. Theodor Herzl helped to turn modern Zionism into a political project. Herzl argued that Jewish assimilation, and efforts to combat anti-Semitism proved ineffective, and promoted the idea that Jewish people should remove themselves from Europe and establish their own independent polity to secure their national rights. He understood anti-Semitism as an “economic rivalry with native artisans and shopkeepers” and that “by relieving Europe of its surplus population, eliminating Jewish competition for scarce resources, Zionism would put a definitive end to anti-Semitism; the condition of Jews everywhere would improve.”<sup>70</sup> For Herzl, Zionism did not only reflect a way to improve the status of Jewish people in Europe, but to improve Europe itself. In terms of the futility of Jewish assimilation in Europe, Herzl writes in *Der Judenstaat*:

Where it does not exist, it is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations. We naturally move to those places where we are not persecuted and there our presence produces persecution. This is the case in every country, and will remain so, even in those highly civilized – for instance, France – until the Jewish question finds a solution on a political basis. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America. (Translated by Sylvie d’Avigdor and Jacob De Haas)<sup>71</sup>

Herzl believed that if Jewish people remained in Europe, they would forever be second-class citizens. For Jewish people to become part of the ranks of European humanity and gain equality they needed to acquire power – a state of their own; this would ultimately incorporate Jews into

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<sup>70</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (WLC, 2008), p. xxvii; originally published in 1902

<sup>71</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896)

modernity, making them part of Europe. In *Der Judenstaat*, Herzl considered other locations for statehood, including Argentina and East Africa (modern day Uganda). However, the Zionist movement fixed its eyes on Palestine as the site for an independent Jewish State, a strategic move that would allow them to utilize religious history and the significance of Palestine to justify their political goal of colonization and settlement.

*Altneuland* is set in 1923 Palestine and features two misanthropes - a young, overeducated, and unemployed Jewish Viennese man named Friedrich Lowenberg, and a Prussian (German) nobleman named Kingscourt. Friedrich is described as “in deep melancholy” and “too tired to make new acquaintances.” The novel begins in a Viennese café, which Friedrich frequents to read newspapers and chat with his friends who are in a similar position as he is - “newly baked jurists, freshly graduated engineers” who constantly complain about “how very hard it [is] to make it ‘these days.’” While Friedrich sits in the café, a “sickly, pale waiter [greet]s him submissively,” and he then returns back to read the newspaper, chat with friends, or engage in “solitary musings.” The Viennese café in the novel signifies Herzl’s vision of Europe as an impasse for Jewish assimilation. The status of unemployment and marginalization of Friedrich and his fellow café-mates reflects the dire plight of Jewish people. As important, the “sickly, pale waiter” mirrors the character of Friedrich, reflecting the “degenerative” status of Jewish people in Europe.

When Friedrich and Kingscourt visit Palestine on their journey in 1902, in the city of Jaffa, they describe it as backwards and virtually uninhabited, echoing Herzl’s own impressions upon visiting Jaffa in 1889: “Everywhere misery in bright Oriental rags... a particular tomblike odor of mold caught one’s breath... alleys were dirty, neglected, full of vile odors.”<sup>72</sup> Walking through Jerusalem, the two notice that it is “a picture of desolation. The lowlands were mostly sand and

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<sup>72</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), 42.

swamp, the lean fields looked as if burnt over.”<sup>73</sup> Friedrich and Kingscourt observe that the land has “declined like [their] people,” referring to the status of Jewish people in Europe. In Jerusalem, Friedrich and Kingscourt visit “blackish Arab villages” whose inhabitant “looked like brigands.” One hope was held out by the German nobleman - that the Jews might create an experimental land for humanity, a New Commonwealth. However, disgusted with society, the two spend twenty years on an unnamed pacific island, removed from civilization. Upon their return to Europe twenty years later, they stumble back to Palestine, and find that the land has drastically transformed. As their ship docks in Haifa, they are astounded to discover a modern, sophisticated industrialized country instead of the backward Ottoman province that they recalled from their previous visit. Palestine now “boasts a modern, cosmopolitan, democratic society, combining cutting edge technologies with a cooperate industrial and consumer framework.”<sup>74</sup> They stumble upon old acquaintances from Vienna, who have become the leaders of the new country; they reveal to the two that the country’s prosperity is a result of the massive influx of immigrant Jews who have founded the Land of Israel, referred to as the “New Society.”

### **The Jewish Body and Collectivity as (Dis)abled**

Representations of the body are never innocent but are constituted by and constitutive of knowledge production. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla suggest that: “Paradoxically, even as they are understood to be self-evident, bodies continue to require expert interpretation. Thus, they become surfaces onto which physicians, scientists, and lay people can inscribe and project powerful cultural meanings and moral prohibitions.”<sup>75</sup> The scholarship of Michel Foucault (1971,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>74</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef, “New Cities for New Jews: Haifa as futuristic urban fantasy in Theodor Herzl’s *Altneuland* and Violent Guttenberg’s *A Modern Exodus*. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 12(2) (2013): 162-183. Doi:10.1080/14725886.2013.76155

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 6.

1973, 1977) further situated the body in a political context, by defining the “body politic” as “a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes, and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into ‘docile bodies.’”<sup>76</sup> The field of Disability Studies challenges a Western medical approach to disability, which frames disability as a deficiency located in ‘abnormal’ bodies and minds that should be ‘fixed’ through individualized medical intervention. Disability Studies scholars similarly emphasize that “all bodies are transforming bodies.” Rather than relegating it to the individual body, disability is articulated as a social ideology of a particular form of human embodiment, where “disabled bodies are constructed as other, deviant, and non-normative.”<sup>77</sup> Lennard Davis distinguishes between impairment and disability, arguing that “[i]mpairment is the physical fact of lacking an arm or leg. Disability is the social process that turns an impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access.”<sup>78</sup> This distinction is critical because it exposes how particular bodies become constructed as “problem bodies,” including disabled bodies, in order to construct the “normative body.” *Altneuland* similarly unites Zionism, science, and the construction of a Jewish body politic, where the transformation of the land becomes synonymous with the transformation of the Jewish body on an individual and collective level. Herzl’s descriptions of his characters as “degenerate” mirrors that of the plight of the Jewish people in Europe; they are constructed as “problem bodies” who cannot fully acquire independence without a “return” to Palestine, and ultimately, a “return” to their bodies.

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<sup>76</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, (Picador, 2009)

<sup>77</sup> Kathryn Allan, *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 4.

<sup>78</sup> Leonard J. Davis, *Bending Over Backwards: Essays on Disability and the Body* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 12.

The concept of disability figures as a prominent cultural signifier that undergirds many facets of the Zionist nationalist project. Sandy Sufian examines how the Zionist nationalist project believed that establishing autonomy in historic Palestine would not only secure a homeland for Jewish people but would “rehabilitate” them from their “seemingly disabled state” in the Diaspora. While Zionist leaders and physicians of that period used “disease” to describe ailments of a physical and mental nature, Sufian uses what we would describe today as “disability;” they were, in essence, referring to “the social, political and economic ramifications of diseases.”<sup>79</sup> Like Sufian, I use the category of disability as a cultural signifier that not only helped construct Zionist ideas of Jewish futurity before and after the creation of the state of Israel, but that also connected the individual disabled body with the construction of the nation-state. Turning to disability as a category reveals how human life is managed by the state through the management of bodies on an individual level, or what Michel Foucault refers to as “biopower”. This also foreshadows the ways that Israel manages the different racialized bodies to create the necessary Jewish body politic – one that I have reiterated is racialized, abled and gendered. For instance, part of their characterization as “degenerates” was the representation of Jews as an “effeminate” race. In psychiatry, both Jewish men and Jewish women were stigmatized as pathologically hysterical. John Efron argues that in Europe, the field of medical thinking, especially modern psychiatry, was partly constructed through the characterization Jews as being prone to mental illness, partly due to their “abnormal sexual practices.”<sup>80</sup><sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Sandra Sufian, “Mental Hygiene and Disability in the Zionist Project.” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 27(4). (2007) doi:10.18061/dsq.v27i4.42

<sup>80</sup> John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Yale University Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>81</sup> Sander Gilman explains this in depth in his text: Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (Routledge, 2013).

In *Altneuland*, Friedrich and Kingscourt encounter Palestine in 1902 as a “primitive and neglected territory” where the streets consisted of “poor Turks, dirty Arabs, timid Jews... indolent, beggarly, and hopeless.”<sup>82</sup> To Friedrich, the landscape of Palestine in 1902 reflects the state of diasporic Jewry: “If this is our homeland, then it has been brought just as low as we are,” referring to the Jewish Diaspora as degenerate, debilitated and close to the “oriental body.” This gestures towards two things: First, this reference to the inhabitants of Palestine undermines the “myth of Jewish ignorance of the presence of Palestinian Arabs” by acknowledging that Palestine was not, in fact, a land without a people for a people without a land.<sup>83</sup> Second, by stating that “it has been brought just as low as we are,” the passage makes a correlation between the land as neglected, and the Jewish people as weak and impoverished. The land, however, is ultimately framed as the “cure for the pathological diaspora Jews,” signifying the binding relationship between the individual body and the nation-state.<sup>84</sup>

Futurity is framed in curative terms, a time frame “that casts disabled people (as) out of time, or as obstacles to the arc of progress.”<sup>85</sup> Indigenous Studies scholar Mark Rifkin makes a similar argument about how native peoples are often “consigned to the past” or if they are inserted in the present it is defined on non-native terms.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, one’s future is determined through notions of disability: “how one understands disability in the present determines how one imagines disability in the future; one’s assumptions about the experience of disability create one’s creation of a better future.”<sup>87</sup> Kafer is suggesting that constructions of disability, whether on an individual

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<sup>82</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), 42.

<sup>83</sup> Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (Stanford University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>85</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 28

<sup>86</sup> Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Duke University Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>87</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 2.

or a collective level, create assumptions about the future; in Herzl's vision for a Jewish futurity, the "presence of disability" signals a future that no one wants. However, for the Jewish diaspora, a physical rejuvenation could only occur in a "healthy environment," through securing Palestine as a Jewish homeland. Jeremy Stolow contends that "what nature could not provide for the Jews, social action schooled in medical science would have to provide prosthetically; if a 'healthy environment,' if a 'homeland,' or a 'nation' did not already exist, then one could- and must - be built." In *Altneuland*, the "New Society" – along with the science and technology incorporated in this new society - becomes the very technology necessary to "cure" and transform the disabled Jewish body and collectivity.

While Friedrich and Kingscourt are away, Jewish people from Europe have settled in Palestine and implemented new technology throughout Old-New Land, called "New Society." In the "New Society," women share "equal rights with men," there is "no army," education is socialized, and ideas of "rationality" and "liberal tolerance" are primary principles of the state. After stumbling back to a transformed Palestine, Friedrich encounters David Litvak, one of the founding citizens of the "New Society." Confused by the changes that occurred, Kingscourt curiously and excitedly asks: "Do you mean to say that the Return of the Jews to Palestine is taking place?"<sup>88</sup> Friedrich, on the other hand, realizes that twenty years prior, he had given money to David, when David was a young boy. David, who was the former son of a poor peddler, is now the wealthy, "tall, vigorous man of thirty" and "a free, healthy, cultured man who gazed steadfastly upon the world and seemed to stand firmly in his shoes."

David's ability to "stand firmly in his shoes" combines images of autonomy and able-bodiedness, where he stands on his own two feet. In addition, the emphasis on a "tall," "free," and

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<sup>88</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland* (WLC, 2008), p. 52; originally published in 1902.

“healthy” man, contrasts with the “poor,” hunched shouldered, and shivering body of the boy that Friedrich ran into at the cafe, 20 years prior. This contrast alludes to the ways that the “New Society” transformed both David’s body and the national body. For many of Herzl’s characters, once they enter the national sphere, or are discussed in the context of the “New Society,” their actions turn public and visible. David is also described as “one of our best men,” “so able and upright,” and “a scrappy fine fellow.” David’s<sup>89</sup> body as autonomous, self-sustained, able-bodied, and male, serves as the model for what the citizens of the “New Society” should aspire to become, at the level of the individual.

The character David represents what Zionist theorist Max Nordau theorizes as the “muscular Jew.” Max Nordau, one of the cofounders of the World Zionist Organization, along with Herzl, declared in 1898 that the image of the muscular Jew should replace the meek or sickly Jew (*Muscular Judaism*, 1898). For instance, at the first Zionist Congress he stated in his opening address that “the majority of Jews are a race of accursed beggars.” For the Jewish race to reverse its state of being, Nordau believed that the physicality, muscularity, and mentality of the Jewish body needed to be “regenerated.” Addressing it to the Second Zionist Congress, he called for a *Muskeljudentum* (*Muscular Judaism*), where he called for Jews to become “men of muscle” rather than remaining “slaves to their nerves” - a gendered and ableist sentiment. Unlike the “coffee house Jews,” as Herzl similarly references to in the beginning of *Altneuland* to describe Freidrich, Nordau insists that the “New Jews” should “rise early... and not be weary before sunset... have clear heads, solid stomachs, and hard muscles.”<sup>90</sup> For Nordau, he believed that “Zionism is Judaism with muscles,” inferring that discipline, mental agility, and physical strength produces

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>90</sup> Texts Concerning Zionism: “Auto-Emancipation,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed May 14, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-auto-emancipation-quot-leon-pinsker>.

stronger, more physically fit and confident Jewish bodies, necessary to reverse the long-held representation of the weak, overly intellectual Jew. Being “one of our best men,” the characters in the novel refer to David as not only physically strong (“able and upright”), but intellectually fit, the appropriate body necessary for the “New Society” to thrive.

### **Zionism Ideology and the Turn Towards Eugenics**

The discourses that refer to the decline of the physical and mental health of Jewish people in the diaspora, and the Zionist solution to “cure” them physically, mentally, economically, and politically, coincided with debates concerning the racial nature of Jewish people. In fact, the Zionist project was based on Jewish “racial improvement,” which led to its inevitable intertwining with the eugenics movement that dominated Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eugenics gave Zionists the framework by which to understand Jewish degeneracy and weakness. Within scientific and popular scientific discourses, the category of “race” as it related to Jewish people was used in some contexts to establish Jewish unity, while in other contexts it was used to establish diversity and hierarchy among Jews.<sup>91</sup> As reiterated earlier, Herzl and other Zionist theorists argued that anti-Semitism was a response to a “specific social irritant” rather than a symptom of Europe’s anti-Jewish pathology. In fact, the terms used to express the image of the Jewish body shifted from “the rhetoric of religious anti-Judaism to the rhetoric of the pseudoscience of anti-Semitism.”<sup>92</sup>

Anti-Semitism, or the racialization of the Jewish subject as the “internal other,” or the image of the Jew “as a nomad...rootless and parasitic...[shaping] modern sensibilities,” is in fact inherent to the political project of the West, particularly Europe.<sup>93</sup> While early Zionists understood

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<sup>91</sup> Dafna Hirsch, “Zionist Eugenics, mixed marriage, and the creation of a “New Jewish Type.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15(3), 2009, 592-609.

<sup>92</sup> Sander Gilman, “The Jewish Body: A ‘Footnote,’ *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 64 no 4 (1990): 588-602.

<sup>93</sup> Sherene Seikaly and Max Aji, “Of Europe: Zionism and the Jewish Other,” in A. Czajka and B. Isyar, *Europe After Derrida: Crisis and Potentiality* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2014), 121.

that they could not assimilate in Europe, Zionists still sought to be a part of it, which “required their physical departure from its shores; through this process, the Jew could be (finally) of, even if not in, Europe.”<sup>94</sup> For Zionists, the physical departure from Europe to Palestine signified the means for Jewish people to join the “Christian West,” which included internalizing ideologies about Jews as a race, who are capable of self-improvement. Dafna Hirsch examines how Zionist racial and nationalist discourses reveal that Zionist “men of science,” in both Palestine and Europe, appropriated eugenic language to describe Jews as a race undergoing a process of “degeneration” and the nationalist project as a path towards “regeneration” and “racial improvement.” After embarking to Haifa in 1923, Friedrich and Kingscourt discover that the “New Society” has schools, hospitals, industry, progressive prisons (based on education and rehabilitation), and that the spoken language is German. Thus, Friedrich and Kingscourt do not need to return to Europe, as they “already are in Europe, a recast *better* Europe” (emphasis in the original).<sup>95</sup>

Friedrich’s gaze towards the Arab inhabitants and the land became foundational to the Zionist project of colonial nation-building, or what Nahla Abdo and Nira Yuval-Davis (1995) have termed the Zionist settler project in Israel and Palestine.<sup>96</sup> In *Altneuland*, Palestine is portrayed as without history or “primitive” people, seemingly waiting for the return of the Jewish people, when in fact, it was a colonial venture to a region already populated by people, including Palestinians. The main vision of the Zionist settlement project has been to dispossess the native Palestinians, where Palestinians were excluded from having control over resources of the country and the state. From the outset, the “utopian *Altneuland* vision rendered the Palestinians superfluous and

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>95</sup> Mikhal Dekel, *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Moment* (Norwestern University Press, 2010), 111.

<sup>96</sup> Nahla Abdo and Nira Yuval Davis, "Palestine, Israeli and the Zionist Settler Project" in Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies* (SAGE Publications, 1995), 292.

irrelevant to the project of Jewish ‘Return into History.’<sup>97</sup> It was the Zionist settler project that drove the ideologies and practices around constructing the normative body - one that was masculine, physically fit, and intellectually capable. Settler colonialism and militarization in Israel depend on the disablement of both Jews and Palestinians.<sup>98</sup> Adria Imada argues that colonial projects, including settler colonial projects, demanded “able bodyminds from subordinated subjects,” where colonial projects imposed impossible regimes of self-regulation its subjects would not be able to perform.<sup>99</sup> Colonized subjects were “always already figured and constituted as disabled, whether because of their perceived unproductivity as laborers; embodied racial-sexual differences; ‘unchaste’ proclivities of their women; susceptibility to moral contagion and infectious diseases; or inability to learn.” Similarly, Labor movements in Israel held firm to the notion that welfare depends on productivity, which in turn depends on developing the right human stock.

*Altneuland’s* reference to the inhabitants of Palestine as “poor Turks, dirty Arabs, timid Jews” suggest that not all inhabitants could be rehabilitated. By definition, Arabs were excluded from the body politic and could not be a part of the “New Society.” This not only included Palestinians native to the land, but also Jews who came from Middle Eastern and Arab countries, such as Iraq, Morocco, Iran, and others, who were both “embedded in and in excess of nation-state identity formulations.”<sup>100</sup> Jasbir Puar argues that the process of rehabilitating Jews involved multiple facets: the banishment of European Jews; the recreation of Europe, in Palestine, for the Jews who were forced to leave it; and lastly, the severing of the Jew from the Arab. Thus, as

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<sup>97</sup> Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims,” *Duke University Press: Social Text*, 19/20 (1988), 7.

<sup>98</sup> Liat Ben-Moshe, “Movements at War? Disability and Anti-occupation Activism in Israel,” in Pamela Block et al, *Occupying Disability: Critical Approaches to Community, Justice, and Decolonizing Disability*, (Springer, 2015).

<sup>99</sup> Adria L. Imada, “A Decolonial Disability Studies?” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 37(3), 2017.

<sup>100</sup> Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims,” *Duke University Press: Social Text*, 19/20 (1988), 6.

Seikaly and Ajl argue, from the onset, this rehabilitation project was racialized – first against the European Jew, and later, the Middle Eastern.<sup>101</sup> To “whiten” the Western Jew, the racial schema targeted the “other” Semitic figure – “the Arab.”<sup>102</sup> Ella Shohat argues that the term “Mizrahim” is an “imagined community,” constructed by Zionism to incorporate Arab-Jews into Israel. She argues that in order for Jews from the Muslim world to reshape their identity as Israeli, they must dismiss or negate their “Easternness” (Arab-ness); often times this was done through violence and force. For instance, “Yemenis were shorn of their sidekicks, religious artifacts were stolen by Zionist emissaries (with false promises of return), babies were kidnapped... Mizrahim under the control of Ashkenazi religious authorities, meanwhile, had to send their children to Ashkenazi orthodox schools, where they learned the ‘correct’ forms of practicing Judaism, including Yiddish accented praying, liturgical-gestural norms, and centuries old Polish sartorial codes favoring dark colors.”<sup>103</sup> However, while colonized groups are typically figured and constituted as disabled, due to their “perceived unproductivity as laborers,” Zionists racialized the Mizrahim as “natural workers” and disposable labor. In fact, the transformation of Diaspora Jews, especially Arab-Jews, into the figure of the “New Jew” (European Jew) was through productive labor, especially agricultural labor.<sup>104</sup> However, despite them being “natural workers,” their role was to simply replace the native Palestinians as the labor force. Where Labor Zionists understood Jewish

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<sup>101</sup> In my third chapter on the coerced sterilizations of Ethiopian immigrant women, I make a similar argument that the Zionist project depended on a racialized Other “whiten” the European Jew, who was once racialized by Europeans and Zionists, who internalized European racism. Thus, the European Jew needed the racialized Middle Eastern/Arab Jew to define itself first as Europe, and later, depended on the existence of Ethiopians to not only “whiten” the European Jew, but to essentially, become Europe.

<sup>102</sup> My second chapter focuses on the racialization of Arab-Jews, or Jewish people from Middle Eastern countries, in my analysis of testimonials about the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Jewish Affair, the disappearance of over 1500 children from these regions, during the early years of Israeli nation-state formation.

<sup>103</sup> Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims,” *Duke University Press: Social Text*, 19/20 (1988), 6.

<sup>104</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (University of California Press, 1996), 24.

deficiency, however, was in their intelligence and creativity: “This is the simple, natural worker capable of doing any kind of work, without shame, without philosophy, and also without poetry. And Mr. Marx is of course absent both from his pocket and from his mind. It is not my contention that the Yemenite element should remain in its present state, that is, in his barbarian, wild present state...the Yemenite of today still exists at the same backward.”<sup>105</sup> Labor Zionists in Israel held firm to the notion that welfare depended on productivity, which meant developing the right human stock. However, despite being constructed as “natural workers,” their other deficiency lay in racial and sexual differences. Upon arriving to Israel, Yemenite families were separated from their children, where children resembled “skeletons [more] than living humans.” The testimonies of several doctors and nurses who worked at the ma’abarot (immigration absorption camps) constructed Yemenite immigrants as “unclean, disease-prone” and sterilized their bodies upon entering the children’s houses to protect and preserve the children’s health.<sup>106</sup>

Eugenics is defined as the science that investigates ways to improve the genetic conditions of the human race. It was popularized by Francis Galton (1822-1911), Charles Darwin’s cousin. Between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Galton drew many followers of eugenics as his ideas spread rapidly in Europe, the United States and South America. Several countries laws were passed allowing for the coerced sterilization of women for “hereditary paupers, criminals, the feeble-minded, tuberculosis, shiftily and ne-er-do-wells.” Zionist leaders and physicians operated within the British Mandatory Government’s system to “encourag[e] selective immigration policies” and institutionaliz[e] [the] mentally ill,” where the movement coincided with eugenics ideology to facilitate this rehabilitation process of Jewish people. Raphael Falk

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<sup>105</sup> Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims." *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (1988), 14.

<sup>106</sup> I expand on Yemenite and by extension, Middle Eastern “deficiency” in my second chapter, “Where are Our Children? Hauntings, Testimony, and the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Affair.”

argues that while representing different historical moments, eugenics and Zionism were ideologies conceived from a similar historical and intellectual trajectory and strove towards a similar goal: “Eugenics aspired to redeem the human species - more precisely, the European human species - by forcing it to face the realities of its biological nature. Zionism aspired to redeem the Jewish people by forcing it to face the realities of its biological existence.”<sup>107</sup> Arthur Ruppin, an early Zionist thinker and founder of the city of Tel Aviv who was later known as the “father of Jewish Sociology,” called for the “purification of the ‘Jewish Race,’” writing that it was “desirable that only the racially pure come to the land [of Israel],” advocating for a eugenics approach to Zionist nationalism by supporting the adoption of a selective policy for immigration to Israel. In his text, *The Sociology of Jews*, he writes that: “While in Europe many are calling for a eugenic policy, the Jews... have never engaged in a ‘self-cleansing’ of their race, but rather allowed every child, be it the most sickly, to grow and marry and have children like him. Even the mentally retarded, blind, and deaf were allowed to marry. To keep the purity of our race such Jews must abstain from childbearing.” He even advocated to “limit ourselves to the physical appurtenances of immigrants, and reject those individuals who are dangerous by virtuous of some infectious disease (syphilis, advanced tuberculosis, etc.) or who are likely to become public charges (the mentally deranged, epileptics, and those who are prevented by sickness from making a living).<sup>108</sup> Several scholars note that while eugenics is associated with Germany, which “was indeed the most murderous manifestation of eugenics,” it was in fact “a movement that attracted many followers. In every place it took a unique, local aspect.”<sup>109</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, Sachlav Stoler-Liss discovered

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<sup>107</sup> Rachael Falk, *Zionism and the Biology of Jews* (Springer, 2017).

<sup>108</sup> Spektorowski et al., "From 'race hygiene' to 'national- productivist hygiene,'" *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 16 no 2 (June 2011).

<sup>109</sup> Sachlav Stoler-Liss, “‘Mothers Birth the Nation’: The Social Construction of Zionist Motherhood in Wartime in Israel Parents’ Manuals,” *A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues*, 2003: 104-117.

that eugenics was encouraged by those who created and managed the health system in Israel. For example, one of the most prominent eugenicists Dr. Joseph Meir, a well-known doctor who acquired his education in Vienna, served for about 30 years as the head of the Kupat Holim Clalit health maintenance organization and after whom the Meir Hospital in Kfar Sava is named. He “brought young mothers the gospel of eugenics, warned them about degeneracy and transmitted the message to them about their obligation and responsibility for bearing only health children;” he also advocated the castration of the mentally ill.<sup>110</sup> In the 1950s, then Prime Minister David Ben Gurion wrote a policy encouraging Jewish families to have large families through economic rewards. He criticized this policy, writing: “We have no interest in the 10<sup>th</sup> child or even the seventh in poor families from the East... (I)n today’s reality, we should pray frequently for a second child in a family that is part of the intelligentsia. The poor classes of the population must not be instructed to have many children, but rather restricted.”<sup>111</sup>

Once again, this burden of biologically reproducing the nation fell on Israeli women; however, Israeli physicians and psychologists felt responsible for providing child-rearing guidance for raising healthy, physically fit Jewish children. According to Stoler-Liss, Israeli mothers of this era embraced their duty as “mothers of the nation” - on behalf of the state of Israel, they were subjected to “an unremitting program of education, indoctrination and regulations that formed the subtext of the apparently innocuous medical advice provided to them throughout their childbearing years,” which included counseling regarding proper breastfeeding, toilet training, and “how to avoid spoiling one’s children.”<sup>112</sup> Stoler-Liss writes about gynecologist Miriam Aharonova who wrote extensively about eugenics. For instance, in Aharonova’s articles for parents under such

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 104.

headings such as “The Hygiene of Marriage,” she includes instructions for parents including “the recommended age for giving birth (between 20 and 25), to the recommended difference in age between father and mother, (the reason for which is the betterment of the race), to a list of diseases that can infect the spouse or ‘be transmitted through heredity to their descendants after them,” which include “...syphilis, gonorrhoea, tuberculosis, alcoholism, narcotics addition... and diseases of the minds and the nerves.”<sup>113</sup> These eugenics ideas similarly represent the eugenics movement that dominated the United States during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which led to the forced sterilization of women, who were mostly non-white and/or poor, to prevent the reproduction of these undesirable traits.

Eugenics ideology and the turn towards producing a body politic of healthy, physically fit Jewish children is evident within *Altneuland* and can be situated through a reproductive futurity. *Altneuland’s* “New Society” depends on a reproductive futurity through the production of physically fit bodies, but also physically fit children. The figure of the “Child” after the “New Society” is conceived becomes synonymous with the preservation of the Jewish future, where the state’s management of healthy, young bodies becomes a central tenet of the Zionist project. The following passage from *Altneuland* demonstrates how the creation of the “New Society” depends not only on the transformation of the Jewish body, but also on the status of Jewish children. As David, one of the founders of the “New Society,” explains to Friedrich and Kingcourt:

We have no state, like the Europeans of your time. We are merely a society of citizens seeking to enjoy life through work and culture. We content ourselves with making our young people physically fit. We develop their bodies as well as their minds. We find athletic and rifle clubs sufficient for this purpose... We tried and tested things and tested them all over again. Jewish children used to be pale, weak, timid. Now look at them!<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Tamara Traubmann, "Do Not Have Children if They Won't Be Healthy!" *Haaretz*, accessed April 24, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4709890>.

<sup>114</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland*,

This passage from *Altneuland* is accompanied by a footnote by Jacques Kornberg: “Israeli children are, indeed, a remarkably sturdy specimen with a great love of the outdoors and athletics.” While David’s body represents the model citizen of and for the “New Society” - wealthy, confident, athletic - his individual body becomes a means to preserve the national body. Similarly, his own transformation is not an anomaly, but because of the “New Society,” the children who “used to be pale, weak, timid” are now, “athletic” and “physically fit,” like him. Here, the Jewish children’s bodies are no longer individual bodies; the “pale, weak, timid” bodies become “construed as other, deviant and non-normative” where the “New Society” becomes the very thing, that “cures” or “rehabilitates” the disabled children to normative standards. Kathryn Allan argues that in utopian visions, when technology is applied to the disabled body, it is due to an attempt to “cure or normalize what is deemed ‘wrong with the body. Take the technology away and the disabled body’s supposed lack remains.”<sup>115</sup> Similarly, in *Altneuland* the creation of the “New Society” becomes what “normalizes” or “cure” the disabled Jewish body. Herzl’s novel itself, accompanied with the discourses of other Zionist thinkers, are what produce healthy, physically fit young Israeli children. According to Herzl, without the Jewish State, the “disabled [Jewish] body’s supposed lack remains” and a “future with a disability is a future no one wants.”<sup>116</sup>

### **The Future of the Jewish State: The Rise of Assisted Reproductive Technologies**

In their introduction, Teitelbaum and Lottem contend that Israel’s very existence as a nation was inspired by science and speculative fiction, through *Altneuland*. Since Herzl depicts Palestine as “primitive and neglected,” for him, Palestine answered to a futuristic vision; humanity’s desire to shed the past and start absolutely afresh on virgin territory.” Aimee Bahng

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<sup>115</sup> Kathryn Allan, *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

utilizes “speculative fiction” to describe a genre “that might include related genres such as fantasy, horror, and historical fiction; and that highlights the speculative mode of the ‘what if?’”<sup>117</sup> In grappling with the relations between science and futurity, she contends that “science, like futurity, is contested terrain, consisting of varying arenas of scientific production and publication situated in specific historical contexts and political economics.”<sup>118</sup> The new development of science and “cutting edge technologies” is a central theme in *Altneuland*, where Herzl links Western ideas of progress and modernism to the advancement of a techno-scientific culture in Israel. With the descriptive emphasis of Palestine in 1902 as “desolate,” “filthy” and “backwards,” Herzl was able to construct Palestine as terra nullius - an empty, barren and primitive land, in dire need of enlightened intervention through the incorporation of science and technology. M. Shahid Alim similarly contends that Zionists justified the exploitation of native land and populations by clinging to the idea of a civilizing mission: “In the exclusionary colonies of settlement, where they sought to exterminate the natives, they spoke of improving the land; the natives were part of the wild fauna that had to be eliminated.”<sup>119</sup> Zionists sought to “[make] the deserts bloom with their toil and technology.” As David takes Friedrich and Kingscourt on a tour of the “New Society,” the fantasy of “bullet trains” and “glass towers” become means by which Herzl envisions a Jewish State. Technology emerges to transform historic Palestine from a state of primitiveness and “neglect,” into a State that ultimately becomes “far more advanced than Europe.”<sup>120</sup> Shocked with what he is witnessing, Kingscourt exclaims, “You’re a damned shrewd nation... left us with the old scrap iron, while you travel about in the latest machines.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Aimee Bahng, *Migrant futures: Decolonizing speculation in financial times*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 19.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>119</sup> M Shaheed Alam, *Israeli exceptionalism: The Destabilizing Logic of Zionism*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>120</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), ix.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, x.

Building on Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges," Bahng situates the production of scientific knowledge alongside "the conditions and contexts that shape these knowledges," that often reflect claims to objectivity rather than acknowledge that they are "radically contingent upon the situations that give rise to them."<sup>122</sup> The rise of "machines" and advancement in technology by the "New Society" emerges as a racialized and ableist form of nationalism necessary to improve or rehabilitate the Jewish Diaspora, as well as to justify colonization against the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants. In *Perceptions of Jewish History*, Amos Funkenstein contextualizes Max Nordau's concept of "muscular Judaism" as a *scientific* solution to the Jewish problem:

Faith in the sciences shaped these ideals [in regard to "muscular Judaism"]. Without science and technology – such was the almost general consensus among Zionists – there can be no normalization. Because there is not time enough to wait for the slow, organic-historical growth of a healthy, agricultural society in the land of Israel, only scientific planning can secure, in the land of Israel, a massive "colonization."<sup>123</sup>

The transformation of the land coincides with the transformation of the Jewish body. David explains to Kingscourt: "Plants cannot thrive without sun. No more can human beings. Plants can be saved by transplantation into congenial soil. Human beings as well. That is how it happened!"<sup>124</sup> This last section examines how the creation of the "New Society," represented by science and technology in order to "cure" or rehabilitate the Jewish diaspora, gestures toward a reproductive process. What Herzl and others envisioned, as it intertwined with eugenics logics, is the sustainable growth of a healthy, Jewish collectivity. In other words, the novel's "New Society" not only serves as the technology to re-embody the already dis-emodied Jewish subject, as others have argued, but also calls for the biological reproduction of a healthy and physically fit population necessary to maintain the Jewish state. It is in this context that I read Israel's "reproduction boom" and its

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<sup>122</sup> Aimee Bahng, *Migrant futures*, 15.

<sup>123</sup> Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (University of California Press, 1993), 342.

<sup>124</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), 51.

rise of Assisted Reproductive and Genetic technologies. The technologies made evident in *Altneuland* anticipates this reproduction boom via technology.

Israel has one of the highest birth and fertility rates among industrialized countries. The average age of women giving birth for the first time has increased consistently during the past ten years, however, modern technologies including the use of ARTs and in vitro fertilization (IVF) have made it possible for an increased number of women, including unmarried or infertile women, as well as women who wish to delay procreation for their careers, to have children.<sup>125</sup> Israel also has the highest number of fertility clinics per capita of any country in the world and four times the number in the United States. This obsession with reproductive technologies is not because of high rates of infertility, but because of the centrality of reproduction in Israeli society and its pro-natalist policy with regard to reproductive care. Israel's pro-natalist policy has been institutionalized through multiple funds and committees, providing monetary incentives for large families, alongside social benefits for mothers and child allowances.<sup>126</sup> While Israel proudly defines itself as a democracy that protects the rights of women, including the right to have autonomy over their bodies, historical, religious, political, cultural and social references to Israel's unique status as a specifically Jewish status generates a clear pro-natalist vision, in which women continue to reproduce for the state. Assisted Reproductive Technologies are "socio-technical products shaped by numerous technical, economic, political, and moral factors," and their acceptance is embedded in the context of social relations and cultural norms.<sup>127</sup> First, Israel's reproductive care policy reflects Jewish religious, cultural, and social norms regarding fertility, in that parenthood is considered a basic human right based on religious sources. Second, the desire to reproduce has

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<sup>125</sup> Israel: Reproduction and Abortion: Law and Policy, Law Library of Congress

<sup>126</sup> Shulamit Almog et al, "The Politics of Pro and Non-Reproduction Policies in Israel, *Journal of Health & Biomedical Law*, XIV. (2018), 27-80.

<sup>127</sup> Shulamit Almog et al, "The Politics of Pro and Non-Reproduction Policies in Israel, 32.

been engrained in Jewish culture and has been strengthened by the historical persecution of Jews in the Diaspora and particularly by genocide against Jews during the Holocaust. Third, its portrayal of being surrounded by “hostile Arab” countries have impacted Israel’s urgency regarding procreation. Fourth, some are influenced by the “insurance policy” effect, which advocates having more than one child due to the risk of military and terrorist attacks.<sup>128</sup> Thus, it is through this social, cultural, and political context of Israel’s settler colonial project and increased militarization that I situate its obsession with fertility.

Even though there is widespread support for technologies for procreation, the promotion of birth and fertility often contradict Israel’s practices that limit and prevent births (also called “non-natal practices”), including its lenient laws around abortions. Although abortions must be approved by a committee, the reality is that most requests for abortions are often approved. Israel’s reproductive policies regarding abortions with its rise of ARTs confirms how Israel’s obsession with fertility is not necessarily just about quantity, but with quality. ARTs, and especially the implementation of preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) technologies, similarly ensure the elimination of “sickly” and “pale” Jewish bodies and the promotion of healthy, physically fit children and a normative Jewish collectivity.

Israel has a system of national health care. According to the National Health Insurance Law, 5754-1994, Israeli residents are entitled to medical services provided by Health Funds that are approved by the Ministry of Health, included in a “basket of basic health services” which includes reproductive health services and products.<sup>129</sup> This includes access to oral contraceptives, prenatal care, interruption of pregnancy for medical reasons (or non-medical, including abortions

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<sup>128</sup> Rebecca Steinfeld, “War of the Wombs: Struggles Over Abortion Policies in Israel.” *Israel Studies*. 20(2), 2015. 2.

<sup>129</sup> Israel: Reproduction and Abortion: Law and Policy, Law Library of Congress

for girls under 19), fetal organ system exams, epidurals during birth, and exams for identification of fetus disabilities, including amniocentesis. These entitlements also provide access to genetic counseling, which include blood tests and genetic evaluation. Genetic counseling is provided to couples who may have a high probability of giving birth to a child with serious chromosomal disabilities or women who have had repeated miscarriages. This service, called Prenatal Genetic Evaluation (PGE) is limited to two pregnancies resulting in birth. This also includes the invasive extraction of ova for freezing, in case a woman or a couple would like to save it for future implantation, which is completely covered by the national health insurance. Israel is the only country where in vitro fertilization (IVF) is almost entirely state subsidized. For these reasons, Israeli women hold the world record for fetal diagnostics, where close to 60 percent of pregnant women in Israel undergo diagnostic test before delivery. In many of these cases in which a fetus has a mild impairment, including cases where the risk of mental retardation is just five percent, doctors will recommend abortion to the woman.<sup>130</sup>

This is evident during the second pregnancy of Yael,<sup>131</sup> a 44-year-old single woman in Israel. During her first pregnancy, four years ago, she underwent amniocentesis, a process in which amniotic fluid is removed from the uterus for testing or treatment and had a baby girl. Amniocentesis is primarily conducted to detect trisomy 21 (Down Syndrome – DS) in the fetus. Israel is the first in the world in the rate of amniocentesis, where 20% of pregnant women undergo the procedure. As the risk of Down Syndrome increases with maternal age, screening tests (maternal serum triple test and others) and age are used to generate a risk assessment, and

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<sup>130</sup> Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>131</sup> Shanny Littman, “The Abortion Conundrum: How Far Israelis Go to Make Sure Their Babies Are Born Perfect,” *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-abortion-conundrum-how-far-israelis-go-to-ensure-their-babies-are-born-perfect-1.7362524>

According to the author of the article, the names in the article have been changed to protect the interviewees privacy.

amniocentesis is often offered to women at high risk.<sup>132</sup> In Israel, amniocentesis is government funded for women of advanced maternal age even if their risk assessment is low. As she did with her first pregnancy, for her second Yael underwent amniocentesis and paid 2,000 shekels (\$550) for a CMA (“DNA Chip”). This time, the results indicated a problem in the fetus’ genetic sequence. According to Yael,

the doctor talked about possible intellectual disability and autism, about delayed development and attention deficit problems...He showed me a list of all kinds of disabilities, which I had 30-percent probability of happening. That sounded very high. I cried but we reached the conclusion that it would be out of the question or me to give birth to a baby with disabilities. I am a single parent with limited resources. There was no way I could cope with that.<sup>133</sup>

Upon seeing the results, Yael’s physician suggested that she terminate the pregnancy. Her physician suggested that that they immediately approach the pregnancy termination committee, as Yael was in an advanced stage of her pregnancy and her doctor urged her to hurry before she approaches 24 weeks (after week 24, termination of pregnancy typically involves causing the death of the fetus by injection of a substance into its heart, then giving birth to it). Yael was in her 23<sup>rd</sup> week (fifth month) when she received the results of the tests. Per the doctor’s recommendation, she met with the pregnancy termination committee, which approved the abortion immediately. However, on the day before her abortion, Yael went to another clinic to receive a second opinion, expecting that this physician would give the same results. However, this doctor, a geneticist, had a completely different approach. According to Yael, “he said that the probability of intellectual disability and autism among the general health population is 2.5 percent. Given what they know about me, the probability rose by another 1.5 to 2 percent. He led me to understand that the doctors

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<sup>132</sup> <https://ijhpr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13584-015-0019-6>

<sup>133</sup> Shanny Littman, “The Abortion Conundrum: How Far Israelis Go to Make Sure Their Babies Are Born Perfect,” *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-abortion-conundrum-how-far-israelis-go-to-ensure-their-babies-are-born-perfect-1.7362524>

don't know a lot about these things, and then said, 'Now you decide by yourself.'"<sup>134</sup> In shock that a doctor recommended she make the decision for herself, she skipped out of the procedure and instead sent her test results to a genetic consultant for a third opinion, where the geneticist concluded that there was a 7 percent chance of her infant suffering any significant damage. Based on the slim percentage, Yael decided to proceed with her pregnancy and gave birth to a second baby girl, two and a half years ago, "perfectly healthy."<sup>135</sup>

Although abortion is legal and often free or heavily subsidized, the state does not give all Israeli women the right to choose to have an abortion. The decision is often up to the state's discretion by way of a separate abortion committee. For instance, a healthy married woman between the age of 18-40 who wants a free or heavily subsidized abortion in a public facility must face a pregnancy termination committee, called the Committee for Interruption of Pregnancies (CIP), giving them justifications for the decision in order to have the abortion approved. The CIP is designated by the manager of a hospital registered under the Public Health Ordinance 1940, as amended, or, in the case of any other recognized medical institution, by the Minister of Health. The committee must consist of at least one woman as well as two qualified medical practitioners, one of whom holds the title of specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, and a registered social worker. Despite these restrictions, in practice, 98.5% of all requests for abortions to the committees were approved in 2009, and 98.7% in 2010. In the same study, it is reported that 13.3% of the total applications for approval of interruption of pregnancy in Israel were submitted by women younger than nineteen years of age, 51.4% involved a pregnancy out of wedlock, and 19.1% a pregnancy involving fetal physiological or mental defect.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid

<sup>135</sup> Here, point out the use of the terminology "perfectly healthy" that it is about not having any diseases, abnormalities, etc.

<sup>136</sup> [https://www.health.gov.il/Publicationsfiles/preg1990\\_2010.pdf](https://www.health.gov.il/Publicationsfiles/preg1990_2010.pdf)

As shown with Yael's case, Israel is one of the few countries in the world where the law explicitly allows termination of pregnancy after week 24 because of potential birth defects. However, a separate committee does exist for late-term abortions after 24 weeks of pregnancy. The number of abortions performed in Israel at an advanced stage of pregnancy is on the rise. According to Health Ministry data, the number of terminations after week 23 resulting from birth defects rose from 1.1 percent (about 175 abortions) in 2000 to 1.8% (about 302 abortions) in 2017, although the overall number of abortions remained stable or decreased slightly during that period (between 18,000-19,000 per year). By comparison, in England, only 0.1 percent of the abortions in 2017 were performed after week 24. While on the one hand, the Israeli state will pay for many legal abortions to be performed, up to full gestation, a woman seeking an abortion must get permission from a committee. This dual status leads political scientist Yael Misha to categorize Israel as an "intrusive state" that "limits individual discretion but is committed to implementing authorized legal abortions."<sup>137</sup> This also denies women from receiving full autonomy over their body, by having to abide by a set of laws around reproduction and their decisions being left up to the state's discretion.

Building from feminist studies scholars who theorize the relationship between race, disability, and reproductive technologies, I historicize the rise of ARTs in the haunting shadows of eugenics in Israel. Most legal abortions—in some estimates as many as 80%, are because of fetal defects. This does not mean that contemporary uses of ARTs are the same as the mainline eugenics of the past, but that the racialized, gendered, and abled ideologies around creating the "perfect" body that dominated Israel's early years, is made visible through these technologies. The access to blood tests, genetic counseling, and technologies before and during pregnancy are meant

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<sup>137</sup> Rebecca Steinfeld, "War of the Wombs: Struggles Over Abortion Policies in Israel." *Israel Studies*. 20(2), 2015. 1-26.

to guarantee a “perfect” child. Pregnant women with disabilities or pregnant women whose fetuses have tested positive for various health conditions are understood as threats to the future.

Israeli Studies scholar Meira Weiss argues that eugenics is a social discourse that “has gained prominence in Israel through the ideology of the ‘chosen body’ ... the ‘masculine, Jewish, Ashkenazi, [and] perfect body,’” required by the Jewish collectivity. The development of new genetic technologies has resulted in many types of tests, including prenatal testing (amniocentesis, as Yael had undergone), individual carrier screening, and pre-implantation testing as part of in vitro fertilization (IVF). While Israeli sperm banks do not necessarily screen for particular traits, many sperm banks have allowed for other types of screening, where it proved that Israeli residents, men and women, preferred traits reflective of the dominant Ashkenazi population, including tall, light skinned, blue eyes, and light colored hair.<sup>138</sup> In terms of genetic screening, many screen for some major common genetic diseases, including Tay-Sachs, in order to eliminate these traits from Israeli society, however, other “fetal defects” in which Israeli residents receive abortions for include Gaucher disease, spina bifida or even a cleft lip. Such tests, combined with its liberal approach to abortion especially in cases of “fetal defects,” signify a disdain towards disabilities. Children with disabilities here are constructed as a “burden” on not only individual families, but on the state’s resources, reproducing the similar logics of the eugenics movement in Europe and the United States.

I end with Israel’s expansive use of reproductive technologies to screen out disabilities to suggest the role of disability and in Israeli nation making. The disabled child continues to serve as a symbol of what Alison Kafer calls an “undesired future” for the modern Israeli state. Reproductive technologies can be contextualized as a contemporary manifestation of the

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<sup>138</sup> Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (Stanford University Press, 2004), 29.

“reproductive futurity” cultivated through Herzl’s “new Society,” with its emphasis on creating a healthy, normative (re: non-disabled) body politic. Here, physical, and intellectual fitness remains a powerful notion for acceptance into the Zionist body politic, and the construction of normative Jewish bodies. In *Altneuland*, and consequently, in the emergence of the modern Israeli state, the disabled Jewish body is and continues to be treated as “contaminated” or “unruly” and must be controlled by others, where the formation of a nation-state becomes configured as the “cure.”

*Altneuland* tells the story of several characters who, after 20 years has passed, visit a thriving Jewish State. Rather than describe the founding of this state, Herzl, skips directly from the present – one that reflects the dire situation of poverty and marginalization of Jewish people in Europe – to the fantastical future of a Jewish state called the “New Society.” Disability in the Zionist nationalist project was ideologically configured as a national problem that could only be eradicated through the formation of a state in historic Palestine. Disability has been viewed historically as the antithesis of Zionism, as a remnant of the weak diasporic Jew of the past. Thus, the Zionist settler colonial project is inextricably linked to disability and notions of fitness (physical and intellectual).

Today, Israel has the highest number of fertility clinics per capita than any other country in the world. This is not simply because of Israel’s pro-natalist agenda and its desire for a Jewish majority as a buffer against native Palestinians. Its increased use of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), including in vitro fertilization, and other forms of fetal diagnostics and genetic screening technologies such as PGD, reveals Israel’s desire to not only create a racially pure Jewish population, but one that is based on constructing the “perfect child.” Israeli residents have preferred abortion in cases where the fetus has a mild impairment, as well as in relatively low cases, such as five percent risk of mental retardation. Prenatal testing via these screenings is

defended by the Israeli abortion law that permits the abortion of “defective” fetuses, without having to specify what defect and without setting up a maximum time threshold beyond which abortion is forbidden. The advancement of reproductive technologies that combine assisted conception with genetic selection, or as Dorothy Roberts calls “reprogenetics,” intensify the “stratified reproduction” amongst the collective population in Israel.<sup>139</sup> The emergence of reprogenetics shifts responsibility for promoting well-being from the state and government level to the individual, who are responsible for ensuring the genetic fitness of their children. As Roberts notes, the “individual woman becomes the site of governance through self-regulation of genetic risk.”

Situating *Altneuland* as a speculative novel disrupts our understandings of the past, present, and the future as fixed, as well as our notions of time and space, the literary and the imaginary, and the real and the fictive. Sami Schalk describes the material impact that literature has: “Imagination, representations, and the real world influence each other cyclically.”<sup>140</sup> In this context, *Altneuland* is not only a novel, but becomes a way in which claims of collective disability in the Jewish diaspora and the emergence of the modern Israeli state as a mode of rehabilitation can be conceived of discursively. The notion of the “disembodied Jew” that becomes rehabilitated with the creation of the Jewish state does not apply to everyone. The disembodiment of “the other within us,” including non-Jewish Arab and Palestinians, as well as Ethiopians, Yemenis, and the Mizrahim becomes central to Israel’s refashioning of the Jewish (European) body and are the subjects of my remaining chapters.

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<sup>139</sup> Dorothy Roberts, “Race, Gender and Genetic Technologies.”

<sup>140</sup> Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds, Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction*, (Duke University Press, 2018), 19.

## CHAPTER TWO: Where are our Children? Testimony, Hauntings, and the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair

In 1949, Eli Buaron's parents and older siblings immigrated to Israel, along with thousands of other Yemenite immigrants. Upon their arrival, Israeli authorities placed them in Beit Lit immigrant camp, a "ma'abarot," or tent city that typically housed newly arrived immigrants to Israel. In 1950, Julia Buaron, Eli's mother, gave birth to his older brother Herzl Buaron. At the age of three months, Herzl became ill, and the camp transferred him to a hospital at Beit Lit. The doctors and nurses reassured Julia that the child would be fine and that she should return to her young children at the camp. Two days later, when she went to the hospital to check in on her son, the doctors told her that Herzl died and was properly buried. The doctors did not allow her to see the body of her child and did not give her a death certificate. Four months after the death of her child Herzl, Julia gave birth to Eli in 1954. Similarly, Eli fell ill at the age of 5 and was hospitalized for two months at Tel HaShomer Hospital (formerly known as Litwinsky). Fearing that the same thing would happen to Eli as with Herzl, Eli's mother stayed with him the entire time, and never left his side. She refused to leave the hospital despite the doctor's reassurance. In Eli's words, "Day and night for more than two whole months she sat and slept on a metal chair, despite the fact that I had two younger sisters at home in Netanya... and it's probably because of the trauma of my missing brother."<sup>141</sup> Julia's trauma of having another child abducted by Israeli doctors is part of the collective memory of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair.

The "Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair," the "Yemenite Children Affair" or "Operation Amram," refers to the tragic and overlooked story of child abductions and racialization in Israel's early state formation. State reports estimate that the Yemenite Children Affair resulted

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<sup>141</sup> Eli Buaron, Testimonial on behalf of Herzl Buaron, Last Accessed: July 8, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/eli-buaron/>

in 1000 reported cases of missing Yemenite, Balkan, and Mizrahi,<sup>142</sup> and Balkan babies and toddlers during the 1950s and 1960s. Mizrahi, or Jewish people from North Africa, the Middle East, Iran, and sometimes India, had a different perspective on the event. Mizrahi activists estimate 4500 children were abducted in this period.

Activists of the Amram Association, estimate that thousands of children disappeared in Israel during this time; around two-thirds of them were Yemenite, the remainder were mostly from other Mizrahi groups, and close to two percent were Ashkenazim.<sup>143</sup> Many of these children of immigrants disappeared from immigration absorption camps and transit camps throughout Israel and from the transit camp, Hashed, in Yemen.<sup>144</sup> Hundreds of testimonies from families living in the transit camps revealed similar stories: Women who either gave birth in overburdened hospitals or took their sick children to the doctors were told (often Ashkenazi doctors, of European descent) that their children had suddenly died. Many of these children were admitted to the hospital healthy. In cases where parents “were present and refused to consent... camp authorities forcefully took their children from them, even acting with violence.”<sup>145</sup> The families believe that Israeli authorities abducted their babies and children and illegally put them up for adoption to childless Ashkenazi families, in Israel and the United States.<sup>146</sup> In the hospitals, doctors would tell the parents that their

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<sup>142</sup> Following other scholars, such as Ella Shohat, I use Mizrahim (an umbrella term for Jewish people from North Africa, the Middle East, and Iran) and Arab-Jews interchangeably. I similarly refer to them as Middle Eastern Jews or Jewish descendants from the Middle East. The physical creation of Israel simultaneously constructed other racial categories and identity markers, even within the category of “Arab-Jews,” differentiating between the Mizrahim and Sephardic Jews.<sup>142</sup> Sephardim refers strictly to the Jews of Spain who retained their “Spanishness” even outside Iberia, for example, in Turkey, Bulgaria, Egypt, Palestine and Morocco. Mizrahim became a widely accepted term during the 1990s, as a political and cultural category of a third world coalition of Arab Jewish descendants today.

<sup>143</sup> Rachel’i Said and Tom Pessah, “What Happened to the Yemenite Children? We’re Still Waiting On An Answer.” Forward, July 10, 2017, Last Accessed: January 15, 2020. <https://forward.com/subscribe/376641/what-happened-to-the-yemenite-children-were-still-waiting-on-an-answer/>

<sup>144</sup> Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal Conflict: The Yemenite babies affair* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

<sup>145</sup> Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal conflict*, 7.

<sup>146</sup> Judy Maltz, “Yemenite babies who disappeared in 1950s Israel were sold to US Jews, New Film Claims.” Haaretz, July 5, 2017. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-yemenite-babies-who-disappeared-in-1950s-israel-were-sold-to-u-s-jews-new-film-claims-1.5468742>

child died, without giving them a proper burial or presenting a death certificate or proof of body. Years later, parents began receiving draft notices in the mail for their supposedly deceased children, forcing parents to question whether their child really died. Amram Association argue that some children not sold for adoption to Ashkenazi families were kept by the Israeli government for medical experimentation.<sup>147</sup> Despite decades passing, and after three separate boards of inquiry spanning thirty years, the results of the investigations were sealed, and the grieving parents learned nothing. Israel refuses to accept responsibility, nor does it intend to compensate the victims for their losses.<sup>148</sup> The testimonies express that the families including second and third generation Mizrahis, want answers to what happened to their loved ones, as this affair continues to be a wound that haunts the collective memory of the Mizrahim. The families believe that Israeli authorities abducted their babies and children and illegally put them up for adoption to childless Ashkenazi families, Jews of European descent, in Israel and the United States.<sup>149</sup>

The Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair was a critical site for the consolidation state formation and the shaping of Israeli power, through biopolitical and reproductive control over racialized Jewish bodies. Biopolitics or the governing techniques that rely on “the disciplining of individual bodies and the regulations of the life process of aggregate human populations”<sup>150</sup> is a useful framework to trace the construction and circulation of individual bodies, collectivities, and racial discourses. The discourses on the abduction of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan children

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<sup>147</sup> Richard Silverstein, “Knesset Inquiry Reveals Yemenite Babies Murdered in Medical Experiments, Abducted from Parents and Exploited in Paid National Institutes of Health Experiments.” Tikun Olam News, 2017, Last Accessed April 20, 2020. <https://www.richardsilverstein.com/2017/06/15/knesset-inquiry-reveals-yemenite-babies-murdered-medical-experiments-abducted-parents-exploited-paid-national-institutes-health-experiments/>

<sup>148</sup> Silverstein, “Knesset Inquiry Reveals Yemenite Babies Murdered in Medical Experiments,” 2017

<sup>149</sup> Judy Maltz, “Yemenite babies who disappeared in 1950s Israel were sold to US Jews, New Film Claims.” Haaretz, July 5, 2017. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-yemenite-babies-who-disappeared-in-1950s-israel-were-sold-to-u-s-jews-new-film-claims-1.5468742>

<sup>150</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage.

reveal the eugenic practices and ideas that informed the immigration of Middle Eastern or “Oriental” groups to Israel. Discourses of the Mizrahim by early Zionists racialized them as “bad parents,” who neglected their children and could never become “proper” parents. By forcibly placing Mizrahi children with Ashkenazi families, the early Zionist state argued that they could “save” these lost children.<sup>151</sup> The children would be re-educated and made into suitable material for the new Zionist State.”<sup>152</sup> These discourses stripped Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants of their native heritage and constructed a new body politic, dominated by Ashkenazi and other European Jews. The kidnapping of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children was a form of nation-building. European Jewish positioning of Mizrahim, as “dirty,” “primitive,” and “barbaric” because of their “Eastern origins,” motivated these abductions and teach us about the construction of Jewishness and Israel’s national body.

Eli’s testimony is one of many gathered and displayed on the Amram Association website. The Amram Association emerged after June 21, 2013, death of Rabbi Uzi Meshulam, who fought for the recognition and investigation of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair.<sup>153</sup> Before he died, he succeeded in bringing about the establishment of an official committee to investigate the affair, to make this issue more visible in Israeli discourse. According to their website, the Amram Association marked the death of Rabbi Uzi Meshulam as the day of awareness for the abduction of these children. Every year on this day, Amram hold lectures, discussions, and public forums, arguing that they will not stop until the children affair is officially recognized by the Israeli state. Amram established an online archive of testimonies in 2016, where they gathered

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<sup>151</sup> While writing this chapter, I could not help but to connect this process of saving the children from the logic that rationalized the boarding school system that impacted indigenous children from North America. In particular, the ideology of “kill the Indian, save the man,” is strikingly similar to how the rationale behind the kidnapping of Mizrahi children is about ‘killing the Yemenite/Mizrahi’ and “saving the child.”

<sup>152</sup> Jonathan Cook. “The Shocking Story of Israel’s Disappeared Babies”

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/shocking-story-israel-disappeared-babies-160803081117881.html>

<sup>153</sup> Amram Association, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/about/>

stories by the survivors of the children who disappeared; they also conducted DNA tests and released a call to open the Israeli state archives, which they hold the files on the adoptions and of the subjects of the testimonies. Amram's decision to make the testimonies accessible and open to the public is to enable awareness of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Affair and give voice to the immigrants who have been historically silenced by Israel. This has encouraged many immigrants and children of immigrants to reach out and tell their stories. Amram's other goal is to assist families and kidnapped persons to locate their loved ones, as well as put pressure on the Israeli government to redress the violence from the children affair. The thousands of testimonies by parents displayed on the website reveal the same pattern: doctors asked newly immigrated parents to take their children to hospitals or nurseries under the pretext that they will be given more appropriate care. When they returned to pick up their children, doctors notified them that they died. The striking similarities between the testimonials reveal that the abduction of these children was not a few isolated incidents, but a systematic operation in which doctors, nurses, and the Israeli government operated together.

Eli's testimony reveals the secrecy and trauma surrounding the disappearance of his brother. He writes that while growing up, his mother refused to talk about his brother. When his mother got older, Eli asked his aunt: "did mom see the body of my brother Herzl after she was told that he died?" to which she replied, "I'm not allowed to talk... but she hadn't seen it..." This sentiment of "I'm not allowed to talk" and the refusal to discuss the events surrounding the abduction of Eli's brother Herzl is not a unique one. In fact, most of the testimonies reveal how families have either been silenced or refuse to discuss the children who have been allegedly kidnapped, out of fear of repercussion by the state. The repeated denial of the affair in the investigations, Israeli politicians' refusal to publicly condemn the affair, and the long-lasting

trauma that losing a child suddenly created, suppressed the Mizrahim from telling their stories. However, it is the ghost that “is primarily a symptom for what is missing,” and thus emerge in these testimonials through the telling of the stories of the missing babies, that continue to haunt families today.<sup>154</sup>

The Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair lives on as a form of haunting till this day. Haunting is one way that abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts are felt in everyday life, especially when they are “supposedly over and done with” or when their oppressive nature is denied. Haunting reveals the ways that events that are “supposedly over and done with” come alive and manifest itself as ghosts that attach themselves to the events, things, and places that produced them in the first place. The haunting presence of the figurative and literal bodies of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan children looms in the present. The ghosts are ubiquitous in the testimonies of the survivors of those children – their parents, nieces and nephews, and siblings. The ghosts of these children stand in for a loss while they represent a future possibility, a political act, or a means of hope.

The testimonies serve as a form of cultural production that acknowledges the presence of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair, and to call into question the remnants of the affair from the past into the present. The late Haitian scholar Michel Rolph-Trouillot argues that the “distinction between what happened and that which is said to have happened is not always clear.”<sup>155</sup> The production of historical narratives and the way it is remembered is not simply recalling a past event, but “involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production.”<sup>156</sup> The Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan

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<sup>154</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 15.

<sup>155</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>156</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 7.

Children Affair is remembered and understood differently, depending on who you are talking to. Until this day, the state of Israel denies there was an organized and institutionalized abduction campaign, claiming instead that the children die or went missing due to “bureaucratic chaos,” resulting from Israel’s formative years absorbing immigrants from the Middle East and Europe. My focus on the testimonies is not to necessarily fill in the gaps of the events, as Trouillot reminds us is impossible, but to consider competing narratives of the affair and recognize how these competing narratives work to reinforce relations of domination and subordination then and now. I follow the “ghosts” of the Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan Affair, the literal and figurative bodies of the children abducted, through the painful and traumatic descriptions of the affair as told by their relatives. In her examination of force-feeding and visibility in Guantanamo Bay, Michelle Velasquez-Potts argues that prisoners’ testimonies allow for a reading of pain (the pained body) as not simply a private act, but rather a display of pain and one that allows for a relationality between those held captive and the spectator.<sup>157</sup> She writes that the “testimonies by prisoners that bear witness to force-feeding opens up the possibility for pain to be more than an experience felt in isolation, but rather an experience shared with a public.”<sup>158</sup> The testimonies by family members of those abducted opens up the possibility for these individual forms of trauma to be collectivized and shared with the public, as well as constructs a relationship between those experiencing the trauma and those consuming this trauma. The individual stories publicized through the Amram Foundation rejects the Israeli state’s insistence to concealing and changing the narrative of the affair. If family formations, such as personal experiences of trauma, constitute private acts of grievance, they are absent, redacted, or deemed invisible from the colonial archive; in other words,

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<sup>157</sup> Michelle C. Velasquez- Potts, “Carceral Oversight: Force- Feeding and Visuality at Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp Carceral Oversight: Force- Feeding and Visuality at Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp.” *Public Culture* 31, no. 3 (2019): 581–600.

<sup>158</sup> Velasquez- Potts, “Carceral Oversight,” 590.

if they are not in the archive, where are they? What happens when these stories emerge? How can bringing forth these private experiences of trauma into the public realm challenge and collapse what we understand as the personal and the political and the private and public? The collective traumas of state kidnapping of Mizrahi children disrupt these binaries and are critical sites in the making of racial categories of the Mizrahim and in the management of Israeli colonial and imperial rule.

### **Operation “On Eagles’ Wings” and the Portrayal of Rescue**

The relationship between newly arrived European immigrants during the First and particularly, the Second Aliya (1904-1914) and the Arabs in Mandate Palestine shaped concepts of land and labor that helped racialize immigration during Israel’s early years. In Gershon Shafir’s *Land, Labor and the Origin of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, he argues that rather than a well-developed ideology, it was the Jewish community, especially during the Second Aliya (the Yishuv), that created the conditions for a social organization to gain the necessary administrative control over territory in order to determine how the land would be used.<sup>159</sup> The Zionist project differed from other comparable settler colonial enterprises, in that “Jews could not claim the land as Britain and France did in North America, Australia, North and East Africa...by ‘right to discovery,’ ‘right of conquest,’ and ‘right of protectorate.’”<sup>160</sup> During the First Aliya, the goal was to settle the land through privately owned, self-sustaining farms that hired cheap and experienced Palestinian agricultural labor, but this failed, as the Zionist movement did not have the financial means and resources to acquire land for the newly arriving settlers, as the cost of land increased drastically and the land already owned by Zionists could have been legally sold to non-

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<sup>159</sup> Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, (University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

Jews. The Second Aliya led to a new approach based on creating self-employing cooperative settlements on non-alienable, nationally owned land financed by public funds. This led to what Shafir calls the “conquest of land” from the Palestinians, where they were excluded from Jewish owned and controlled land, which created a foundation for the “conquest of Jewish labor.”<sup>161</sup> The policy of “conquest of land” involved three successive goals: the first, to reduce the distance between Jews and agricultural work; the second, to reduce and possibly Palestinian labor altogether; and third, to associate the Palestinian peasants to low paying job.

The declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, and the enactment of the Law of Return in 1950, brought over a massive number of immigrants from all over the world, particular from Europe and the Middle East. The two main ethnic immigrant groups were Ashkenazi Jews (European Jews) and Mizrahi Jews (mostly from Arab countries, such as Yemen and Iraq, and the Balkans). In the first six months of independence, close to 100,000 immigrants arrived to Israel; by 1949, over 250,000 arrived.<sup>162</sup> The largest group of immigrants to arrive in 1949 was from Poland (47,000); other immigrants included those from North Africa (39,000), Yemen (35,000), Turkey (26,000), and Bulgaria (20,000).<sup>163</sup> David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister, argued that while immigration enhances the political, social, economic, ideological, and psychological image of the new state, he believed that the most vital reason for promoting immigration to Israel is to improve the state’s national security and military. Thus, immigration became a primary objective for Israel’s foreign policy and its diplomatic relationships in Washington, Paris, and London helped to facilitate the departure of Jews from North Africa, Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>162</sup> Tom Segev, 1949: The First Israelis (Owl Books by Henry Holt and Company; First Edition, 1998), 95

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 98.

Many Yemenite immigrants arrived in Israel in 1949 because of an Israeli initiative, in cooperation with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Jewish Agency, and the rulers of Aden and Yemen. Close to 50,000 Yemenite Jews arrived in Israel between the years of 1949 and 1950, through a mass airlift Israeli operation called, “On Eagles’ Wings,” or Operation Magic Carpet.<sup>165</sup> Before “Operation Magic Carpet” there were tens of thousands of Yemenite Jews already living in Israel – the first group arrived in the early 1880s, around the time that European Jews similarly immigrated to Israel; the remaining group arrived during and after World War 2. “Operation Magic Carpet” occurred in three stages:<sup>166</sup> In the first stage (December 1948-April 1949), the Israeli government brought 7,000 Yemenite and Adeni Jews - some of whom had spent several months and even years in transit camps in Aden, Yemen – to Israel. In the second stage (July 1949- November 1949), 30,000 Yemenites were brought over. In the third stage (November 1949 until late 1950), 10,000 Yemenites arrived in Israel. The JDC ran the operation, through funding as well as taking direct charge by handling ties with the British rulers in Aden, the Yemeni Imam, and the sultans in the areas between Yemen and Aden.<sup>167</sup> The JDC maintained contacts with the airlines that carried out the flights and supplied the Jewish refugees with what they needed in transit camps. The person directly in charge of the activity was Harry Viteles, the JDC representative in Tel Aviv, although in practice, it was run by Joseph Simon, the JDC representative in Aden.<sup>168</sup> In December 1949, Simon was replaced by Max Lapidès, a retired Jewish U.S. Air Force Colonel.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Esther Meir-Glitzstein. "Operation Magic Carpet: Constructing the Myth of the Magical Immigration of Yemenite Jews to Israel." *Israel Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 155.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 151

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 151

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 151

<sup>169</sup> Max Lapidès was an attorney by training and a colonel in the U.S. Air Force during the war.

The second stage began with a plan agreed upon by the Yemeni Imam, the British in Aden, the sultans of the protectorate between Aden and Yemen, Israel, and the JDC. The priority was for Jews in Yemen to leave legally for Aden through a gradual process. This was to prevent the challenges involved in the illegal emigration of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>170</sup> The plan was to ensure that they provided the people in the camp shelter, food and medicine at the end of their journey, however, the JDC failed in administering the operation in two ways: The British rulers of Aden were supposed to arrange an airlift to carry 20,000 people in 2 months; the operation took 5 months to evacuate the people waiting. The second failure was that the JDC failed to provide elementary conditions to the thousands of people waiting in the refugee camps – there was overcrowding, very little shelter during hot climatic conditions and heavy sandstorms, and there was a shortage of food, medicine, and medical care. As a result, hundreds of people died in the camps in Aden before even immigrating to Israel due to starvation and illness. Most of the deaths occurred not in Yemen, where the Jews were protected by the authorities, but in the British protectorate and in Aden, where they arrived ill and malnourished.

The newspapers depicted the immigration of Jews from Arab countries as part of an exchange of population and property between incoming Jews and the outgoing Arabs – that Jewish immigrant from Arab lands had left their homes behind, just as the Arabs in Israel had.<sup>171</sup> Compared to any other Jewish immigrant group, the Yemenites were noticeably more “Jewish,” with their sidecars, beards, prayer shawls, and Torah scrolls. Yemenite immigrants were stereotyped as “sweet-natured, “bewildered,” and intimidated by bureaucracy and modernity of Israel; they were viewed as “innocent, trusting people who saw the state of Israel as the Promised

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<sup>170</sup> Meir-Glitzstein, “Operation Magic Carpet,” 152; Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 155.

<sup>171</sup> Segev, 1949, 90.

Land of the Torah.”<sup>172</sup> For example, in the 1998 documentary series *Tekuma*, the arrival of Arab-Jews is portrayed as an act of devotion to the Israeli nation-state.<sup>173</sup> In *Tekuma*, images of Yemeni Jews arriving at the camps set up by the Jewish Agency are juxtaposed with a voiceover that reductively speaks of messianic will and persecution. They are portrayed as willing to “cross the desert and sacrifice their lives, in order to get to the promised land,” which in turn, naturalizes this inevitability of their arrival to the State of Israel.<sup>174</sup> Avraham Nissim’s testimony<sup>175</sup> illustrates this devotion to Israel even prior to stepping foot on the land. Coming from Baghdad, Iraq, Avraham describes how, growing up as one of ten siblings, it was his household’s dream to immigrate to Israel. He states that they “ate, drank, and breathed the love of this country” and how his father would repeatedly tell them that Israel was their “real place.”<sup>176</sup> Upon arriving to Israel, his “father got off the plane, knelt down, and kissed the ground.” This allegiance and devoutness as well as the rhetoric of their “rescue,” fortifies the construction of Israel as the refuge for Diasporic Jews from global anti-Semitism.

Western media portrays Israel as not only the religious site for Diasporic Jews, but as a safe haven for Jewish families who escaped in the Holocaust. The Israeli Declaration of Independence references the Holocaust directly. The declaration not only references Israel as a place of refuge for the “survivors of the Nazi Holocaust in Europe” but describes Israel as the state

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<sup>172</sup> Meira Weiss, “The Immigrating Body and the Body Politic: The ‘Yemenite Children Affair’ and Body Commodification in Israel.” In *Commodifying Bodies*, edited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Loic Wacquant, (Sage Publications, 2003), 94.

<sup>173</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of *Tekuma*, See “Ruptures and Return” by Ella Shohat. Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab-Jews.” *Taboo Memories: Diasporic Voices*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 338.

<sup>174</sup> Shohat, “Rupture and Return,” 340.

<sup>175</sup> Avraham Nissim, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: July 8, 2020 <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/nissim-avraham/>.

<sup>176</sup> Avraham Nissim, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: July 8, 2020 <https://www.edutamram.org/en/testimonies/nissim-avraham/>.

of all the Jews, whose primary goal is the “ingathering of the Exiles.”<sup>177</sup> Ben Gurion similarly spoke from time to time about saving Jewish people in the Diaspora: “Aliya saves Jews from destruction... we must do everything to save them.”<sup>178</sup> Similarly, during the debates about whether to bring Jews from Arab countries into Israel, Yaakov Zrubavel, a MAPAM leader and a member of the Jewish Agency Executive insisted, “The Zionist Executive must hasten to help the millions of our brothers who are subject to persecution and in peril of their lives, to extricate them from the inferno and bring them to their safe national haven, to the State of Israel. This is an imperative of rescue.”<sup>179</sup> Zrubavel is speaking to the millions of Jewish people from Arab countries who were in no danger of annihilation as they believed; however, this discourse of Jewish people from Arab countries “in danger” became a critical part of Zionist discourse and aided in the facilitation of their immigration to Israel. The “imperative of rescue” for the Jews in Arab countries meant to accomplish what had not been done during the Holocaust - Zrubavel contends, “We were too late in Europe... we were just not fast enough to come to the aid of millions of Jews and save them when it was still possible to do so.”<sup>180</sup> However, it is telling how the rescue of Mizrahi Jews did not become an urgent issue until after the Holocaust, when two-thirds of European Jews were exterminated by Nazi Germany, which is something worth noting.

In fact, Israel’s very existence depends on the discourse of Jewish people constantly being under the constant threat of violence and persecution. Stephen Spielberg’s short documentary film *Flight to Freedom*, depicts the immigration journey of Yemenite Jews to Israel from Aden in “Operation Magic Carpet.” As the documentary opens, the narrator expresses that Yemenite Jews’ dream of attaining Israel was based not only as a religious desire, but as an escape from threat and

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<sup>177</sup> Proclamation of Independence: [https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\\_eng.htm](https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm)

<sup>178</sup> Segev, 1949, 116; Ben Gurion said to senior officials for the Foreign Ministry in April 1949

<sup>179</sup> Segev, 1949, 117.

<sup>180</sup> Segev, 1949, 138.

prejudice by the Arab leaders of their origin country: “Jews were pariah... Muslims called them dogs... the Jews of Yemen clung to their Torah with one hope that the messiah will one day lead them back to their homeland... that the messiah would take [them] to Israel.”<sup>181</sup> This portrayal reiterates Zrubavel’s “imperative of rescue” – that Jews from Arab countries were being persecuted by Arab leaders and thus, it is necessary that Israel rescue them by bringing them to their homeland. In essence, “Operation Magic Carpet” becomes the messiah that the Jews of Yemen longed for, to rescue them from their impoverished and persecuted status in Yemen. On November 7, 1949, Edward Warburg, chairman of the JDC in New York, and Dr. Joseph Schwartz, chairman of the European council of the JDC in Paris, celebrated publicly by announcing to the media that Israel has transported Jews of Yemen from Aden to Israel in “Operation Magic Carpet.” They praised Israel for their “heroic and inspiring act” in taking in the Jews of Yemen: “the decision exhibits the absolute determination of the new state to offer haven to distressed Jews.”<sup>182</sup>

As they land in Israel, the film shows Yemenite Jews – men, women, the elderly, and children - running off the platform of the plane, looking abroad and onto the land of Israel. They are all smiling, and their faces are beaming with happiness, hope, and gratitude – another representation of the sacrifices that Yemenite Jews will make to get to the promised land. Some of men are carrying hookahs as they walk off the plane, while others are dancing. The scenes portray many of them, especially children, half naked. They are not wearing shoes and their clothes are dirty. However, waiting for them at the bottom of the platform and just outside the plane are Israelis – light skinned and fully clothed – grabbing their babies, smiling, and celebrating with the newly arrived immigrants. The images of European Israelis – including nurses and soldiers – holding Yemenite babies and toddlers almost immediately after they leave the plane, creates a haunting

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<sup>181</sup> *Flight to Freedom*, directed by Steven Spielberg, (The Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, 1949)

<sup>182</sup> Meir-Glitzstein, “Operation Magic Carpet,” 157.

image as it foreshadows the systemic kidnappings and what becomes known as the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair. As the nurses and soldiers are carrying the children, the narrator explains cheerfully, “in Israel, the children of the Yemenites would grow big and tall,” as if they could not in their countries of origin.<sup>183</sup> As the interaction between the different groups appears on screen, the narrator declares: “In one night, they spanned more than a thousand miles and 2000 years, entering into the modern world.”<sup>184</sup> This reference to being premodern, behind in time and space has been used to racialize native and non-white groups globally. One announcement by the leaders of the JDC referred to the operation as a “genuine miracle,” alluding to not only the magnitude of the operation, but the impossibility that Yemenites can become a part of a “modern” nation. Despite the challenges and hardships brought upon by “Operation Magic Carpet,” Israel emerges as the savior, the place of refuge for Jewish people in its land, and the site of redemption of Jews from their bitter fate in exile.

Ella Shohat argues that the fabrication of Israel as a site of “rescue” for Arab-Jews, worked to erase the violent dispossession of native Palestinians from their homeland: “The tragedy of ‘the Palestinian refugees’ is answered with the tragedy of ‘the forgotten refugees from Arab countries;’ ‘the expulsion of Palestinians is cancelled out by the ‘expulsion of Jews from Arab countries;’ ‘the transfer’ and ‘ethnic cleaning of Palestinians is correlated with ‘the transfer’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Jews from Arab countries; and even ‘the Palestinian Nakba’ is retroactively matched with a ‘Nakba of Jews from Arab countries.’”<sup>185</sup> The idea of a Jewish “return” intertwined with imagining Palestine as empty land, where suddenly Palestine’s indigenous inhabitants all became

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<sup>183</sup> *Flight to Freedom*, Steven Spielberg, 1949.

<sup>184</sup> *Flight to Freedom*, Steven Spielberg, 1949.

<sup>185</sup> Ella Shohat. “Introduction.” *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings* (Pluto Press, 2017), 2.

“intruders” deemed to “return” to their Arab lands of origins.<sup>186</sup> The Palestinian Nakba – which signified a moment of rupture for Palestinians in historic Palestine and those who became part of the Diaspora, similarly signified a historical moment of rupture for Arab Jews, where “Arab Jews woke up to a new world order that could not accommodate their simultaneous Jewishness and Arabness.”<sup>187</sup> While the figurative and literal cross-border movements of Palestinians and Arab Jews differ from each other, they are both essential for marking the Israeli nation-state as the site of refuge for Diasporic Jews. When Jews from other Arab countries immigrate to Israel, during the 1950s and 1960s, they realize upon their arrival that their “return” to Israel meant abandoning their diasporic culture, which meant “abandoning Arabness and acquiescing in assimilationist modernization ‘for their own good.’”<sup>188</sup> The Zionist fabrication of a “Jewish nation” led to the invention of a new “Mizrahi identity.”<sup>189</sup> Despite the portrayal that Israel welcomed the Mizrahim into the Jewish nation, the testimonies reveal a different reality.

### **Racialization of the Mizrahim**

"Israel was always the big dream in our household in Baghdad, where I grew up as one of ten siblings. We ate, drank, and breathed the love of this country, and Father kept saying that it was our real place. When I was five years old my parents packed our home in a great rush, and we all hurried to the synagogue with the other Jews. I remember a big mess and crying and screaming. This is what our great escape from Iraq looked like. Father got off the plane, knelt down, and kissed the ground. I will never forget this image. Following his lead, we also knelt down. I can still feel the sand on my lips. At the gates to enter Israel we were sprayed with DDT. I remember that I could not breathe. I wanted to run. Our reception in the Holy Land was so difficult and traumatic for Father that he even tried to kill himself once.

We were the first family to reach the transit camp in Ramat Hasharon. We were welcomed by sand dunes, derelict tents and the howling of jackals. These were the austerity days of the '50s. We ran around barefoot and had nothing to eat. We ate oranges we picked from orchards, and if the guard caught us, we were beaten. When

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<sup>186</sup> Shohat, “Introduction,” *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine and Other Displacements*, 3.

<sup>187</sup> Shohat, “Rupture and Return,” 3.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>189</sup> Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999), 5-20.

I went with my mother to the market, I was yelled at not speak Arabic. I did not know Hebrew, so I kept quiet.”<sup>190</sup>

Avraham Nissim’s testimonial portrays a fragment of the immigration story of the Mizrahim and how Israel racialized Arab-Jews upon their arrival into Israel. Nissim’s family, including his parents and his then, eight-year-old sister Judith, immigrated to Israel from Iraq in 1949. Once they arrived in Israel, they became the first family to live in the transit camp in Ramat HaSharon. Despite his father’s love for Israel, the reality is that the love by the state was not reciprocated. Nissim describes that although attaining Israel was a dream for his parents, illustrated by his father kneeling and “kiss[ing] the ground,” they were all sprayed with DDT, the children were separated from their parents, and they were denied their right to speak their language of origin (Arabic). Nissim’s experience of being beaten, sprayed with DDT, and living in the horrid conditions of the transit camp is a shared experience among many of the testimonials on Amram. In fact, this contrast of attaining the “dream” of living in Israel with the reality of what actually happened is a similar sentiment in many testimonials. The immigration journey for Jews coming from Arab countries, as well as their experience living in the transit camps, presents a stark difference from the experience of their European counterparts. Despite portrayals found in films such as *Flight to Freedom*, where Yemenites finally “found themselves wanted and needed” in the land of Israel, they were perceived as being inferior from their European counterparts.

Zionism’s goal was not only to save the Jewish people as a people from the violence of anti-Semitism and restore them to nationhood, it also “collaborated with those aspects of Western culture (in which Zionism exclusively and institutionally lived) making it possible for Europeans to view non-Europeans as inferior, marginal and irrelevant.”<sup>191</sup> While Zionism claimed to be a

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<sup>190</sup> Avraham Nissim, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: July 8, 2020 <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/nissim-avraham/>.

<sup>191</sup> Edward W. Said, “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims.” *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979), 25.

liberation movement for all Jewish people, in actuality, it has been primarily served as a liberation movement for European (Ashkenazi) Jews, leaving Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews out. The construction of a white and western, “Jewish nation” was simultaneously and dependently constituted alongside the primitivity of the Mizrahim. This myth of the Mizrahim’s primitiveness is especially notable in the name given to the operation that brought them to Israel: Operation Magic Carpet. The names of the immigration operations, such as Magic Carpet and Ali Baba (the original name of the operation that brought Iraqi Jewry to Israel), “borrowed from *A Thousand and One Nights*, evoke orientalist discourses by foregrounding the technological backwardness of the Mizrahim, that naively saw modern airplanes as ‘magic carpets’ transporting them to the promised land.”<sup>192</sup>

The Mizrahim’s gratitude and loyalty to the Israeli state is often times conflated as “naivety” and is perceived as deficiency of themselves as Arab-Jews. The newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, founded during Mandatory Palestine in 1939, reported on the Yemenites arrival to Israel: “Like chickens from the coops, they emerged from the belly of the plane, stunned and astonished by the wonders of technology, their lips mouthing prayers.”<sup>193</sup> The newspaper continues: “They don’t ask questions, they show no interest, they don’t protest, and they don’t make demands. They accept everything with love.”<sup>194</sup> This description of the new immigrants suggests two things: firstly, that Israel exposed Yemenites to modernity for the first time and, secondly, that Yemenites were children who could not care for themselves and depended on a western state like Israel to mother them. The logic was: the Mizrahim could not care for themselves, and thus, could not care for their children. This is critical given the events that

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<sup>192</sup> Meir-Glitzstein, “Operation Magic Carpet,” 160

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 161

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 164

followed including the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair, demonstrating how infantilization becomes key to colonial logic.

This belief that the Mizrahim could not care for their children is evident in Mashiah and Yehudit Harandish's testimonial, collected by their daughter, Leah Harel, about their missing child. The Harandish family emigrated from Persia in 1950. The mother Yehudit gave birth to twins – a boy and a girl – in a hospital on Brandes Street (today's Hillel Yaffe) on July 6, 1954. When Leah's father went to visit his wife after she had given birth, the ward nurse told him: "You have five children at home, and now you have another two and will have seven – it will be very difficult for you to take care of the kids."<sup>195</sup> Assuming his incapability of taking care of all his children, she offered, nonchalantly, to purchase one of his children: "With you the Persians, you prefer the boys. Take your son, and we will buy the daughter."<sup>196</sup> Shocked by what she said, including the racist and presumed sexism, he yelled: "Why are you talking to me like that?! These are my children! In Persia, we did not sell children and we do not sell children now!"<sup>197</sup> A couple weeks later, the couple returned to the hospital with their son who got sick. A few days later, the nurse came by and told them that their son died. They showed the parents no proof of their son's body and did not give them a death certificate. He disappeared without a trace. Similarly, in Avraham and Sarah Shimon's testimonial, a couple who immigrated to Israel from Sana'a, Yemen, Sarah describes how the nurse told her: "Bring him [Sarah's child] to me, it's winter, you're a little girl, and can't look after him."<sup>198</sup> The next day she went to breastfeed him every three hours. At 9

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<sup>195</sup> Mashiah and Yehudit Harandish, testimonial on behalf of selves, Last Accessed: June 10, 2020 <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/mashiah-yehudit-harandish/>.

<sup>196</sup> Mashiah and Yehudit Harandish, testimonial on behalf of selves, Last Accessed: June 10, 2020 <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/mashiah-yehudit-harandish/>.

<sup>197</sup> Mashiah and Yehudit Harandish, testimonial on behalf of selves, Last Accessed: June 10, 2020 <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/mashiah-yehudit-harandish/>.

<sup>198</sup> Avraham and Sarah Shimon, testimonial on behalf of selves, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/avraham-sara-shimon/>.

PM she “came again, and the boy was gone.” This belief that the Mizrahim were incapable of taking care of themselves, and by extension, their children, becomes an apparent theme and pattern throughout the testimonies. Constructing the Mizrahim as “unfit for motherhood/ parenthood” becomes the basis and justification for kidnapping of their children.

The Mizrahim’s “return” to Israel, signified a rupture of Diaspora, which meant a transformation of all Jews, into “New Jew” (which later become Israelis). This bodily transformation into New Jews meant that their “Arabness” was no longer compatible with their new Jewish identity, attached to the state of Israel. Ella Shohat argues that the “ruptures” were not simply physical (the actual movement across borders) but also a cultural and conceptual, in which time, space, history and geography were conceived. These conceptualized borders constructed by Zionist discourse, created binarism of “savagery versus civilization, tradition versus modernity, East versus West, and Arab versus Jew.”<sup>199</sup> Thus, Jews who originated from the regions of the Middle East became both embedded in and in excess of the State, and abandoned their cultural traditions in order to become the “New Jew.” The rise of Arab nationalism during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as in the context of Jewish nationalism through the Zionist movement, the creation of Israel rendered Arab-Jews’ existence virtually impossible. However, this signified a new dynamic for Arab-Jews: While their country of origin, such as Yemen or Iraq, rendered them as the minority, they have now become part of the dominant power and have a stronger sense of national belonging. However, their “Arabness” became a permanent marker of racial otherness and represented an excess: “If in the Arab world, prior to their ‘exodus’ their Jewishness (associated now with Zionism) was subjected to surveillance, in Israel, their affiliated with an Arab cultural geography was similarly disciplined and punished.”<sup>200</sup> They have a dialectic relationship

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<sup>199</sup> Shohat, “Introduction,” On *The Arab-Jew, Palestine and Other Displacements*, 7.

<sup>200</sup> Shohat, “Introduction,” On *The Arab-Jew, Palestine and Other Displacements*, 13.

with Israel, where the state is dependent on them to not only fulfill the demographics of Jews vs. Arabs, but to be the non-native, non-white presence that it needs to define itself as a white nation.

Zionist discourse racialized the Mizrahim as “natural workers” and disposable labor, who were “accustomed” to difficult conditions and could sustain land work without complaints. Scholars such as Zachary Lockman and Gershon Shafir emphasize how Labor Zionists, mainly of European Ashkenazi Jews, stressed the necessity of transforming Diaspora Jews, especially Arab-Jews, through “productive labor,” especially agricultural labor.<sup>201</sup> Rather than rely solely on the labor of the “natives” (Palestinians), like other European colonial regimes, Zionists sought to replace Palestinian workers, with a population of Arab-Jews into laborers, mainly Yemenites. In an issue of the Ha-Zvi newspaper in the early 1900s, Yemenite people were considered “simple, natural workers” and were compared to the fellahin (Palestinian village): “they [the Yemenites] can take the place of the Arabs.” Labor Zionists constructed Yemenite workers as “merely workers,” socially ‘primeval matter”, while Ashkenazi workers were portrayed as “creative” and “idealists, able to be devoted to the ideal, to create new molds and new content of life.”<sup>202</sup> In fact, Labor Zionists considered Yemenite the ideal imported laborers whose immigration was encouraged during the Second Aliya only when Ashkenazi workers could not compete with Arab ones. Yemenite workers were paid low wages, comparable to the salaries of Palestinians. There was no attempt for solidarity between Eastern European Labor Zionists and Yemenite workers. According to Shafir, the position of the Yemenite Jews in Palestine marks not only the inequities

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<sup>201</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (University of California Press, 1996); Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, (University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>202</sup> Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims." *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (1988), 14.

embedded in the labor Zionist strategy, but also how hierarchies in one sector created inequities in another.<sup>203</sup>

The concept of “natural workers” with “minimal needs,” was exploited by Ben Gurion, as well as Arthur Ruppin, an early Zionist figure who became the “Father of Jewish Sociology” and founder of Tel Aviv University, who quoted: Recognizable in them [Yemeni Jews] is the touch of Arab blood, and they have a very dark color.”<sup>204</sup> Zionists capitalized on this idea of “Jews in the form of Arabs,” by appealing to Yemenite laborers to replace Arab laborers, constructing them as “healthy” with “strong legs;” this form of “quasi-eugenic selection” became a part of Israel’s larger immigration policies. In fact, all immigrants from Yemen – unlike most other countries – came under the Labor category. Yemenite immigrants were perceived as simply “laborers” and were excluded from socialist benefits afforded to European workers. Labor Zionism, through the General Federation of Labor (Histadrut), tried to prevent Yemenis from owning land or joining cooperatives, thus limiting them to the role of wage-earners. This impacted the sexual division of labor, where Yemenite women and adolescent girls were constructed as a replacement to Arab women household servants, who work at “high salaries,” for families of Jewish colonists. Thus, from the onset, Yemenite immigrants, and Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews generally, were never constructed to be the beneficiaries of the Israeli nation-state, but rather, as disposable labor to benefit the nation.

Along with being naturalized as “workers” and “disposable labor,” Zionists claimed that death for Mizrahim was a “common” and a “natural” occurrence. This naturalization of death for Yemenites in particular, impacted the ways that the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair disseminated and circulates today. Sarah Shimon and Yehudit Harandish’s testimonials

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<sup>203</sup> Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, 13

<sup>204</sup> Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel,” 16.

illustrate how their racial marker of “Persianness” and “Arabness” impacted how the nurses perceived them, as mothers who could not take care of their children. This led to the “death” of their children almost instantly, making it suspicious. This belief that death for the Mizrahim as naturalized becomes more apparent in the experiences of Mizrahi immigrants in transit camps. For instance, Michael Kaftori, former secretary of the Atlit immigration camp, recalls that as a result of enduring a trek across the desert and arriving undernourished to the camps, many Yemenite children died before even reaching Israel. In fact, the child mortality rate in Yemen during this time was around 50 percent. Kaftori responds that because many of the children that did arrive in the Atlit camp malnourished and suffered from diseases, they had to be quarantined in the camp: “Some of the children were so weak they had no strength left to cry.”

### **The Creation of the “New Jew”**

The Jewish Agency<sup>205</sup> was primarily responsible for fostering the immigration (Aliyah) and absorption of new Jewish immigrants, by placing them into transition housing in “absorption centers” throughout the country. The Absorption department, now called the Aliyah and Absorption department, was responsible for the immigration and integration of Jews coming to Israel. Many of the immigrants who came to Israel in the 1940s were immediately placed into absorption camps, designated as transit camps (ma’abarot). The three main absorption camps where Jewish immigrants from the Middle East were placed in were Bet Lid, Ein Shemer, and Rosh Ha’ayin. In these camps, the hygiene was poor, there was a lack of proper food and medical resources, and there was a widespread of diseases, including malaria. They prepared meals to meet

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<sup>205</sup> By law, the Jewish agency is a para-statal organization, but receives its core funding not by the Israeli government, but by the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), Kefen Hayesod (United Israel Appeal), major Jewish communities and federations, and foundations and donors from Israel and around the world. From “Jewish Agency Annual Report 2014.” *Jewish Agency*.

the immigrants' caloric needs, and in April 1949, the government felt pressured to impose rationing of food and other consumer goods. The health of the most susceptible, including a large percentage of children, deteriorated rapidly. Tsvi Hermon, of the Absorption Department, told the Zionist executive that conditions in the camps were unacceptable: "it is not an exaggeration to say that conditions were better in the refugee camps in Germany, after the war."<sup>206</sup> According to some, the camps "reflect one of the most ironic failures in the world – Jews keeping other Jews in camps," referencing the ironies of the Holocaust. "It seems they have not learned anything from their own tragedy."<sup>207</sup>

Haim Sadok,<sup>208</sup> who was the head of the Jewish Agency's Department for Oriental Immigrants, described the transit camp in the following words:

Nearly all of the thousands of immigrants at Perdessia [one of the transit camps] had malaria and each night at least a dozen died. Year old tots looked like newborns. Many mothers, themselves ill, were apathetic about the babies and others staunchly refused modern medicine. Babies had to be sent to hospitals throughout the country. There were tens of thousands of people in the camps and children often had several first names. When taken to the infirmary the babies were emaciated and their heads shaved. Once fatter, with hair and well dressed, the parents often failed to recognize them. Children were sent from hospital to hospital and it was hard to keep track of them in the general confusion that reigned. In 1949, 250 nurses cared for over 7,000 very ill Yemenite babies. In such conditions it would be amazing if there weren't lost babies.<sup>209</sup>

David Ben-Gurion, first Israeli Prime Minister, similarly described the state in which the immigrants arrived in a 1949 entry of his diary: "The Yemenite children are dying like flies. We must save them. Even here in Israel their mortality rate is high, but there is more efficient and reliable treatment."<sup>210</sup> This state is remnant of a similar rhetoric of rescue discussed earlier. Rather

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<sup>206</sup> Segev, 1949, 158.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. 159.

<sup>208</sup> Weiss, "The Immigrating Body," 96. According to Meira Weiss' article The Immigrating Body, Haim Sadok's own family had come to Jerusalem from Yemen when he was 15 and who was an immigration emissary in Yemen in the mid 1940s.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 96.

than recognizing the rising of deaths amongst children as part of a dangerous migration to Israel, this statement constructs Israel as the place of modernity and the place in which the Mizrahim, including children, can be saved. After visiting a Yemenite children's war in the then military hospital at Tel Hashomer as "one of the most horrid pictures [he has] ever seen... Children and babies lay there more resembling skeletons than living humans."<sup>211</sup> In order to preserve the Yemenite children's health, children were separated from their "unclean, disease-prone" parents and were sterilized upon entering the children's house. According to a nurse's testimony, collected by Meira Weiss: "They bathed the children in hot water, to clean them" and controlled how often mothers visited and fed their children.<sup>212</sup> These repeated descriptors of Yemenite children as ill, dirty, and "resembling skeletons rather than living humans" not only constructs Yemenite parents as unable to care for their children, but also racializes Yemenite bodies as being associated with degradation and in a state of decline. This discourse conjures up a dichotomy between Yemenite Jewry (and by extension, the Mizrahim) and Israel, between suffering and helpless on the one hand and salvation and saviors on the other. Their accent and native language as Arabic or another language other than Hebrew, supported their portrayal as "uneducated, primitive, and barbaric."<sup>213</sup> Israel depended on Yemenite immigration for two different reasons: Firstly, to fulfill the demographics of the state, which includes outnumbering the native Palestinian population since not enough European Jews immigrated to Israel. And secondly, to fulfill the religious connection that Israel desired: [the Yemenites] gave Jews from a western land a feeling of being linked directly to the time of King Solomon.<sup>214</sup> Despite this dependency on Mizrahi immigration, Israel emerged as the redeeming force, and the Mizrahim as being in excess of the state.

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>213</sup> Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal conflict*, 57.

<sup>214</sup> *Flight to Freedom*, Steven Spielberg, 1949

Zionists evoked similar language of primitivity and savagery towards Palestinians during the early years of colonization, referring to them as savages in dire need of a civilizing force. However, Zionists perceived Palestinians as a threat and hindrance to the Jewish state entirely, and a presence that needed to be eliminated: “In the exclusionary colonies of settlement, where they sought to exterminate the natives, they spoke of improving the land; the natives were part of the wild fauna that had to be eliminated.”<sup>215</sup> Unlike Palestinians, the Mizrahim can undergo a bodily transformation at a young age, which included being washed, sterilized, separated from their “diseased” prone parents, and kidnapped, to become a part of the Israeli settler colonial state.

As a result of this widespread of disease and malnutrition, many Mizrahi children and babies were taken to nearby hospitals for medical treatment. Many of the children and babies were separated from their parents immediately upon arrival in the camps, because they believed that the conditions were better in baby houses. According to Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber, the nurses and doctors viewed parents who refused to be separated from their children as “troublemakers” and repeatedly told them that they were doing what was “best for them.”<sup>216</sup> An article written in 1966 in *Davar* - a Hebrew-language newspaper published during the era of the British mandate and continued until 1996 – argues that Yemenite immigrants brought disease into Israel from their homeland, suggesting that Yemenites were less civilized than their European counterparts and did not have “proper hygiene” as the Europeans did, a similar trope circulated in other settler colonial nations. The article argues that Yemenite immigrants were not only “disease ridden,” but that they were “ignorant of basic baby care such as bathing or changing a diaper,” a similar belief that the Mizrahim were incapable of taking care of their own.<sup>217</sup> The author continues, suggesting that the

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<sup>215</sup> M. Shahid Alam, *Israeli Exceptionalism: The destabilizing logic of Zionism*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21

<sup>216</sup> Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal conflict*, 80.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 81.

staff at the camp had to teach Mizrahi mothers how to take care of their children: “In one of the camps, there was a special arrangement: all of the babies were put in beds in the windows so the family members could watch them. Many families were taking turns watching their babies by the window, this way they could see for the first time in their life how to bathe a baby and how to change a baby’s diaper.”<sup>218</sup> Below the quote is an image of a nurse teaching three Yemenite immigrant mothers how to diaper their babies at the Rosh Ha’ayin camp.

Sadok’s statement portrays how Yemenite immigrants underwent a form of conditioning that involved shaving their babies’ heads and changing the way that they look and dress. Part of abandoning their “Arabness” meant to undergo this form of conditioning in order to appear less Arab and more European. This is a form of biopolitics that is concerned with constructing a particular Israeli body for the national collectivity. This is a part of what Meira Weiss calls, “the culture of the chosen body,” which she argues, is the way that Israeli society has been regulating bodies as part of an ongoing constructive of its collective identity.<sup>219</sup> When Levi Eshkol stated in 1949 that, “Israel is a small country and cannot take in all the crazy Jews in the world,” he was referring to the mentally ill, the physically weak or ill, and the aged. The reason for this is because Israel “need[s] workers and fighters.”<sup>220</sup> Since before 1948, this “culture of the chosen body” is concerned with constructing a collective of “new persons,” embodied in the “trope of the ‘pioneer’ (halutz): secular, strong, masculine, healthy and physically perfect.”<sup>221</sup> Many Zionists emphasized the need for a group of “laborers” to replace what Zionists called the “Arab work problem,” and to be a permanent working-class population. However, this fixation to create a “strong” and “healthy” nation is in response to Jewish pathologization in Europe. Theodor Herzl argued that

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<sup>218</sup> Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal conflict*, 82

<sup>219</sup> Weiss, “The Immigrating Body,” 100

<sup>220</sup> Segev, 1949, 139.

<sup>221</sup> Weiss, “The Immigrating Body,” 104

anti-Semitism was a “comprehensible response to a specific social irritant, rather than as a symptom of Europe’s continuing anti-Jewish pathology.”<sup>222</sup> Thus, Zionists believed that securing Jewish autonomy in Palestine would “normalize” the Jewish nation amongst a community of nations, contrasting the “abnormal,” marginalized status they had in Europe. Because the essential figure of the Jewish collectivity was conceived as traditionally disembodied, Zionism emerged as a revolutionary attempt to “re-embody the Jew.”<sup>223</sup>

This eugenics argument of limiting Aliyah to “healthy” Jewish immigrants, extended towards racializing Jewish immigrants from the Middle East, including those from North Africa, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran. European Jews referred to the Mizrahim as “handicapped,” supposed by their “Oriental, illiterate, despotic, sexist, and generally premodern formation in their lands of origin, as well as by their propensity for generating large families.”<sup>224</sup> Arthur Ruppin similarly argued that in order to “purify” the Jewish race, it is “desirable that only the racially pure come to the land [of Israel].”<sup>225</sup> Ben Gurion similarly stated that that his desire to create Israel as a “Switzerland of the Middle East.”<sup>226</sup> Rather than challenge the discriminatory and racist ethos that excluded, pathologized, and marginalized Jewish people within Europe, Zionists internalized and reproduced this exclusionary logic in order to become European. Because the racialization of Jewish people as “rootless and parasitic” is inherent to the political project of the West, and specifically Europe, racializing Arab-Jews for being Arab and Jewish is necessary for Zionists to bring Europe to the Middle East.

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<sup>222</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland: The Old-New Land*, (Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994), xxvi.

<sup>223</sup> Meira Weiss, *The Chosen Body: The Politics of the Body in Israeli Society* (Stanford University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>224</sup> Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel,” 22.

<sup>225</sup> Seth J. Franzman, “Israel’s Uncomfortable History of Racist Engineering.” *Forward*. April 21, 2014, Last Accessed: February 5, 2020. <https://forward.com/opinion/196719/israel-s-uncomfortable-history-of-racist-engineer/>

<sup>226</sup> Franzman, “Israel’s Uncomfortable History of Racist Engineering,” 2014.

To become part of this new Jewish collectivity, the Mizrahim needed to abandon or “cleanse” their Arabic origins entirely, evident in Avraham Nissim’s testimonial. In his testimony, he describes being encouraged to “get in the car” of an Israeli Jeep at the age of five and a half, with his sister Judith (who was eight and a half then), thinking that this was “a fun trip for the children of the transit camp.” He did not realize that he was being taken to a kibbutz, a communal Israeli settlement, where he was told: “There is no more home, we’re going to kibbutz.” He was introduced to a man and a woman who said to him and his sister: “From this day on these are your mother and father.” While living with them, they forced him to change his name from Sabah (his Iraqi name) to Shahar and they encouraged him to stay with them so that him and his sister can receive “good education, clothing and food.”<sup>227</sup> The act of changing his name with Arabic origins to a more Hebrew sounding name was a part of conditioning the body of Mizrahi children, and the process of “whitening” of Yemenite immigrants. In a report entitled “Where are Our Children,” Dr. Dov Levitan, a Danish born Bar-Ilan University lecturer and one of Israel’s leading experts on the case of the missing children, argues that social Zionists who ran Israel during its early years aimed to forcibly replace the Yemenites’ traditional values with Western, secular norms: “Sidelocks were routinely cut, tefillin confiscates,” in order to cut ties with their families and larger ethnic group. Young Israeli children were taught to despise their parents, who were perceived as “primitives” who “couldn’t take care of themselves or their children.”<sup>228</sup> This transformation of Mizrahi bodies as children – by cleaning, sterilizing, and eventually, kidnapping Yemenite children – is part and parcel of the early Zionist mission to “cure” the pathological state of Diasporic Jews, and “re-embody the Jew.” However, many of the Mizrahim resisted this

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<sup>227</sup> Avraham Nissim, Testimony on behalf of self, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/nissim-avraham/>

<sup>228</sup> Yolande Knell, "Missing Babies: Israel's Yemenite children affair," BBC News. June 21 2017. Last Accessed: April 28, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-40342143>

“whitening” process. Avraham Nissim recalls in his testimonial that he resisted his new name, “refused to call strangers ‘father’ and ‘mother’” and purposely did not perform well in school, which he today admits may be due to undiagnosed dyslexia. This resistant to his new name, as well as his refusal to call his adopted parents’ mother and father, are reminders of the Israeli impositions and denials, a kind of intervention into haunting that “disrupt how we understand what constitutes history.”

The emphasis of constructing a society of “New Jews” is largely a reproductive politics issue. The focus of producing a “healthy” society is dependent on reproducing healthy and physically fit children. Upon their arrival, Israel constructed Jewish immigrants from the Middle East as “unfit for parenthood” and believed that they depended on Israel to “rescue” their children. For Israel would be the land where the “children of the Yemenites would grow big and tall” and “would belong.”<sup>229</sup> This portrayal of Arab-Jews as “bad parents” because of their primitive origins helped create the discourse of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan, Children Affair. Dr. Don Levitan’s remarks also suggests that because the Mizrahim could not care for their children as well as Israel can, the kidnapping of their children and sending them for adoptions did not constitute an egregious and violent act. These discourses are also produced by the Mizrahim’s lack of political and economic success in Israel as well as Ashkenazi groups, rather than structural racism. Similarly, the repeated descriptions of themselves and their camps as “dirty,” and their children as “malnourished” and “diseased” naturalizes these racialized constructs as inherent to Yemenite bodies. In fact, they depend on Israel to remove them from this state of primitivity caused by being Arab. This rhetoric is repeated throughout many of the testimonials.

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<sup>229</sup> *Flight to Freedom*, Steven Spielberg, 1949.

## **The Story of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair**

“After I heard that my child was dead, I screamed and cried and said that I wanted to see his body. The doctor kicked me out and said, ‘Get out of here.’ I went to my husband, my siblings and family, and told them the boy was dead.”

Rumia Sharabi of the Salem family from Yemen, testifies about the kidnapping of her son David Hasan. She immigrated to Israel in 1949 with her husband and her two-year-old son David Hasan Salem, where they went immediately to Ein Shemer camp via the Jewish Agency. After several days in the tents, several nurses came and took her child David along with several other children on the claim that they “did not know how to care for [their] children and that they would do it better.”<sup>230</sup> Shocked that they just took her child from her, she trusted that after the long and grueling journey on air and foot, they would take care of him. She visited him daily in the nursery, where she would “play with him, care for him, and wash his clothes,” and sometimes even take him home. Later that year it snowed heavily for three days, which prevented her from visiting him. After the snow slowed down, Rumia went to visit him one day, but unfortunately, arrived late. The nurses did not let her, and some of the other parents who were with Rumia, see their children. Rumia went to a window where she could see the children eating and saw her son David through the window. She recalls hearing David clearly asking the nurse for another cookie: “More, more.” The nurse snapped at him: “Enough! There isn’t any more.” In her testimony, which is accompanied by a video, Rumia states painfully, while looking down, that she “recall[s] those words of his well until this day.” She says this as tears fill up her eyes.

On another day, Rumia went to visit her son just like any other day, with several other parents. She found the front door shut and they were not letting any of the parents in. She went around the building where she ran into a doctor who asked her, “who are you looking for?” She

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<sup>230</sup> Rumia Sharabi, Testimonial on behalf of self and son David Hasan Salem, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/rumia-sharabi/>.

responded with, “my son.” The doctor answered simply and coldly, “the child died... all of the children who die are sent to the office.” Shocked with what he just said, she pleaded with him to let her see her son. Without any sympathy of Rumia learning the fate of her son, the doctor kicked her out, yelling “Get out of here.” The following day, she went into the office where they announce on the loudspeaker the names of the children who had died. She sat there, praying that they would not say her son’s name. Eventually, her son’s name was announced, and she went to the office as she was told to. She pleaded with the nurses, “where is the boy, what happened to him? You called his name.” She was told, “There is no boy,” and continued to tell her to go home. It was as if David Hasan Salem had not existed. They refused to show her his body and did not give her a death certificate. But she pleaded, “you called his name.” The doctors and nurses showed no sympathy towards Rumia, and to her, that marked the end of finding out what happened to David. She did not know what had happened. One day he was healthy, and the next they had told her that he died, she expresses in the video, still shocked by what had happened. However, she accepted the fate of his death.<sup>231</sup>

This final section pieces together archival fragments and testimonials by the Mizrahim, publicized on Amram’s website, to tell their personal story of their missing child and to theorize the collective memory of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair. Avery Gordon reminds us that the haunting operates in between the context of what it is that we cannot see and what we know.<sup>232</sup> Rather than try to “recover” the history and knowledge of the affair, I examine the testimonials as evidence of the affair, but also pay attention to how they understand what happened to their children in the context of disappearance, reproduction, and state secrecy.

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<sup>231</sup> Rumia Sharabi, Testimonial on behalf of self and son David Hasan Salem, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/rumia-sharabi/>.

<sup>232</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 79.

Amram's work of recovering knowledge of the disappeared and making public what has happened to them is considered crucial political work, as it not only creates the conditions for solidarity for the Mizrahim, but gives an alternative perspective to the state's narrative.

The loss of her son still feels like an "open wound" for Rumia, where she grieves over her son until this day. Eighteen years from the day that she was told that David died, Rumia and her family were living in Ramat HaSharon, where they received a draft order to serve in the Israeli military for the child David Hasan Salem. After several days later, the Israeli military came to look for their son, in which they told them that he had died. If David Hasan Salem died years before, why would they come looking for him? Rumia and her family went to the police, so that they would investigate and brought his certificate of immigration with the details of the boy. She states, "the certificate is still with the police to this day, or maybe it got lost." Confused, Rumia believes that she was not told the full story of what happened to David Hasan Salem and insists on finding out.

Haunting is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence makes itself known. Haunting suggests that something did not only happen, but that it is still happening today. Although Rumia does not know what exactly happened to or the whereabouts of her son, David, she believes that he did not die, but has disappeared. According to the testimonials, the pattern of the children's disappearance is similar. The children arrive with their parents to the immigrant camps, where they were required to be separated – the parents go to the tents and the children are required to stay in the nurseries. The parents go to the nursery to visit their child where they are no longer found. The doctors and nurses who are there tell them that their child has died, without presenting a death certificate or the body. Like the other testimonies indicate, Rumia denies that her son David Hasan Salem died, and believes that he was abducted. She describes him

not as dead but as disappeared, common in many of the testimonies. The abduction of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan children is not only a violent and haunting experience for the families, but a matter of what Michael Taussig calls a “public secret,” which is something known but unspoken and unacknowledged – it “cannot be articulated.”<sup>233</sup>

Rumia Sharabi’s comment about the moment she knew it “marked the end of finding out what happened to David” is a common sentiment in many of the testimonials, especially after finding out their child died. This comment alludes to how widespread death was amongst the children of immigrants, that many believed it without questioning what happened to their children. Dr. Don Levitan expresses that “When they were told the child had passed away, they were used to it, it was a part of life.”<sup>234</sup> “Bureaucratic chaos” has been used as an excuse to justify the widespread death and missing of the children of the Mizrahim. Children were separated from their families upon arrival into Israel, some even before, and many parents could not locate their children afterwards. Babies and toddlers who got sick in the tents were immediately taken to hospitals to “recuperate” and were identified using ID numbers written on name tags – many of which were misplaced or inaccurate. Many of the immigrants who arrived in Israel could not speak Hebrew and thus, made it difficult to find their children or interact with medical professionals. An incident, that was not publicized in the media but is spoken amongst the Mizrahim is the “bus of forty,” from Atlit, Israel, in which forty mothers were asked to bring their babies to Jerusalem for “vaccinations” and promised that they would be back the next day. Forty children never came back.<sup>235</sup> The nurses blamed the parents for writing their child’s name incorrectly or that it was a

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<sup>233</sup> Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*, (Stanford University Press, 1999), 75.

<sup>234</sup> Seth J. Frantzman, "The Tragedy and shame of 1950s Israel's treatment of Yemenite children," *Jerusalem Post*, December 29, 2016, Last accessed: April 20, 2020.

<sup>235</sup> *Ceased to Be*, directed by Idit Ben Shimol (2018, Tel Aviv, Israel: Black Sheep Film Productions), Documentary

result of a miscommunication since Yemenite names were similar or Ashkenazi doctors did not understand them. The Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO), was responsible for taking care of some of the children. WIZO withheld many of the children without informing their parents, and when the parents tried to investigate, they had no idea that they might be in WIZO institutions.

Rumia concludes her heartbreaking testimony with: "I hope that with your help we will be able to investigate the truth regarding of the fate of our son." Rumia is calling for the spectator (the reader of her testimony) to witness her suffering to cultivate collective action in finding her son. She locates her pain alongside others who have similarly gone through this traumatic event: "we heard and read that there were such children... searches for the lost Yemeni children had begun." Thus, rather than understand Rumia's pain and family trauma as a private event, I situate it as something relation, and alongside the other testimonies that call for the spectator to "bear witness" to their suffering. This can perhaps open up a "space of plurality" where the spectator feels called to take part in "new conditions for moral action."<sup>236</sup> Rumia's trauma of not only losing her son unexpectedly, but the draft notes that occurred years later, calls into question the events that occurred years prior when she first tragically lost her son. This trauma is a collective trauma. Journalist Yael Zadok interviewed many families who had similar experiences as Rumia explains how rampant the trauma was. While interviewing second generation children, they told her that at that time, "when a stranger knocked at the door, the mothers hid their children under the couch so they wouldn't kidnap them too."<sup>237</sup> John Beverly describes that in testimonio (testimony), "something is asked of us (the spectator)" – that we are "in effect, interpellated *from* the subaltern

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<sup>236</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 144.

<sup>237</sup> *Ceased to Be*, directed by Idit Ben Shimol, 2018

(emphasis from original).”<sup>238</sup> Rumia’s insistence of “with your help,” calls attention to the spectator to take part in bearing witness to the affair as a form of state sanctioned kidnapping of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children, but also forces the spectator out of a place of complacency. She narrates her story by using “I and many parents” multiple times, to show how the abduction of her son is part of a collective address – in some ways, she is speaking for the other parents whose stories are not in the testimonies. This collective address, as well as her plea for an investigation, shifts her from being an object of suffering to one calling for solidarity.

David and Sham’a Shuker began their immigration journey to Israel in 1949 from Yemen. Sham’a gave birth to her daughter, Miriam Shuker in January of 1950, at the transit camp of Rosh Ha’Ayin. When Miriam turned three years old, she fell sick and her parents took her to the hospital. She was transferred between multiple hospitals in Israel and as a result, her traces were lost. Her father, David Shuker, traveled public transportation across Israel to search for her, until one day a doctor notified him that she died. Like Rumia Sharabi, as soon as Miriam was supposed to have turned 18, the family received tax payments and a military draft for her, causing the family to question her death. They began a search, writing letters to government offices and filed police complaints, as well as attending and giving witness to, the first commission of inquiry (Bahalul-Minkovski) with no luck. He learned several years later, after hiring a lawyer, that Miriam Shuker was alive and was adopted by a family in Israel. After realizing she was adopted and her biological parents were searching for her Miriam agreed to take part in an interview with journalist Yigal Mashiah in 1996, who at the time was writing a series of articles about the child abductions. In the interview, Miriam explains I did not know I was kidnapped. I did not know my biological father, David Shuker, searched for me all of these years. I did not know anything?” She also collectively

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<sup>238</sup> John Beverly, “Introduction: Testimony and Empire.” *Testimonio: On politics of truth*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 2.

bears witness to the child abductions, situating her and her family's trauma as part of a collective trauma amongst Yemenite immigrants: I think all of this affair is not just a private affair, between me and myself, this story needs to be told, this is the business of all the Jewish people. This is an awful historic chapter that needs to be passed on. This is why we decided, me and my mother, that it is better to go public."<sup>239</sup>

Miriam's story is a unique one, as it is one of the few in the testimonials on Amram in which the adoptee chose to come forward and tell her story. At the age of twelve, Miriam's (now Adina) adopted mother, told her the secret that she was adopted: "Imagine, a girl growing up knowing that her mother had abandoned her," Miriam (Adina) describes, in an interview, where she discusses the psychological trauma of growing up feeling neglected.<sup>240</sup> However, as an adult, she learned about her biological family and the story of her adoption, and realized she was not abandoned. A physician told her adopted parents, who struggled to have a child during this time, of an abandoned girl (Miriam) left in a hospital in Rosh Ha'Ayin and adopted her through WIZO. When Miriam (Adina) became an adult, she received a call from Ella Balas from the Ministry of Welfare to notify her of her biological parents. Miriam (Adina) Shuker shares how anxious she felt doing two different interviews, 8 years after she learned of her adoption and met her biological parents. She continued to have a relationship with them, which she kept secret from her adopted mother for 8 years, in fear of hurting her. She advocates for other adoptees to come forward, expose themselves as adoptees, and search for their biological families: "I call on the adoptees to expose themselves for the sake of both sides. The world of the biological parents will be filled when they meet with the children." Miriam (Adina) is calling for adoptees to come forward to bear witness

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<sup>239</sup> Miriam Shuker, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: May 25, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/miriam-shuker/>.

<sup>240</sup> Miriam Shuker, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: May 25, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/miriam-shuker/>.

that there was a possibility of a state-sanctioned kidnapping that separated families of recent Mizrahi immigrants. Miriam's testimonial includes images her meeting with her sister for the very first time, as well as the ads where it reveals how her biological father David Shuker, tried to search for her since she went missing. These images of the meeting, as well as the ad, also "bear truthful witness" to the events that took place, despite Israel's secrecy and denial of the Children's Affair.

Miriam's (Adina) call for adoptees to expose themselves also is about acknowledging the "open wounds" that this affair has created for multiple parties, for both the adoptees and the families of the abducted children. The testimonials on Amram that commonly share that this affair is an "open wound" and that after 60 years later, the events still produce a "living and painful trauma," indicates that families cannot find closure from the affair. Part of this is that many of the families know that something happened to their child (kidnapped, possibly died), but they are not given any proof (the body, death certificate, a proper burial or grave). Many of the families insist that their child(ren) I (are) missing or "disappeared," rather than died. In the testimonial, there is a photo of Miriam, sitting down, staring at the camera, and smiling. She is about 8 or 9 years old in the photo. The other photos are of adult Miriam (Adina) with her adult biological sister Esther, photos that signify one of their first meetings. These images in the testimonial furnish a type of evidence that proves the existence of something that is doubted or often silenced – in this case, the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair – and suddenly the disappeared child appears or is now "real." In Miriam's (Adina) case, she found her biological family; however, for many other Mizrahi families, their children remain disappeared.

Many of the testimonies posted on Amram include photographs to accompany their testimonials. Some of these photos include images of the families when they lived in their countries of origin or photographs of when they first immigrated to Israel. Some of the photographs are of

their child that disappeared – a plea by the family that they existed. In Herzel Buaron’s testimonial about his brother Eli, he expresses that his parents’ experiences were “like many others” –a collective address, an indication that something systemic happened, and that they are not alone. In his testimonial, he testifies that the lack of details surrounding his brother’s disappearance “kept haunting [him] all these years.”<sup>241</sup> His testimonial is accompanied by six images, including an individual photo of his father, his mother Julia Buaron, a photo of his parents and Herzel when he was a child, and a group photo of what appears to be his other siblings. The final image includes a picture of Herzel Buaron. In the picture, Herzel is looking directly at the camera and has a smile on his face. He is holding a photograph of his brother Eli, as a baby. His earlier statement of being “haunted” is manifested in this photo, where the ghost of Eli emerges as something “real.” Herzel’s physical act of holding a photograph of him is an affirmation of Eli’s existence and that something happened to him. Gordon explains, “when photographs appear in contexts of haunting, they become part of the contest between familiarity and strangeness, between hurting and healing, that the ghost is registering.”<sup>242</sup> By holding the photograph of his brother to every spectator who witnesses his testimonial, Herzel is not only insisting that his brother is real and existed in this world, but becomes a means of healing and remembrance of Eli. The disappearance of Eli no longer is a private form of trauma, but rather, a path towards collective healing for the Mizrahim, since it is accompanied by many other testimonials of families who have similarly chosen include photographs of their missing children. When someone views his online testimonial and the photos, they become the spectators. As we bear witness to Herzl’s pain, which simultaneously is his family’s and the remaining families’ on Amram pain, via their testimonials, the ghosts call out to

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<sup>241</sup> Eli Buaron, Testimonial on behalf of Herzel Buaron, Last Accessed: July 8, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/eli-buaron/>

<sup>242</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 103.

us to take part in “new conditions for moral action.” Ariella Azoulay reminds us that we cannot avoid looking at these stories – we must look, for there is a responsibility inherent to the witnessing of the image.<sup>243</sup>

The ghosts that emerge from the photograph that he is holding is revealed in Herzl’s uneasiness about the events that happened for his brother to disappear – “I would like to get the true details about my brother... if he died, where was he buried and when? Can I get an answer at least?”<sup>244</sup> While Herzl is moving towards healing through the holding of his brother’s photo, the uneasiness of his “disappearance,” rather than his death, continues to haunt him. Thus, these photographs that many families including Herzl portray to the viewer, the “knowing and not knowing that is characteristic of disappearance, its terror, and its political power.” The photos not only tell a personal family story, but rather tell the story of the violence of the Israeli state, and how the kidnapping of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children is not only a violent chapter of Israel’s past but rather integral to its nation-state formation.

Rather than argue that the disappearance of these children was a result of “bureaucratic chaos” or the failure of the Jewish Agency to protect them, I argue that the kidnapping of Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan Children must be situated against the backdrop of the racist attitudes that Israeli officials, doctors and nurses had against these new Jewish immigrants. For instance, the executive director of the Jewish Agency, Giorga Yoseftal referred to them as part of the lower class, in his words, the “lumpenproletariat,” and said they were nothing but “human material” – sickly, dirty, disease-ridden as explained earlier, who were, as Arthur Ruppin explained, “a valuable element for Palesitne... cheap labor.”<sup>245</sup> As an immigrant from Yemen,

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<sup>243</sup> Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 287.

<sup>244</sup> Eli Buaron, Testimonial on behalf of Herzl Buaron, Last Accessed: July 8, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/eli-buaron/>.

<sup>245</sup> Seth J. Frantzman, The Tragedy and shame of 1950s Israel's treatment of Yemenite children," *Jerusalem Post*,

Israeli doctors and nurses read Rumia Sharabi as not fit to take care of her child: “The nurses... took the children on the claim that we did not know how to care for our children and that they would do it better.” In 1950, David Ben Gurion writes to the Chief of Staff Yadin that “the Yemenite father doesn’t take care of his children as we do,” and that “he doesn’t feed them until he’s eaten his fill.” The images of the children at the camps as sick and dirty constructed their families as negligent or capable of abandoning or not wanting their children. This racist attitude constructed the dichotomy that the Mizrahim cannot care for their children, and the Ashkenazim as those who can, emerging here as the saviors. This justified the kidnapping of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan children and giving them for adoption to Ashkenazi families.

The fabrication of the Mizrahim as “bad parents,” re-emerges later during the committees to investigate the kidnapping, partially as a means to silence claims of the parents that their children were kidnapped. In these meetings, some state institutional workers testified in some cases that Yemenite parents “were not interested in their children.” Similarly, when one nurse from WIZO was asked: “Did you really believe that the Yemenite parents didn’t come get their children [from the WIZO institutions]?” She testified, “yes, we were told they didn’t want them.”<sup>246</sup> Since the 1960s, there has been a broad outcry in the form of rallies, protests and appeals to the government, and has been the subject of public debate every few years. Since then, three formal inquiry committees and one public inquiry committee was established to investigate the mystery of the missing children. In Israel, the state can commission two types of bodies to conduct public investigations: a commission of inquiry (Va’adat Bedika) and an official public investigative commission (Va’adat Hakira Mamlachtit); the latter is far more powerful because it is appointed

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December 29, 2016, Last accessed: April 20, 2020.

<sup>246</sup> *Ceased to Be*, directed by Idit Ben Shimol, 2018

by the prime minister, it has subpoena power, and holds discussion open to public observation.<sup>247</sup>

A commission of inquiry, however, can be proposed by any minister, it has no subpoena power, and holds closed door discussions without public oversight to assure balanced representation.

The first official response by the Israeli government was the Bahalul-Minkovski Commission in 1967-1968, a commission of inquiry, pushed forward by the Yemenite community after numerous protests. After examining the cases of 343 missing children, they determined behind closed doors that 316 of the children had died, 4 were placed for adoption under legally questionable circumstances, and 22 cases remained under investigation. The Yemenite community felt that the commission served to pacify the families calling for investigation of the missing babies. The second investigation was in 1988, where Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir appointed a second commission of inquiry, headed by Justice Moshe Shalgi, in response to another wave of massive pressure from the Yemenite community. The Shalgi Commission dragged its investigation for six years and did not release its results until prompted by the Rabbi Meshulam revolt in March 1994. Rabbi Meshulam's revolt comprised of Rabbi Meshulam and a group of Yemenites to protest the way that Israel is handling the Affair, by establishing a weapon cashed at his house in an attempt to "force the Israeli government to appoint a public investigative commission to properly investigate the kidnappings." As a response, the Israeli police and army personnel surrounded Rabbi Meshulam's home for over a month, finally mounting an armed attack on May 10, 1994. During the attack, police shot and killed 19-year-old Shlomi Asulin, a student of Rabbi Meshulam. Several people including Rabbi Meshulam were arrested and served five years prison sentences.

As a response to the negative media attention as a result of this incident, the Israeli government released the Shalgi Commission's findings, which resulted in a public investigative

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<sup>247</sup> Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal conflict*, 6.

commission shortly after. The Shalgi Commission findings revealed that of the 301 new cases investigated, 14 children disappeared from the Hashed Transit camp in Yemen, 222 children had died, and 65 cases remained unknown. However, there was no effort to locate the children or continue to investigate the 65 remaining cases. Dov Shilanski, who had overseen testimony given, reveals: “I personally believe, in contradiction to the Shalgi reports, that there were more than a few cases of kidnapping of Yemenite babies.” The Shalgi Committee documents also revealed reports of autopsies on many children, which described mutilated corpses and “no organ left untouched.”<sup>248</sup> None of the parents of these children gave permission to have these autopsies and they denied giving the families the bodies of their dead children back. Ami Havov, the investigator for the Shalgi Committee argued that the Israeli authorities did not need permission to perform autopsies on the children. He stated that medical examiners “wanted to see which diseases they’d brought to Israel in order to deal with them later on.”<sup>249</sup> As a result of the negative press by the Rabbi Meshulam revolt, the Israeli government created the Kedmi Commission (1995-2001), a public investigative committee, to continue the investigation of the missing babies. After another long six years, they released their finds. Among the 406 new cases examined by the Kedmi Commission, it was revealed that 20 children had disappeared from the Hashed Transit Camp in Yemen, 391 of the babies had died, and 14 remain missing. Of the 20 babies from hashed, 7 had died and 13 were still missing.

In one of the public meetings, a vocal activist in the affair, Yigal Yosef, the mayor of Rosh Ha’ayin, claims he had a sister named Esther, who disappeared six months from a hospital in 1953 when they first immigrated to Israel. While explaining the Israeli government’s intentions behind the disappearance, he states: “The thinking at that time was, ‘these primitive Yemenites have so

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<sup>248</sup> *Ceased to Be*, directed by Idit Ben Shimol, 2018

<sup>249</sup> *Ceased to Be*, directed by Idit Ben Shimol, 2018

many children, and here are childless Holocaust survivors. So, what is the harm in taking a few?”<sup>250</sup> This not only alludes to a multitude of suffering here (Mizrahim as victims of Arab persecution and Ashkenazim as victims of the Holocaust), but also re-constructs Israel as the place of refuge for Holocaust survivors. This attitude is similarly reflected in the testimonials, many doctors and nurses even encouraging the Mizrahim to sell their children while justifying it by saying, “you can make more.”

Madeleine Eliyahu’s testimony reveals how the Israeli government targeted immigrants who arrived in Israel already pregnant. Madeleine Eliyahu immigrated to Israel in 1952 from Iraq, where she was placed in the Sharon Jalil Transit Camp. While seven months pregnant, a fire broke out into the camp, where Madeleine saved a toddler, the son of another family, while sustaining injuries herself. Two weeks later she went to the Meir Hospital in Kfar Saba, in fear that something had happened to her fetus. Alerted by her belly, the medical staff required her four days of bed rest in the designated ward, where “she was bound by her hands and feet and kept immobilized under general anesthesia.” Women in the neighboring beds mentioned to Eliyahu that the doctors repeatedly administered anesthesia injections to her whenever she had such as slightly nodded. In the next couple of days, while in the hospital, she went into labor. She went into labor while unconscious and gave birth to a baby boy. Still unconscious, the doctors took her son away from her. After she gained consciousness, four days later, she asked the doctors: “What did I bear?” The doctors told her that she gave birth to a son. She followed up, “Where is he?” to which they nonchalantly replied, “Dead.” Shocked by this unsympathetic and shocking response, she cried out, “What do you mean Dead? Dead how?” Similar to the other testimonials, she was not

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<sup>250</sup> Yolande Knell, "Missing Babies: Israel's Yemenite children affair," BBC News. June 21 2017. Last Accessed: April 28, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-40342143>.

presented with the body of her child, despite her pleas, nor was she given a death certificate. Her child vanished from her before she could even see him.

Eliyahu's testimony is striking, especially where she narrates how the women in the nearby beds warned her about the anesthesia injections. This reveals not only how common and widespread this practice was, in order for Israeli doctors and nurses to kidnap Mizrahi children, but the fear that the women experienced of simply going to the hospital. Mizrahi women had limited options in terms of delivering their child. Going into the hospital, their biggest fears are most likely of their labor or something happening to their child during labor – not being kidnapped by the doctors. When Eliyahu returns to the Sharon Jalil Transit camp without a baby, one Iraqi doctor at the camp approaches her (whom she referred to him as “one of our folks,” which presents a collectivity of Iraqi immigrants, but also sets a differentiation between other Arab immigrants and non-Arab Jews). Her scolds her for coming without a baby, shouting, I told you not to give birth there, I told you not to go to the hospital.”<sup>251</sup> This statement alone exposes that Eliyahu experience was not unique, and that this has happened to many of the Iraqi women at the camp. However, this unearths another dilemma in which Iraqi, and other Mizrahi women, have to decide whether to go to the hospital to give birth and risk having their child kidnapped, or give birth in the camp, revealing the precarity of their reproductive experiences.

Despite the Iraqi doctor's warnings, Madeleine Eliyahu gave birth to a second child at Meir Hospital several years later. While she was there, she witnessed the kidnapping firsthand of another woman's baby boy, whom Eliyahu testifies that she “heard crying and saw [the baby] alive.” She witnessed a doctor deliberately anesthetizing the woman, while another woman, not a member of the medical staff, grabbing the child from the doctor's hands. Although Eliyahu tried to protest

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<sup>251</sup> Madeleine Eliyahu, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: June 30, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/medlen-elياهو/>

and demand the baby on the woman's behalf, the doctors ignored her, dismissing her completely. Although this happened to her several years earlier, Eliyahu claims that this was the moment that she realized that the missing children was undoubtedly a set pattern of kidnappings by the doctors and nurses. It was there that she realized that this pattern of abducting Mizrahi children was a systematic abduction on behalf of the Israeli state, and not the result of bureaucratic chaos. This is also evident in the remainder of her testimony. Eliyahu narrates that after witnessing the woman's child get kidnapped in the hospital, she rushes to tell her neighbors and other women, many of whom allege that their child had also been kidnapped while giving birth in the same hospital, just like Eliyahu several years prior. In one case, when one family from Tel Aviv heard the story from Eliyahu, they suspected that their neighbor's son had been kidnapped. The mother from this family asked the mother of the alleged kidnapped child, "When did you give birth to him?" to which her reply was: "Oh, that's quite a story. I never gave birth to him, I bought him."<sup>252</sup>

Until this day, Eliyahu grieves what happened to the woman and her kidnapped son: "To this day, it hurts here (in my heart), what happened to this son." Her ability to empathize with the woman and child, as the woman's pain becomes her own pain, especially having encountered the same event years prior, is exemplary of how the kidnapping of Mizrahi children becomes the collective memory for the Mizrahim. The Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair is a shared trauma for the Mizrahim that continues to haunt their lives today, whether they experienced this kidnapping firsthand or not. Her means to relate to not only the mother, but to the kidnapped child, is a call towards what John Beverly refers to as a "desire for solidarity," and cultivates a new kind of politics based on relationality, rather than a private act of trauma.

My family did not believe that such a thing could happen in Eretz Israel, which they were longing for when they were in Aden, Yemen. The land of mil and honey. They

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<sup>252</sup> Madeleine Eliyahu, Testimony on behalf of self, Last Accessed: June 30, 2020, <https://www.edut-amram.org/en/testimonies/medlen-elياهو/>.

did not know that it had a sting, a land that kidnaps its children. (Testimonial by Malka and Nissim Oded)

I don't believe that my grandmother, the way I have come to know her for all of her integrity and innocence, could comprehend the possibility of someone doing such a thing. It was beyond her grasp. But she could not grasp the opposite situation either. You just know whether some things are true or not – it's an obvious gut feeling. Power relations didn't allow that generation's voice to be heard, but slowly, the grandchildren are rising up and demanding answers. And if not answers, then at the very least we demand memories. We have our own awareness day, since the state *still* denies the fact that this holocaust took place. In the end they'll understand that we don't really need them. The voice, the memory and the truth are only up to us. (Testimonial by Shlomi Hatuka)

During the mid 1960s, many families - recent immigrants from North Africa, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran, who arrived in Israel 15 years earlier - began receiving IDF summons for their teenage children's initial checkups. This signaled something wrong, as all the families were told that their children died as babies, years ago when they first immigrated to Israel. The draft letters from the IDF not only re-opened the wound from being told that their child died, but the families began to question whether their child had indeed died as the doctors and nurses told them. Many of the grieving families had not seen the bodies of their dead children, and many of the children were not given a proper place of burial. This is what began the investigations of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair – where during the late 1950s and 1960s, thousands of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan children of new immigrants disappeared from immigration absorption camps and allegedly given up for adoption to Ashkenazi families in Israel and abroad, including the United States and Britain.

According to many of the testimonials on Amram, what many Arab-Jewish immigrants dreamt of before landing in Israel was not their reality. The Mizrahim suffered from forced cultural erasure and assimilation by the Ashkenazim, majority of whom immigrated to Israel before the Mizrahim. Because the Ashkenazim perceived the Mizrahim as pre-modern, backwards, and

lacking whiteness, the Mizrahim had to abandon their “Arabness” in order to become part of the “New Jew” and become Israelis. However, they were still subjected to racist and Eurocentric mechanisms of discrimination, including being dehumanized as barbarous “SchwartzChaies” (Black animals in Yiddish) and were compared by David Ben-Gurion to the black slaves who were “brought” to America. Many of the testimonials acknowledge this contrast between the long-lived dreams of many immigrants and the reality that they experienced, being descendants from Arab countries. Similarly, many did not initially believe that their beloved country would kidnap their own children.

Towards the end of his testimonial, Avraham Nissim describes how when he sees “the green trees in the neighborhood, [he] knows they grew on the tears of [his] parents and their generation. Out of the painful wound of the kidnapping, [he] grew up to be a stronger person with ambition and aspirations, with the ability to love and give.” The description of the trees being watered by the tears of his parents’ generation and this shared trauma of the Mizrahim is a collective metaphor that challenges Israeli disavowals of not only the racism against the Mizrahim, but the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair. This metaphor of growing trees similarly draws attention to how contemporary Israel depends on this prior history of reproductive violence. The Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair is not only an accidental chapter during Israel’s early years or a result of “bureaucratic chaos,” but is critical to bringing Europe to the Middle East or creating a “Switzerland of the Middle East.” The abduction of Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan children and the collective trauma that the Mizrahim endure, until this very day, is a constant reminder of their subjection and second-class status in Israel, in relation to the Ashkenazim.

The political project that the Amram Foundation is conducting by publicly displaying these testimonials is a means of resistance, where the Mizrahim are challenging and breaking the silence that the Israeli state has imposed upon them for years. These testimonials are Amram, as, what Naomi Paik calls, a “counter-archive of struggle;” these testimonials have the ability to challenge the ghosts of the Children Affair, and the state secrecy of the abduction of Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan Children. Thus, these testimonials are not necessarily the truth, but a form of the truth, and an alternative to the dominant narrative imposed by the state. Paik reminds us, the giving of testimony constitutes an event of its own, beyond the mere recounting of what happened: it forms a part of the strategy of survival and self-constitution.” The stories revealed in the testimonials of the Mizrahim become ways for the families to acknowledge their grief, publicly, and move towards healing. As they are released on a public platform, for all of us to witness, their individual or familial act of pain becomes more than a private event but rather, something relational, shared by other immigrants of Arab descent. These testimonials thus, are not simply a source of evidence of the affair, but as a method to recognize the authority of racialized and colonized people in Israel to narrate their own truth. They are also a means to bear witness to the threatening and violent presence (and absence) that continues to impact their lives today, and create a new way of remembering the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair. Since many of the testimonials are gathered by descendants of the immigrants – many second and even third generation – they essentially prove that the affair is not a chapter in the past but continues to haunt and shape the present and the future Shlomi Hatuka, the chairman of the Amram Foundation and the grandson of a woman who was coerced to give up her child, writes in his testimony for his grandmother: “Power relations didn’t allow that generation’s voice to be heard, but slowly, the grandchildren are rising up and demanding answers. And if not answers, then at the very least we demand

memories.”<sup>253</sup> In their own words, they become the voice of the generation who were once silenced by the Israeli state. While their parents’ and grandparents’ tears help water the trees in the neighborhood, these activists are the fruits of the tree that remember their disappeared loved ones and that demand accountability of the Yemenite, Mizrahi, and Balkan Children Affair.

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<sup>253</sup> Tammy Riklis and Yonit Naaman, "New Web series spotlights disappeared Yemenite children," +972 Magazine. May 7, 2017. Last Accessed: June 20, 2020. <https://www.972mag.com/new-web-series-spotlights-disappeared-yemenite-children/>

### CHAPTER THREE: Zionism is a Form of [Anti-Black] Racism': Ethiopian Immigration, Sterilization, and the Depo- Provera Affair

Nirit Takele, an Ethiopian Israeli artist, presented a series of five paintings in her final exhibition at the Shenkar School of Engineering and Design in Ramat Gan, Israel in 2015. One painting, entitled *Stork*, depicts an image of dark-skinned hands carrying what appears to be a dying white stork. The eyes of the stork are closed, and head falls limply back, with the hands feeling the weight of the bird as its fingers clench tightly on its back. The wings of the bird include various hues of pink, blue and yellow, against a black backdrop, making the figure pop from the canvas. In Takele's words, the painting of the dying white stork represents the "failure of the integration of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society."

Born in Ethiopia, Takele immigrated with her family to Israel in 1991 at the young age of 6, as part of Operation Solomon,<sup>254</sup> an Israeli military operation that transported more than 14,000 Ethiopians to Israel. Takele explores her cultural heritage, illustrating the everyday life of Ethiopian Israelis, and draws inspiration from old Ethiopian sagas and folktales remembered from her youth. Her artwork has circulated on an international scale, having showcased her paintings in cities such as New York and London. Takele places dark-skinned figures at the center of her pieces: "It is natural for me to paint figures who are the same color as I am, just as a white, Western painter documents himself and his surroundings... I [want] to paint the story of the Ethiopian

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<sup>254</sup> Operation Solomon is named after King Solomon from the Bible, whom several theorists believe that Ethiopian Jews descended from. Steven Spector argues that in one of these famous and influential accounts, an elaboration on 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12, Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) descend from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. In this account, Sheba is the ruler of the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum, the birthplace of Ethiopian civilization. She visits Solomon in Jerusalem and inspired by his wisdom and good judgment, accepts the God of Israel. Solomon then tricks her into having sex with her, and she gives birth a boy called Menelik, Solomon's first born son, who later grows up and visits his father. As he departs, King Solomon commands the eldest sons of his counselors and officers to accompany Menelik back to Ethiopia, to establish a second Israelite kingdom there. Before leaving, the men steal the Ark of Covenant from the Temple, and bring it with them to Aksum. Here, the Divine Presence moves from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, becoming the new Israel. In another account of Solomon's judgment, is the dispute of the identity of the actual mother of an infant child. In this narrative, Solomon offers to split the living child in half, understanding that the true mother would prefer to lose her son to another woman than to have him killed.

community in color.”<sup>255</sup> Her artwork also conveys a gloomy picture of the social and political experiences of Ethiopian Israelis, including representations of police brutality, immigration absorption, and state and systemic racism. For instance, in her 2015 painting, she depicts an image of three men holding down a young man on the ground, portraying the 2015 beating of Ethiopian-born soldier Damas Pakada, an incident that sparked national protests in Israel around state-sanctioned violence against Black people, in connection to and in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movements in the US. Her 2016 painting, “Mikveh,” depicts the experience of an Ethiopian woman, forced to immerse herself in ritual bath under the withering eye of orthodox rabbis. This is symbolic of the doubt casted by orthodox rabbis about whether Ethiopians were Jewish or not. In the painting, the women are drenched in water, covering up their exposed bodies with their hands. Another painting, *Our Blood Donation*, illustrates three Black women sitting on a green expanse, collecting blood falling from a red-soaked sky in white bowls. This portrait represents a critical moment of the 1990s in the collective memory of Ethiopian Israelis, when they learned that the Magen David Adom, the Israeli Red Cross, secretly and deliberately destroyed thousands of units of blood donated by Ethiopian immigrants because of fear that it was contaminated with the virus that causes AIDS, a prevailing colonial construct that suggests African ‘uncivility’ and ‘primitivity’. In fact, it was not until 2016 that Ethiopian-born Israelis could donate blood. These moments do not necessarily represent despair for Takele. In an interview, she comments on *Our Blood Donation*, stating that the “women who collect in a vessel drops of blood that drips from the sky...express[es] power, the ability become strong and mark forward.”<sup>256</sup> I bring together Takele’s

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<sup>255</sup> Vered Lee, “The Ethiopian Israeli Artist Whose ‘Black Art’ Gives Power to the People,” Haaretz, May 10, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-the-ethiopian-israeli-artist-who-gives-power-to-the-people-1.7220832>

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 2019.

different representations of adversity and racism against Ethiopian Israelis to situate how these moments of anti-black state violence all signify matters of reproductive justice.

Given the symbolism of the stork as one about birth and fertility<sup>257</sup>, I begin with a description of Takele's painting of the dying stork to tell the story of the Depo-Provera Affair. In 2013, then Israeli Deputy Health Minister Yaakov Litzman admitted that doctors in transit camps and absorption centers in Israel administered Depo-Provera contraceptive shots to Ethiopian women without their consent. Depo-Provera is a contraceptive injection that contains the progesterone hormone, typically administered once every three months. The injection prevents pregnancy by stopping the production of progesterone and estrogen, which in turn inhibits ovulation and prevents the lining of the uterus from being prepared to accept a fertilized egg. The controversy around the Depo-Provera Affair first emerged in 2008, when Sebba Reuven interviewed thirty-five Ethiopian women awaiting immigration to Israel. Israeli investigative journalist Gal Gabbay included some of these stories in the television documentary report *Where Did Our Children Go?* which aired on the Israeli Educational Television Program *Vacuum*, sparking national outcry and protests. These reports concluded that Israeli doctors in Israeli-run transit camps in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Israeli absorption centers coercively administered Depo-Provera inoculations to Ethiopian women.

This chapter examines the Depo-Provera Affair to argue that the Israeli settler colonial project depends on forms of gendered anti-Black violence, through the management of Black African bodies. I argue that the coordinated effort between the medical staff at the health clinics in both Ethiopia and Israel is part and parcel of a broader policy of racialized violence, or “state sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to

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<sup>257</sup> The portrayal of the stork became popularized by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Hans Christian Anderson story called, the Storks, representing purity, family values and morality, and childbirth.

premature death”<sup>258</sup> against Ethiopian immigrants. I draw from Black feminist theory and historiography around race and reproduction to argue that the forced inoculations of Depo-Provera against Ethiopian women are about the management of life and death of Black bodies in Israel. More specifically, I deploy what Black feminist activists have referred to as “reproductive justice,” a term that builds from the commonly used concept of intersectionality to shift how we understand the politics of reproduction in recent history. Centering reproductive justice moves away from a “rights-based discourse” and moves away from the “binarized and under-theorized pro-choice/pro-life frameworks” typically employed by feminists and predominantly white organizations.<sup>259</sup> Reproductive justice also locates other issues of social justice, such as premature death, environmental justice, immigration restrictions, and colonial violence, are all also reproductive issues. For instance, activists have often framed the movement for Black Lives and the police targeting of unarmed Black men an issue of reproductive justice.<sup>260</sup> A Black feminist analytic also allows for an understanding that reproductive nationalism, reproductive labor, and biological reproductive are intricately connected.

Dorothy Roberts writes that dominant understandings of reproductive rights are shaped by racist assumptions about black procreation, and that reproductive health policy cannot be understood without attention to race and gender: “The feminist focus on gender and identification of male dominance as the source of reproduction repression often overlooks the importance of racism in shaping our understanding of reproductive liberty and the degree of “choice” that women

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<sup>258</sup>Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>259</sup> Building from Kimberley Crenshaw’s dynamic concept of intersectionality, a group of Black feminist activists came together during the 1990s, and in the spirit of the Combahee River Collective, developed the concept of Reproductive Justice.

<sup>260</sup> Dani McClaim, “The Murder of Black Youth is a Reproductive Justice issue,” *The Nation*, August 13, 2014. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/murder-black-youth-reproductive-justice-issue/>.

really have.”<sup>261</sup> Many of the women were told that they could not immigrate into Israel unless they took these inoculations; others were not even told that they were taking Depo-Provera. While Roberts study focuses on reproductive liberty in the United States, I build from her framework to think about how the denial of reproductive control and autonomy over black women’s bodies is a global iteration of anti-blackness.

In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel, Depo-Provera is not typically the first choice when it comes to doctors recommending contraceptives because of its significant possible side effects of irregular menstrual cycles, vaginal bleeding, headaches, osteoporosis, and psychological issues including depression and mood swings. Because Depo-Provera includes progestin, it increases women’s risk of permanent infertility, termination of their periods and breast and cervical cancer. Dorothy Roberts argues that ‘an injection [of Depo-Provera] is closer to temporary sterilization because its effects are irritable once the hormones are shot into a woman’s bloodstream’.<sup>262</sup> Reproductive and women’s rights activists in Israel, such as Isha L’Isha, Achoti-Women and the Israeli Association for Ethiopian Jews, demanded that the Israeli Ministry of Health investigate after they noticed a 50 per cent drop in birthrate within the previous decade among Ethiopian women. Rachel Mangoli, the director of the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO) branch in Haifa, established a day care facility for 120 Ethiopian children at her absorption center. She expressed alarm after realizing that only one Ethiopian child had been born within the past three years. She reports: ‘I started to think about how strange the situation was after I had to send back donated baby clothes, because there was no

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<sup>261</sup> Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 5.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.145.

one in the community to give them to'.<sup>263</sup> Mangoli followed many cases in which Ethiopian women complained to her that they suffered from pregnancy-like symptoms, including morning sickness, a swollen abdomen and fatigue. As a result, she accompanied them to a gynecologist at the Pardes Katz Government Hospital, where doctors informed her that they administered Depo-Provera to the women every three months without the women's knowledge. The clinic manager revealed to her that his staff had received instructions to administer the birth-control injections to these women but failed to reveal from whom they had received these instructions.

The Israeli women's organization Isha L'Isha (Women to Women), in Haifa, published an investigative report in December 2008 about the widespread use of Depo-Provera in the Ethiopian community. The report revealed that among the 4,833 Israeli women injected with Depo-Provera between 2005 and 2008, 57 per cent of them were of Ethiopian origin, even though Ethiopians comprise less than 2 per cent of the total population in Israel (ibid.). Ethiopian immigrants to Israel are moved around multiple institutions to process their immigration, including the Joint (a Jewish-American aid organization), the Jewish Agency (for immigration matters) and the Immigration Absorption Ministry, where they are overwhelmed with pro-Depo-Provera arguments and required to attend family planning workshops. Many of the women claim that the doctors informed them neither about what the shots were for nor that they would cause temporary sterilization. In a documentary interview with one of the women, Emawayish, she expresses what happens if they refuse to take a shot: "We said we won't have the shot. They told us, if you don't you won't go to Israel and you won't be allowed into the Joint Office, you won't get aid or medical care. We were afraid ... we didn't have a choice. Without them and their aid, we couldn't leave there. So, we

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<sup>263</sup> Diane Tober, "Israel admits targeting Ethiopian Jews for compulsory contraception," Center for Genetics and Society, February 7, 2013, <https://www.geneticsandsociety.org/biopolitical-times/israel-admits-targeting-ethiopianjews-compulsory-contraception> [last accessed 18 May 2021].

accepted the injection.”<sup>264</sup> Before immigrating to Israel, many Ethiopian women attended workshops in Gondar (a region in Ethiopia where many assembled prior to immigrating to Israel), where they received instruction about contraceptive methods, with officials mostly informing them about Depo-Provera. The interviewees said that the workshops they attended taught them how to raise their children and “that it is more important to take care of the children who were already born than to bear new ones.” While the Israeli Ministry argued that Ethiopian women voluntarily accepted the injections, the way that doctors administered Depo-Provera and enforced family planning practices reflects how “poor [Black] women ... have had to negotiate economic and institutional constraints that blur the boundary between voluntary and coercive.”<sup>265</sup> These fear tactics and threats of not being able to immigrate to Israel reflect state and institutional methods of state coercion and manipulation, rather than the women’s personal choice, showing that the practice of coercively injecting Ethiopian women with Depo-Provera is “about reducing the number of births in a community that is Black and mostly poor ... the unspoken policy is that only children who are white and Ashkenazi are wanted in Israel.”<sup>266</sup>

Depo-Provera’s controversy stems back to when it was manufactured. An American pharmaceutical company, Upjohn, submitted Depo-Provera for FDA approval as a contraceptive, but it was rejected in 1973, 1975 and 1978. Before submitting it to the FDA, Upjohn organized domestic medical trials in Atlanta’s Grady Memorial Hospital Family Planning Clinic from 1972 to 1978, where they administered Depo-Provera to 14,000 women, who were mostly poor and

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<sup>264</sup> Where Did Our Children Go?, 2012. Vacuum. TV, Israel Educational Television. 8 December. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=pSO0ITmYpc0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=pSO0ITmYpc0) [last accessed 18 December 2018 [in Hebrew].

<sup>265</sup> Wendy Kline, “Bodies of Evidence: Activists, Patients, and the FDA Regulation of Depo-Provera,” *Journal of Women’s History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 108.

<sup>266</sup> Hedva Eyal, “Depo Provera: A Contraceptive method Given via Injection. A Report on its Prescription Policy Among Women of the Ethiopian Community in Israel,” Haifa: Isha L’Isha Center. Available at: [https://isha.org.il/upload/file/Depo\\_Provera%2520ENGLISH.pdf](https://isha.org.il/upload/file/Depo_Provera%2520ENGLISH.pdf) [last accessed 20 December 2019].

Black. An FDA audit of the Grady clinic’s study found “serious deficiencies in design and conduct of the clinic’s testing protocol, including inaccurate screening, defective informed consent procedures, and no follow up of the women.”<sup>267</sup> Organizations such as the Black Women’s Health Project tracked some of the women involved in the trials and found that many young women had uterine, cervical or breast cancer, or had hysterectomies as a result of hemorrhaging, all possibly related to Depo-Provera.<sup>268</sup> Hospitals in the United States, similarly, administered Depo-Provera to Black, Indigenous and disabled women without their consent as a method of population control. State legislatures in the United States considered bills that gave poor women (often of color) public assistance bonuses and incentives, such as reduced sentences for petty crimes, if they used Norplant or Depo-Provera, or any other form of contraception. This distribution of contraceptives coercively became outsourced as a global solution to “overpopulation” or poverty.

Reproductive control of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women through Depo-Provera—and other forms of sterilization—is often justified through blaming these women for societal problems, such as poverty, alcoholism, and dispossession. These problems are posed as inherent traits of these women rather than a result of structural issues such as colonialism, slavery and the unequal distribution of wealth and labor. Similarly, Ethiopian-Israelis suffer from high rates of poverty and educational inequality, and often work the lowest wage jobs in Israel. Thus, it can be argued that Ethiopian women in Israel bear the brunt of these issues, where they are coerced into taking Depo-Provera to “solve” these problems. These structural conditions of colonialism and poverty also limit Ethiopian women’s bodily autonomy and individual freedoms, placing the blame on the individuals rather than on institutions.<sup>269</sup> This article looks at the coerced nature of the

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<sup>267</sup> Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 150.

<sup>268</sup> Kline, “Bodies of Evidence,” 65.

<sup>269</sup> Loretta Ross, “Reproductive justice as intersectional feminist activism,” *Souls*, 19, no 3 (2017): 286–314.

Depo-Provera injections as a eugenics project, to eliminate the inherent ‘primitivity’ carried by Africans.

While the deployment of Depo-Provera constitutes a form of “temporary sterilization” in Israel, I contextualize this practice of administration of Depo-Provera to Ethiopian immigrants without their consent as a part of a larger historical narrative of state-sanctioned, forced, and “compulsory sterilizations” against Black women in Israel, but also places such as the United States and South Africa, among others. This shared practice of reproductive control against Black women similarly exemplifies a continuity of shared tactics and control between the United States and Israel that exists beyond military, foreign aid, or intelligence – which have resulted in shared practices of racial and gendered tactics of violence against Black and Palestinian populations.

### **Israeli Settler Colonialism and the Gendered Racialization of the “Jew”**

The coerced nature of these injections against Ethiopian women illustrates how the management of Black African life and death is constitutive of Israeli settler colonialism, where its primary goals are to eliminate the native Palestinian population but still create a body politic of white Europeans/ “New Jews.” In settler colonial societies such as Israel, the United States, Canada and Australia, among others, the principal objective of governments and settler-citizens is the acquisition of land for permanent occupation and domination. Rather than a singular event, settler colonialism requires the displacement and subordination of the Indigenous groups occupying desired land and seeks to replace them with a different society. In addition to territorial expansionism, racism and violence accommodate the Zionist settler state: “[Racism] is inherent in the very ideology of Zionism and in the basic motivation for Zionist colonization and statehood.”<sup>270</sup> As mentioned in my previous chapters, while the Zionist political movement

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<sup>270</sup> Fayeze Sayegh, “Zionist Colonialism in Palestine,” *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2 no 1 (1965): 206-225.

claimed to be a liberation movement for all Jewish people, it served as a liberation movement for European (Ashkenazi) Jews, leaving out Ethiopian Jews.<sup>271</sup>

The Depo-Provera Affair not only makes visible how Israel regulates individual bodies, but must be situated within a “global racial order that denigrates blackness and exploits and dehumanizes Black people.”<sup>272</sup> Scholars of Black and Postcolonial Studies argue that European colonization of Africa during the eighteenth century did not occur accidentally but was backed up by “imperialist” ideology, economic, and political processes for extending control over African space and capitalist instructions which ultimately led to dependence and underdevelopment.”<sup>273</sup> Part of this imperialist ideology included constructing all of Africa not only as impoverished and inhabited by “beasts” and “savages,” but also as the negation of Western society: an “elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished ... More precisely, Africa is the mediation that enables the West to accede to its own subconscious and give a public account of its subjectivity.”<sup>274</sup> Cedric Robinson refers to this process as the manufacturing of ‘the Negro’, in which European scholars worked to “wipe out the cultural and intellectual contributions of Egypt and Nubia from European history to whiten the West in order to maintain the purity of the “European race”, where “the Negro” became a homologous group with no civilization, history, place or humanity.”<sup>275</sup> This required “immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West” in order strip away any “semblance of civilization” in Africa. This understanding of Blackness within colonial discourses is frequently evoked as the ultimate sign of the colonized’s racial degeneracy and

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<sup>271</sup> As I showed in my previous two chapters, that the liberation movement set forth by Zionism left out Mizrahi/Sephardic Jews, as well as other Jewish people constructed as disabled.

<sup>272</sup> Jemima Pierre, *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>273</sup> Mudimbe Valentin-Yves, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>274</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>275</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 81.

negates years of slavery and colonialism by European and American powers on the African continent. The construction of Africa as being in a permanent state of “absence,” “lack” and “nonbeing” helped give rise to that which we understand as the West and Europe’s ideas of “progress” and “modernity.” To constitute itself as part of Europe, Zionist ideology draws upon older formations of Africa in European formations through its relationship with Africa, and later by constructing itself as the benevolent nation in the rescue of Ethiopians during the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, Zionism not only borrows from older, colonial iterations of European discourses of African primitivity, but similarly depends on this colonial construction to eventually become its white savior. Despite being outcast from Europe, Zionists believed that Jews should still be part of, “even if not in, Europe.”<sup>276</sup> Zionists understood that part of ‘becoming Europe’ entailed not only internalizing and reifying these colonial discourses of Africa’s primitivity but also bringing Africa into modernity.

Native women’s bodies are often on the front lines of the settler quest for land and are susceptible to racialized violence. Israeli settler colonialism is embedded in a racialized colonial logic, which constructs Palestinians as the dangerous other in opposition to the white/European Jewish subject, framed as the bearers of Jewish civilization. This ‘modernizing’ and ‘civilizing’ mission depends on a Zionist imaginary of exclusively Jewish labor “making the desert [Palestine] bloom,” which is inseparable from conquering the Palestinian (woman’s) body and erasing Indigenous presence.<sup>277</sup> For instance, in 2014, Mordechai Kedar, a lecturer of Arabic literature at Bar Ilan University, invoked rape and sexual violence against Palestinian women publicly on an Israeli radio station: “the only thing that can deter terrorists like those who kidnapped the children

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<sup>276</sup> Sherene Seikaly and Max Ajl, “Of Europe: Zionism and the Jewish Other” in A. Czajka and B. Isyar, eds. *Europe after Derrida: Crisis and Potentiality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 121.

<sup>277</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Sarah Ihmoud, and Suhad Dahir-Nashif, “Sexual Violence, Women’s Bodies, and Israeli Settler Colonialism, *Jadaliyya*, November 17, 2014. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/3148>.

and killed them, is the knowledge that their sister or their mother will be raped.”<sup>278</sup> Threats of sexual violence against Palestinian women further contribute to Zionist thinkers’ Orientalist ideology which constructs Jewish people as holders of European civilization versus a culturally backward people and region. The Zionist ‘modernizing’ mission is also concerned with the biological and cultural reproduction of a strong, Jewish collectivity. National reproduction has always been at the center of Zionist discourse, where Israel’s control over demographics is vital to maintaining a Jewish majority against Palestinians. National reproduction becomes bound up with the female body as the source of national imperative or obligation for Jewish women essentially to birth the nation.<sup>279</sup> David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, expressed anxiety about low Jewish fertility, writing, “the increase of the Jewish birthrate is not an imperialistic need, but rather an essential component of the survival of the [Jewish] people ... any woman who does not have four children as much as it depends on her is betraying the Jewish mission.” This moral obligation that places Jewish women as responsible for biologically and culturally birthing the nation simultaneously positions non-Jewish bodies (i.e., Palestinians) as threatening the purity of the Jewish state; in other words, the curtailment of non- Jewish women’s reproductive rights is structural to the Israeli settler colonial project’s racialized logic of elimination.<sup>280</sup> Thus, the targeting of Ethiopian bodies must be situated alongside the Zionist mission to target Palestinian reproduction – the targeting and conquering of the Palestinian body is inseparable from the mission to conquer and settler Palestinian land.

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<sup>278</sup> Or Kashti, “Israeli professor’s ‘rape as terror deterrent’ statement draws ire,” *Haaretz*, July 22, 2014, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-prof-s-words-on-stopping-terror-draws-ire-1.5256331>

<sup>279</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 2014.

The Depo-Provera Affair complicates this narrative, revealing how the Zionist ‘modernizing’ mission is dependent not simply on reducing Palestinian reproduction and increasing the birthrate among Israeli-Jewish women but additionally on controlling Ethiopian women’s reproductive bodies. Curtailing Ethiopian (Black) women’s reproduction is crucial to sustain the European/ “New Jew” versus Jew relationship. For instance, in *Where Did Our Children Go?* (2012), one participant claims that while they (Ethiopian women) stayed in the transit camps, Israeli representatives from the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Health Ministry relayed to them that raising large families would make their lives more difficult in Israel, that it is challenging for people with many children to find work and support their families, and that landlords would not be willing to rent apartments to large families. The woman narrates, in tears: “They said that you don’t need to birth many children. People who have many children will suffer. You will have to work [in Israel] for your food. It will be hard for you economically if you have a lot of kids. So we said okay, we took the injections every three months”<sup>281</sup> Many of the women in the documentary similarly revealed that they either did not understand what the shots were for or felt pressured to take them. They explained that the JDC and officials from the Health Ministry repeatedly told them the shots were “inoculations” against disease. Despite their resistance and objection to taking them, the women were eventually coerced into taking them out of fear that they would not be allowed to immigrate into Israel – some of the women mentioned that this was directly expressed to them as well.

For a country like Israel, where the reproduction of its Jewish members is prioritized, it is striking that they are discouraging Ethiopian women from having large families. Although birth is

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<sup>281</sup> *Where Did Our Children Go?*, 2012. Vacuum. TV, Israel Educational Television. 8 December. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=pSO0ITmYpc0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=pSO0ITmYpc0) [last accessed 18 December 2018 [in Hebrew], my translation.

encouraged in Israel except amongst Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews and ultra-Orthodox Jews, Ethiopian Jews similarly represent ‘the wrong’ populations needed to “be fruitful and multiply” for the Jewish state and similarly constitute a “demographic threat” to the white, Jewish nation. However, rather than eliminate Ethiopians in Israel entirely, as Israel attempts to with the native Palestinian population, the administration of Depo-Provera is about managing the life and death of Ethiopians. Israel also depends on the presence of Ethiopians in order to “whiten” the “New Jew” (European/Ashkenazi), while maintaining their minority and marginal status.

### **Africa in the Zionist Imaginary:**

I conceptualize the Depo-Provera Affair as a state management project where Israel dictates who must live and who is left to die, to analyze how the production of Israel as a sovereign nation and white settler-subject is dependent on the abjection of Black people and, by extension, of the African continent. This Israeli self-fashioning process begins through the imaginary construction of Africa through its politics, literature, and culture, as a site of barbarity and primitivity and always in need of rescue by a more superior, Western nation. Walter D. Mignolo (2011) argues that coloniality is one side of the same coin as modernity. Israel had to be ‘invented, mapped, appropriated, and exploited’, which is achieved through the negation of Africa as a continent—through reimagining Africa as a site of uncivility and aiding its inhabitants with science and technology—for Israel to situate itself as Europe. Thus, before turning to the Ethiopian Aliyah (immigration to Israel) and the coerced injections of Ethiopian women, the story begins much earlier: during Israel’s early years and its desire to foster a relationship with the African continent. Israel’s capacity and willingness to rescue Ethiopian Jews from Ethiopia and bring them to Israel cannot be understood from its racial positioning internationally.

There are more than 170,000 Ethiopian Israelis residing in Israel today. Most of this population are descendants of Ethiopians who immigrated to Israel during two major Israeli

operations, Operation Moses in 1984 and Operation Solomon in 1991. They are referred to as the Beta Israel ('House of Israel') and believe that Israel is the birthplace of their ancestors. This time period also signified the immigration to Israel of another group of people; during the 1980s and 1990s, close to 900,000 Russian Jews immigrated from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, referred to as the post-Soviet Aliyah. Much of this immigrant wave was comprised of Ashkenazi Jews; however, a significant proportion were Mizrahi groups such as the Mountain Jews, Georgian Jews and Bukharan Jews, with each ethnic group bringing its own distinctive culture to Israel. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. 26 per cent of immigrants who arrived in Israel were not recognized as Jewish by Orthodox interpretations of Jewish law (which only recognizes matrilineal descent) but became eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return (1950) due to patrilineal Jewish descent or marriage to a Jew.<sup>282</sup> The differences between the two immigration patterns expose how Israel sought to maintain a particular racially pure Jewish demographic. In fact, Golda Meir, the first Foreign Minister of Israel, 'cried in relief when Russian Jews began arriving in Israel in the early 1970s: "At last real Jews are coming to Israel again."<sup>283</sup>

In his essay on coloniality, Aníbal Quijano (2007) argues that global, Euro-centered, capitalist power is organized around two axes which he terms "the coloniality of power" and 'modernity.'<sup>284</sup> The coloniality of power presents the basic and universal social classification of the global world in terms of race and naturalizes notions of superiority and inferiority through domination. Walter Mignolo similarly contends that "coloniality" is constituted by "modernity,"

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<sup>282</sup> Rebeca Rajjman, "A Warm Welcome for Some: Israel Embraces Immigration of Jewish Diaspora, Sharply Restricts Labor Migrants and Asylum Seekers," last modified June 5, 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/israel-law-of-return-asylum-labor-migration>

<sup>283</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birth of the nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 44.

<sup>284</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 168-179.

which is the narrative that “builds western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, “coloniality.””<sup>285</sup> Israel’s desire to establish a relationship with the newly independent countries in Africa represents a colonial relationship, despite not having directly colonized on the continent. For Zionists to ‘become Europe’, not only did they have to physically leave Europe, but Israel had to be imagined as a country of modernity, progress and development. For them to become this, other human inhabitants—in this case Africans, as Europe previously conceived them—must be conceived as ‘an anterior stage in the history of the species... “primitive”’<sup>286</sup> Zionism rearticulates European ideologies of “modernity” through the ideological rescue of the entire continent of Africa. During the 1950s and 1960s, Africa preoccupied the imaginations of Israeli leadership—known as the “Golden Age” of Israeli African friendship—where Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Golda Meir sought to move beyond isolation surrounded by Arab “enemies” by forming a friendship with newly independent African nations. Israel’s policy in Africa constitutes a significant area of its foreign policy in general and is organized in five different categories: exchange and training programs, technical assistance, joint economic enterprises, loans, and trade. From the late 1950s until the early 1970s, Israel sent thousands of experts to thirty-three independent and newly decolonized African states, offering aid and technical knowledge, including military training, regional planning, agriculture, medicine, legal work, and community services. At the same time, thousands of Africans travelled to Israel to participate in similar training programs and were viewed as successful from the perspectives of both sides. For example, at the end of his 1957 visit to Israel, the Secretary General of the Ghana Trades Union Congress commented that “Israel has given me more in eight days than I could

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<sup>285</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>286</sup> Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, issue 3 (2000): 542.

obtain from two years in a British university).<sup>287</sup> Ethiopia became the first country to officially engage in diplomatic relations with Israel as early as 1956; Liberia followed in 1957. By the early 1960s, Israel had established liaisons with Congo, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Ivory Coast; by 1966, ten African countries, including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Congo, Dohemy (Benin), Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda, began receiving direct military aid from Israel.<sup>288</sup>

Golda Meir understood these ties with Africa as a “friendship” based on common interests: the quest for a Jewish homeland resembles the desire for African states to claim independence from colonial powers. In her autobiography, *My Life* (1973), Meir describes how the connection between Israel’s newly declared independence from British colonial rule linked political Zionism to pan-African nationalism. Similarly, Herzl framed this relationship between Israel and Africa as one in which similar relationships emerge due to shared histories of racism and colonialism, where the “Jewish question” becomes equated with “the African Question.” In his novel *Altneuland* (Old-New land), he writes:

There is still one other question arising out of the disaster of nations which remains unsolved to this day, and whose profound tragedy, only a Jew can comprehend. This is the African question. Just call to mind all those terrible episodes of the slave trade, of human beings who, merely because they were black, were stolen like cattle, taken prisoner, captured, and sold. Their children grew up in strange lands, the objects of contempt and hostility because their complexion were different. I am not ashamed to say, though I may expose myself to ridicule for saying so, that once I have witnessed the redemption of the Jews, my people, I wish to also assist in the redemption of the Africans.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Haim Yacobi, *Israel and Africa: A genealogy of Moral Geography* (Routledge, 2015), 21.

<sup>288</sup> This is very timely given former Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu kicking off his “East Africa Tour” in 2016, where he first visited Uganda, and later attended a special summit by leaders of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Tanzania to fortify and restrengthen diplomatic relations between Israel and Africa. One of the reasons for his trip was to work together to eliminate “Islamic terrorism,” thus equating the entire “Middle East” to Islamic Terrorism. See more: “Benjamin Netanyahu begins East Africa trip In Uganda,” Aljazeera, July 4, 2016. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/7/4/benjamin-netanyahu-begins-east-africa-trip-in-uganda>

<sup>289</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland [Old-New Land]*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (New York: M. Weiner, 1997), 26.

Throughout his novel, Herzl emphasizes that European culture imagined Jewish people as “dark-skinned,” and if the Jew were somehow positioned in Africa, then he would be whiter. Although there were diplomatic relations on both ends, what is different is the positionality: When the Israeli Jew goes to Africa to bring knowledge, education, and technological assistance to the young, newly decolonized African states, he goes there as a white man. Whiteness did not occur naturally and ascribe to Israeli Jews by default – rather, the process of bringing in Israeli experts to help the African nations became the mechanism to redefine themselves in racial terms.

The situating of political Zionism as an anti-colonial movement became central to Israeli self-fashioning, posing several contradictions. Meir and other Zionist leaders failed to see that their movement to secure a homeland in historic Palestine is also a settler-colonial movement predicated on the dispossession of Palestinians. In the Zionist imagination, Palestinians are constructed in three different and seemingly contradictory ways, to justify the theft of land from Palestinians. Firstly, Zionists claim that Palestinians are not a people on the grounds that Palestine is not a sovereign state and, therefore, they have no juridical rights over their land. Secondly, Zionists argue that most Arabs who were living in Palestine by the end of the British Mandate were not actually native, but rather had immigrated from nearby Arab countries, attracted to Palestine because of the growing demand for labor induced by Jewish colonization. And lastly, Zionists contend that Palestine is *terra nullius*, an empty land, and therefore Palestinians do not exist. The other contradiction regarding situating political Zionism as an anti-colonial movement, like pan-Africanism, is that Meir approached this kinship between Israel and Africa as a colonial relationship, one in which Israel had much to teach the African world, rather than a reciprocal relationship. What Israel receives in return is an exit from a diplomatic isolation brought by the ‘hostile’ surrounding Arab countries. Meir’s account of Israel’s civilizing mission distinguishes

between those whose duty it is to teach and those who must learn: ‘the main reason for our African adventure was that we had something we wanted to pass on to nations that were even younger and less experienced than ourselves [...] We went to Africa to teach, and what was taught was learnt’. Israelis and Africans alike portrayed Meir as the quintessential “white mother,” who embodied a missionary-like zeal of bringing “light” to the “darkness” of Africa.<sup>290</sup> Reconstituting Africa through Israel’s need to save Africans from their ‘unskilled’ and ‘boorish’ state is related to what some have called the “white Jew’s burden,” where Israel’s responsibility is to bring Africa into modernity. This hierarchal and patronizing relationship between Israel and Africa is the context in which I situate the Depo-Provera Affair, and the racialized control of Ethiopian women’s reproductive bodies.

Africa preoccupied the Zionist mind even before the era of the Golden Age. Theodor Herzl proposed and was very fond of the “Uganda Plan” or “Uganda Scheme;” however, the proposal’s original roots were in a secret meeting that took place in 1902 between the Zionist leader and Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. At the Sixth World Zionist Congress in Basel in 1903, Herzl presented the Uganda plan – the proposition to create a Jewish homeland in a portion of British East Africa (modern-day Kenya, not Uganda), as a temporary refuge for Jewish people to escape rising antisemitism in Europe.<sup>291</sup> Although this plan was never realized and was staunchly opposed by members of the Zionist organization, the plan offered Africa as an alternative to Zion; Palestine maintained historical and biblical justifications as the “Land of Israel” that Zionists needed to fulfill a Jewish homeland. Although Zionists did not move forward with the Uganda

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<sup>290</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef, *A village in the Jungle: Africa in Israeli Culture* (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 2013), 7.

<sup>291</sup> While Zionists did not intend to neglect historic Palestine altogether, Herzl (with the British) proposed the Ugandan plan after several attacks took place in Eastern Europe, targeting Jews. For instance, in April 1903, dozens of Jews were killed in the Kishniev pogroms – two days of mob violence in Czarist Russia, provoked by a blood libel. See more: Alona Ferber, “1903: Herzl Proposes Kenya (Not Uganda) as a Safe Haven for the Jews,” Haaretz, August 26, 2015. <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1903-herzl-proposes-kenya-as-jewish-home-1.5391077>

Proposal, it still “conjoined the Jews with the European colonizers, whose settlement in Africa would facilitate the region’s colonization by white people... and revealed the mental mechanism and colonial discourses that characterized Herzl’s method of progression towards his final goal – a Jewish state based on a discourse of enlightenment, modernity and nationalism.”<sup>292</sup> Rather than manifesting as an actual plan, East Africa rather became a “junction of ideas and identity formulations” that would continue after the establishment of the state, through military, economic, and political partnership.<sup>293</sup>

References to Africa—as a site of fantasy, exotification and mystery—are echoed throughout Herzl’s writings, including his utopic novel *Altneuland* (Old-New Land), which eventually became the blueprint for Israel.<sup>294</sup> *Altneuland* features two misanthropes, a Jewish Viennese man named Friedrich Lowenberg and a Prussian (German) nobleman named Kingscourt, who visit Palestine in 1902 only to find it ‘backwards, desolated, and virtually uninhabited.’<sup>295</sup> Disgusted, the two leave Palestine and live on an unnamed island away from civilization. Upon their return to Europe after twenty years, they stumble back to Palestine and find that the land has drastically transformed: a result of a massive influx of immigrant European Jews who founded the land of Israel, called the New Society. This transformation is largely due to the new technological and social “advances,” to which Lowenberg and Kingscourt bear witness. The new development of science and ‘cutting edge technologies’ emphasized in his novel reifies Palestine not only as terra nullius—an empty, barren and primitive land in need of enlightened intervention through the incorporation of science, technology and Western notions of “progress”—but also as a model for progressive humanity throughout Africa. In the New Society, Lowenberg and Kingscourt meet

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<sup>292</sup> Haim Yacobi, *Israel and Africa: A genealogy of Moral Geography* (Routledge, 2015).

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>294</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland [Old-New Land]*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (New York: M. Weiner, 1997).

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

Professor Steinek, a scientist working to “open up Africa” to develop a plan to “colonize vast territories on the African continent” in order to provide a new home ‘for the surplus populations of Europe (i.e. its lumpenproletariat)’ and “to resolve “the Negro problem,” based on the Jewish colonial experiences in Palestine.”<sup>296</sup> Reconstituting the African continent as in need of rescue through the introduction of scientific and technological advances emerges several times within the novel, foreshadowing the many Jewish missionaries, scientists and doctors who travelled to Africa during Israel’s early years to elevate Israelis as naturally superior “moderns of humanity” and the “most advanced of the species” (Quijano, 2008, p. 191). Since Europeans constructed Jewish people as dark-skinned or even “Black,” these Zionist missions of rescue represent a white and masculine presence in Africa: “an expedition into the Dark Continent which would make the white body appear even whiter.”<sup>297</sup> This consolidation of African coloniality/Blackness through the ‘whitening’ of Israelis becomes more evident when enacted on the level of the population. Israel’s strategy to “save” the “Black Jews from Africa” is evident through its racialized and gendered narrative of Ethiopian mothers as unequipped to raise their children, which is constructed through the rescue of Ethiopians from the famine and its coerced Depo-Provera injections of Ethiopian immigrants upon arrival into Israel.

Israel’s relationship with the African nations began to shift after the Six Day War. In the Six Day War, or the “1967 Arab-Israeli War,” Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, as well as the Golan Heights from Syria and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. After the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, many African nations took it as an attack on African continent and became involved with the Third World Liberation movement that emerged during this time in response to capitalist, racist, and colonial powers. By 1973, many African states had

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<sup>296</sup> James Stollow, “Utopia and Geopolitics in Theodor Herzl’s *Altneuland*,” *Utopian Studies* 8, no. 1 (1997)

<sup>297</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef, *A Village in the Jungle*, 19.

severed diplomatic ties with Israel, feeling betrayed. In addition, Israel turned to support the apartheid regime in South Africa, despite being vocally opposed during the 1960s. By the eve of the 1973 Israel-Arab war, Israel had full diplomatic ties with thirty-three African countries. Following this war between Syria and Egypt, leading to an international oil crisis, most sub-Saharan African countries severed relations with the self-proclaimed Jewish states. In addition, Arab states induced Africa's boycott of Israel – which was articulated by the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union) – by promising to provide African countries with cheap oil and financial support.<sup>298</sup>

### **Israel's "Benevolence" and the Rescue of the "Black Jew"**

Meir writes that "There is no Zionism except the rescue of Jews."<sup>299</sup> The Zionist concern to "save" the African continent—by simultaneously constructing it as "primitive," behind the times, and having much to learn from the young but modern Jewish State—extended towards saving all Jews and bringing them to Israel. This becomes especially notable during the mid-1970s, as Israel's agenda towards bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel changed drastically, especially in light of the famine that afflicted and claimed the lives of millions in Ethiopia. The construction of Ethiopia during the famine as an abject space of Black suffering on an international scale set up the rescue missions of Ethiopian Jews back to their "homeland."

Ethiopian Jews consider themselves to be direct descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and thus believe they practice the purest form of Judaism. Ethiopian Jews have lived in Africa for millennia, practicing Judaism in their own language and according to their own customs for generations. After the establishment of Israel, the early founders made state-building

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<sup>298</sup> <https://www.amec.org.za/palestine-israel/item/1707-palestine-in-the-global-south-israel-s-scramble-for-africa.html>

<sup>299</sup> Marie Syrkin, *Golda Meir* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 118.

and promoting the immigration of Jews to the new state a priority. The Law of Return, passed in 1950, granted all Diaspora Jews the right to immigrate to Israel and become citizens of the state. According to the former Minister of Interior Yosef Burg, “The first priority was to rescue the Jews in the displaced persons camps in Europe and then the Jews in Muslim<sup>300</sup> countries.”<sup>301</sup> However, Israeli rabbinical authorities did not recognize Ethiopian Jews as authentic Jews, prohibiting them from immigrating to Israel under this law and sent messages to discourage emigration from Ethiopia. In an article of the 1956 issue of the *Jewish Horizon*, written by Malkah Raymist, a member of the World Zionist Organization, he revealed that ‘there is much spadework to be done [in training Jews in Ethiopia] ... before a thought could be given to bringing them to Israel ... being a backward element, they would be unproductive and it would take several years before they could be educated toward a minimum progressive thinking.’<sup>302</sup> Israel intended to maintain relations with Emperor Haile Selassie, who did not want the Beta Israel to leave Ethiopia. Protecting Israel’s relationship with Ethiopia also served strategic ends for Israel’s foreign policy and diplomatic efforts; given its strategic location in Africa, Ethiopia became Israel’s most important ally in Africa. The most damning evidence that the Israeli government did not actively seek Aliyah for Ethiopian Jews was a secret report written by Yosef Litvak in January 1973 for the Internal Office of Absorption, Planning and Research division of the Department of Research of Diaspora Jewry, stating that the Beta Israel are “completely foreign to the Jewish people” and that failure to respect the Ethiopian government’s position to oppose emigration of the Beta Israel will sever Israeli-Ethiopian relations that Israel depended on to keep its influence in the Horn of

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<sup>300</sup> This is the main topic of my second chapter, which focuses on Israel’s state policy of aiding Jews from Middle Eastern countries to immigrate to Israel, including Operation Magic Carpet.

<sup>301</sup> M.G. Bard, *From Tragedy to Triumph: The Politics Behind the Rescue of Ethiopian Jewry* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Press), 8.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

Africa.<sup>303</sup> Litvek argued that “Halacha” or Jewish law, did not recognize Beta Israel as authentically Jewish, and therefore, are ineligible for immigration under the Law of Return. The Litvek report however, was not well known at the time, and was not publicly disclosed until January 1979, when the Israeli newspaper Ma’ariv revealed its existence. Another piece of evidence included the disparities of issuing visas to Ethiopian Christians versus Ethiopian Jews. For example, Ethiopian Christians had no difficulty acquiring a visa to visit the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, but Israel required Ethiopian Jews to leave a \$600 deposit and purchase a round trip airline ticket, often time posing significant challenges for them. Such policies intentionally minimized the likelihood that Ethiopian Jews would try and stay in Israel.

This policy and attitude towards Ethiopian Jews changed in 1973, after Israel’s chief rabbis declared that Beta Israel are indeed descendants of the biblical Jewish tribe of Dan, and in 1975, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin gave official recognition to Beta Israel as Jews, granting them the right to pursue Aliyah under the Law of Return. This marks the beginning of the “heroic Zionist narrative,” that of Operation Solomon, the ‘majestic, massive, and astonishing swift Israeli airlift of 14,310 Ethiopian Jews to Israel’ that rescued the Beta Israel by flying them out of Addis Ababa at the climactic moment of a civil war and a famine and returned the ‘lost tribe’ to their homeland.<sup>304</sup> What is notable about the timing of the decision to recognize Beta Israel as Ethiopian Jews is that it came shortly after the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, adopted in November 1975, declaring that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.”<sup>305</sup> This placed Israel under great international scrutiny, connecting it to other colonial nations of the world,

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<sup>303</sup> Efrat Yerday, “They Didn’t want Ethiopian Jews in Israel, Either” *Haaretz*, February 1, 2018.

<sup>304</sup> Steven Spector, *Operation Solomon: The Daring Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>305</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), 1975. Resolution 3379. Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. UN Doc A/ RES/3379, 10 November. New York: United Nations.  
<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/761C1063530766A7052566A2005B74D1> [last accessed 18 May 2021].

including the United States.<sup>306</sup> This also marks another moment in which many African nations once in alliance with Israel renounced their diplomatic ties to the Jewish state. Now more than ever, Israel's decision to recognize Beta Israel as Jews and begin the policy of bringing them into Israel seemed vital to mend Israel's image on the international stage. It is within this context that the construction of Ethiopian women as 'bad mothers' and scapegoats for their suffering helps to set the stage for the masculine, 'heroic' rescue of Ethiopian Jews.

After Rabbi Yosef's ruling on the Beta Israel's Jewishness, and Haile Selassie's severing of diplomatic ties with Israel, Israel needed to find more covert strategies to bring the Beta Israel to Israel. Under the pressure from the American people, headed by the American Association for Ethiopian Jews, Israel initiated several covert operations to secretly airlift the Beta Israel out of Ethiopia and Sudan and bring them to Israel. These operations were headed by the Israeli Defense Forces and aided by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the United States Embassy in Khartoum. Two of the most notable covert airlift operations to bring the Beta Israel to Israel were Operation Moses and Operation Solomon. In Operation Moses, the airlift of November 1984 and January 1985, Israel brought approximately sixty-five hundred Beta Israelis from Sudan to Israel. These operations proved a high risk for the Beta Israel. Prior to this operation, between 1983 and 1984, around three to five hundred Beta Israel died during the escape from Ethiopia to Sudan, and due to the conditions of the Sudanese camps. Six years later, with Operation Solomon, from May 24-25, 1991, non-stop flights of 35 Israeli aircraft transported 14,325 Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 36 hours.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> The UN resolution 3379 was revoked in 1991. See more: Paul Lewis, "U.N. Repeals its '75 Resolution Equating Zionism with Racism," *New York Times*, December 17, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/17/world/un-repeals-its-75-resolution-equating-zionism-with-racism.html>

<sup>307</sup> One of the aircraft, an El Al 747, carried at least 1,088 people, including two babies who were born on the flight, and holds the world record for the most passengers on an aircraft. Eight children were born during the airlift process. See more: Chen Kots-Bar, "Children of the Plane," *Ma'ariv News*, June 17, 2011. [https://www.nishmat.net/Uploads/files/Children%20of%20the%20plane\\_pub.pdf](https://www.nishmat.net/Uploads/files/Children%20of%20the%20plane_pub.pdf)

During the 1980s, international broadcasting coverage of the famine in Ethiopia and the Israeli airlift efforts facilitated and naturalized the rescue trope of Ethiopians. One day after the completion of Operation Solomon on 26 May 1991, *The New York Times* described the scene of their arrival into Israel:

At the airport this morning it was difficult to tell who was more joyful—the barefoot Ethiopians who cheered, ululated and bent down to kiss the tarmac as they stepped off the planes, or the Israelis who watched them aglow, marveling at this powerful image showing that their state still holds appeal, even with all its problems.<sup>308</sup>

This scene alone constructs Israel as heroes of the barbaric, naked (barefoot) Black Africans, who are now devoted to the Jewish state. Later in the article, 29-year-old Ethiopian immigrant Mukad Abag expresses his gratitude: “We didn’t bring any of our clothes, we didn’t bring any of our things, but we are very glad to be here.”<sup>309</sup> The graphic description of ‘barefoot Ethiopians’ who “kissed the tarmac” demonstrates the “white Jew’s burden,” described earlier, which demonstrates Israel’s self-conception as benevolent, when in fact it reifies the same binaries of the modern West versus the primitive East. In this instance, Israel is no longer a racist country, since it brought Black Africans to become part of their nation, separating them from other colonial nations.

In 1984, during the height of the famine, televised images of famine victims gave graphic confirmation of Ethiopia as hell on earth. While major international news covered the famine as a natural disaster resulting from drought, in reality it was the culmination of a slow onset disaster that had built up over a period of years. During the height of the famine in 1984, reporter Michael Buerk described the scene in Ethiopia as “hell on earth,” and the 1984 broadcasting of the victims struck by the starvation gave graphic confirmation of that.<sup>310</sup> The international media’s emphasis

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<sup>308</sup> Joel Brinkley, “Ethiopian Jews and Israelis Exult as airlift is completed,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/26/world/ethiopian-jews-and-israelis-exult-as-airlift-is-completed.html>

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 1991.

<sup>310</sup> John Sorenson, “Mass Media and Discourse on Famine in the Horn of Africa,” *Discourse & Society*, 2 No 2

on the famine as a natural disaster overlooked the more complicated and political aspects of mass starvation. Relief agencies approached media during the previous years, urging them to publicize the disaster that will strike Ethiopia, however there was little media interest in Africa and warnings of imminent starvation was ignored. Journalists were adamant that, as one journalist put it, “The Third World isn’t news and starving Africans, in particular, aren’t news.”<sup>311</sup> The televised images that was eventually broadcasted in BBC was selected on the basis of its visual appeal and shock value. The general manager of the foreign news at NBC cited that the “tremendous” images of starving Ethiopians is what led to its coverage: “In other countries the situation may be just as desperate but it’s not quite as graphic.”<sup>312</sup> Much of the photographic coverage of the famine concentrated on close-ups of the most emaciated and desperate individuals: starving women, especially pregnant women, or mothers holding their children. For instance, the cover of TIME Magazine (1987) from December 1987 features a photograph of an Ethiopian woman sitting on the ground with an infant in her lap.<sup>313</sup> Her left breast hangs out as the baby looks in the opposite direction, refusing to breastfeed, despite appearing thin and malnourished. The mother places her hand on her head as she looks down, closes her eyes, and feels hopeless. On the left side of the cover, the caption states: “Why are Ethiopians starving again? What should the world do—and not do?”<sup>314</sup> This caption suggests that starvation in Ethiopia, being in Africa, is inevitable and natural, rather than a result of colonial and neocolonial causes of global inequality that created the very conditions of starvation. Similarly, the addition of *again* in the caption suggests that the problem of starvation is perennial and endemic to the region. By questioning whether the world should

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(1991): 223-242.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>313</sup> TIME Magazine, 1987. Cover. TIME Magazine, 21 December. Available at: <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19871221,00.html> [last accessed 27 August 2020].

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 1987.

react or not react to this human-made humanitarian crisis, the caption almost poses the question “who will save the Africans now,” where Israel emerges as the fearless figure, doing the world a favor by taking in the poor, starving Ethiopians.

The TIME cover of the woman and her starving child constructs her as the one to blame for the famine. This image is not an isolated image from this time. In fact, hundreds of photographs circulated through major international coverage.<sup>315</sup> Such photos construct Ethiopian women as responsible for their dying children and their inability to care for them. As biological and social reproducers, Black mothers are made to bear the guilt for structural problems of inequality among Black people, perceived as inherent and inheritable traits to the Black/African race.<sup>316</sup> Similarly, because of Africa’s association with primitivity and an inherent inferiority, Ethiopian women are already considered bad mothers before they come to Israel, and thus they are considered unfit to have children. This sets up the rationalization behind the coerced injections of Depo-Provera: because Ethiopian women are unfit mothers, they should not be allowed to bear children.

Israel’s attempts to curtail Ethiopian women’s birth rate can be situated with its past and present ties to the eugenics movement, designed to maintain an Ashkenazi-Jewish majority. Emerging almost simultaneously with the international eugenics’ movement, Zionist nationalism intertwined with many eugenic aspects in its mission for a Jewish state. Zionism did not only seek to restore Jewish people to a homeland but also to normalize it as a nation that would restore the bodies of Jews, often constructed as a degenerate race by Europeans. Israel is often situated as a model of rehabilitation from two debilitating conditions, the statelessness of the diasporic Jewish people and the genocide of the Holocaust. Zionists rendered diasporic Jews as ill and disembodied

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<sup>315</sup> For instance, see Stan Grossfeld’s photographs of the Ethiopian famine taken in 1984 and published in 1985 in The Boston Globe (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nostri-imag/4999517191> [last accessed 16 May 2021]), and Kate Milner’s BBC News post ‘Flashback 1984: portrait of a famine’ (2000).

<sup>316</sup> Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 1997.

and sought to create a breed of physically and mentally healthy “New Jews” in Palestine. Arthur Ruppin called for the ‘purification of the “Jewish Race”’ and stated that it was ‘desirable that only the racially pure come to the land [of Israel]’.<sup>317</sup> Throughout his writings, Ruppin explicitly “emphasized the superiority of the Ashkenazi Jews to the Sephardic and Oriental Jews, in terms of intelligence, creativity, mathematical ability, agility, imagination and hygiene,” arguing that ‘with proper treatment [they] could become a new, productive Jewish-Yemenite type, capable of serving the new nation that was evolving.’<sup>318</sup> While he believed that Middle Eastern Jews could be transformed into ‘New Jews’, he outright dismissed the presence of Ethiopian Jews, claiming that they are: “[N-words], who came to Judaism by force of the sword in the sixth century B.C. They have no blood connections to the Jews ... [Therefore] their numbers in Palestine should not be increased.”<sup>319</sup> For Ruppin, race acts as a cultural and biological marker, linking “race with mental, intellectual and cultural traits’, arguing that “Jews with degenerative symptoms,” including the mentally ill, blind and sick, should “abstain from childbearing.”<sup>320</sup> These eugenicist attitudes and practices, imported from the United States and Europe, once anti-Semitic policy, now intertwine with the Zionist goals of creating a normative, racially pure population.<sup>321</sup> Through this history and framework, where Ethiopian women are targeted, it is revealed how Israel’s national framework is bound up with anti-Blackness and anti-Semitism, where the “New Jew” (European/Ashkenazi) is produced in opposition to the Jew (e.g., Middle Eastern, Ethiopian Jews).

The eugenic attitude of controlling the reproduction of the disabled and racially degenerate is evident in the Depo-Provera Affair. In *Where Did Our Children Go?* (2012), many of the medical

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<sup>317</sup> Quoted in: Etan Bloom, *Arthur Ruppin and the Production of Pre-Israeli Culture* (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2011), 198-199.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>320</sup> Dafna Hirsch, “Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a “New Jewish Type,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15 no3: 592-609.

<sup>321</sup> Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

specialists interviewed expressed shock to Gal Gabbay that Israeli doctors administered Depo-Provera to Ethiopian women, claiming that this type of contraception is typically administered to women in mental institutions because they ‘cannot be trusted to take the pill every day.’ Many of the women interviewed similarly expressed that the doctors mistrusted them to take the pill as well. One woman in particular shared that after asking the doctor for advice about whether she should switch over to the pill instead of the injection, the doctor explicitly stated that she would forget if she switched to the pill. In another scene, a hidden camera in a local health clinic in Israel records an Israeli nurse administering Depo-Provera to an Ethiopian woman. The nurse states that Depo-Provera is given “primarily to Ethiopian women because they forget, they don’t understand, and it is hard to explain to them, so it’s best that they receive a shot once every three months ... basically they don’t understand anything.”<sup>322</sup> The nurse’s paternalistic demeanor towards the women, stating that ‘they don’t understand anything’ and “they forget,” reflects how Ethiopians are constructed as mentally deficient and “undesirable.” The Israeli Health Minister at the time, Yaacov Ben Yezri, reportedly claimed that there was no special policy regarding women of Ethiopian origin and that Ethiopian women had a “cultural preference” for contraceptive injections over pills<sup>323</sup>; however, this claim is contradicted by data from the World Health Organization (WHO) reporting that over 70 per cent of women in Ethiopia prefer using birth control pills, taken orally, to other forms of contraception.<sup>324</sup> In an experiment conducted by Isha L’Isha, they sent five non-Ethiopian women

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<sup>322</sup> Where Did Our Children Go?, 2012. Vacuum. TV, Israel Educational Television. 8 December. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=pSO0ITmYpc0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=pSO0ITmYpc0) [last accessed 18 December 2018 [in Hebrew], my translation.

<sup>323</sup> Hedva Eyal, “Depo Provera: A Contraceptive method Given via Injection. A Report on its Prescription Policy Among Women of the Ethiopian Community in Israel,” Haifa: Isha L’Isha Center. [https://isha.org.il/upload/file/Depo\\_Provera%2520ENGLISH.pdf](https://isha.org.il/upload/file/Depo_Provera%2520ENGLISH.pdf) [last accessed 20 December 2019].

<sup>324</sup> Jonathan Cook, “Israel’s Treatment of Ethiopians ‘Racist’, The National, January 6, 2010. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/israel-s-treatment-of-ethiopians-racist-1.533783?videoId=5754807360001>

to doctors asking for Depo-Provera, where they replied that it was prescribed only in “highly unusual cases.”<sup>325</sup>

The narrative that a contraceptive injection is a “cultural” preference reifies Ethiopian primitivity, that “they do not know” better. For Israel, Ethiopians represent a threat to the normative “New Jew” category, as they are racially constructed as mentally inferior. This stems from racial science manufactured in Europe and circulated in the United States that constructed Africans, and Black people generally, as primitive and inferior in intellect and character, making them unfit for citizenship.<sup>326</sup> This forges an indelible link between race and the politics governing reproduction: because Black people are unfit for citizenship, they must abstain from childbearing. Yet because Israel depends on Ethiopian bodies to fulfil its settler colonial objective, controlling their reproduction is a way to manage their lives: to ensure that they are still alive but cannot live as full citizens or outnumber the Ashkenazim. Israel’s form of modern-day eugenics through the Depo-Provera injections reveals how, in order to produce the “New Jew” (European/Ashkenazi), Jewishness must be negated in favor of the anti-Black coloniality of Europeaness, which becomes Israeli anti-Blackness.

“Reproductive politics...inevitably involves racial [and colonial]’ politics.<sup>327</sup> Reproductive matters in Israel cannot be separated from broader political struggles or from the economic, social, and cultural contexts that shape Ethiopian women’s lives, as reflected in Takele’s (2015, 2017) paintings. Israel’s dehumanizing attempts to control Black Ethiopian women’s reproductive lives are not marginal to Israel’s settler colonial policies, but rather operate in tandem with the dispossession of Palestinian land and people and the construction of the “New Jew”

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 2010.

<sup>326</sup> Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 17.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 5.

(European/Ashkenazi) body politic. In Stork, Takele portrays the ‘failure of Ethiopian integration’ through the image of a dying stork. The portrayal of the stork in popular culture and folklore became a prominent symbol in the early nineteenth century, representing purity, family values, morality, and childbirth. In Hans Christian Anderson’s version of the fable, called ‘The storks’ (2019 [1838]), storks pluck dreaming babies from ponds and lakes and deliver them to deserving families. The dark side is that families deemed undeserving or with ill-behaved children would receive a dead baby as punishment from the stork. I read Takele’s piece through this fable: it is not a dying baby but a dying stork that is represented, revealing how Israel initially set Ethiopians up for failure and never intended for them to be full Israeli citizens. While Israel depends on Ethiopian Jews and their physical presence to fulfil their demographic goals to surpass the Palestinian majority during this time, their reproductive bodies must still be curtailed as Israel still desires to maintain a white Ashkenazi- Jewish majority. Population control over Black African bodies as individuals and a collective, through preventing them from reproducing more Black children, allows Israel to finally ‘become European.’ For Ethiopians to become viable subjects of the state, they must undergo a bodily transformation through Depo-Provera to emerge into modernity, while still occupying a liminal status of citizenship in Israeli society. Positioning Blackness as the constant creation of death to allow the potential of life and living power of others, Israel depends on the subjugation of Black lives, like the ways in which Enlightenment Europe sought to do, to reach the level of whiteness of the superior, enlightened West. Centering a framework of reproductive justice moves us, analytically and politically, beyond the individualistic and liberal discourse of choice and towards a radical perspective that prioritizes the stories of racialized and colonized women as the foundation for new knowledge production.

In 2016, I attended an event around the implications of the transnational Black-Palestinian solidarity movement, when a Palestinian woman in the audience raised a question and asked: “Why should we be in solidarity with Black people when Ethiopians are killing our people? The woman’s question connotes how the Israeli state coerces its citizens to actively partake in its rapidly expanding settler colonial project, such as mandatory conscription and serving in the IDF. In 2017, Damas Pakada, a 24-year-old Ethiopian born IDF soldier was repeatedly beat by another Israeli police officer. The officer was not indicted. In 2019, an Israeli police officer shot and killed 24-year-old Yehuda Biagda, an Ethiopian Israeli, who suffered from a mental disorder. The officer was not indicted. Later that year, an off duty Israeli police officer shot and killed 19-year-old Ethiopian Israeli Solomon Tekla. Once again, the officer was not indicted. As one protester told the newspaper Haaretz: “There is racism everywhere. I feel like I don’t belong to this country. Both my brothers served as combat soldiers in the military. It’s unreal, you give your soul, and they end up murdering you.” These cases are not isolated examples, but reveal how Israel constitutes an anti-black racial regime, like the United States, one that incorporates Black people into the nation-state to fulfill its settler colonial, racial, and capitalist goals, but whose lives and bodies are considered disposable and were never meant to actually become part of the nation. These incidents of public beatings and what Ethiopians have similarly noted as “lynchings” in Israel can be understood as being on the same spectrum as the Depo-Provera Affair – the continuity of black life (family planning, bringing Ethiopians to Israel, and serving in the Military) is co-determinant with the necropolitical production of black death (sterilizations, police killings). Thus, the relationship between the biopolitical and the necropolitical is always a question of reproductive politics.

## CHAPTER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## CHAPTER FOUR: Palestine is etched on the heart of the fetus: The Intimate Politics of Palestinian Marriage, Death, and Birth

“Every day another story, another worry; every movement is calculated here in our area, they are after us, even in our own homes. Listen to me carefully; they are after the babies in our wombs. They are - they are scaring us, hoping we will end up unable to bring children into the world.”

- Reham, a Palestinian mother in Occupied East Jerusalem<sup>328</sup>

On August 8, 2018, Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed three Palestinians, including 23-year-old Inas Hamrash and her 18-month daughter, Bayan in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza. From March 30, 2018, to December 27, 2019, Israel has killed over 180 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in response to Palestinians’ March of Return. The Great March of Return was an orchestrated series of protests every Friday from 2018 to 2019, where Palestinians in Gaza protested along the fence between the Gaza-Israeli border against Israel’s naval, aerial and land blockade of Gaza and for the right of Palestinians to return to the homes from which they were expelled in 1948. Hamrash, who was 9 months pregnant at the time, was asleep alongside her daughter when the airstrikes hit their home and was the second pregnant woman to be struck by an Israeli airstrike. Hamrash is the second pregnant woman to be killed since the beginning of the Great March of Return, the first was a woman named Falesteen Saleh Abu A’rar.<sup>329</sup> This deliberate attack against these two women is not an anomaly but is accompanied by discourses from Israeli media, social media, and Israeli politicians promoting acts of state sanctioned violence against pregnant Palestinian women. For example, in 2009, after Operation Cast Lead – an Israeli offensive that killed over 1400 Palestinians in Gaza – Israeli soldiers produced and wore t-shirts calling for execution of Palestinian children, pregnant women, and the sodomizing of Hamas leaders. One of

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<sup>328</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance, and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 155.

<sup>329</sup> Yaniv Kubovich et al., “Two Pregnant Women Among 25 Gazans Killed as Israel Pounds Strip, Resumes Targeted Killings,” Haaretz, May 5, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/eleven-palestinians-dead-as-israel-pounds-gaza-resumes-targeted-killings-1.7206021>.

those t-shirts depicted a bullseye pointed at the heart of a Palestinian child with the caption “the smaller they are, the harder it is.” Another depicts an image of a dead Palestinian baby with its crying mother next to them and captioned, “Better Use Durex,” a brand of condoms. Lastly, and perhaps most directly relevant to this chapter, one shirt included an image of a pregnant woman in crosshairs, with the slogan “1 shot, 2 kills” written underneath, signifying that by targeting pregnant women, they have eliminated two demographic threats to the Israeli state, the child, and the mother.

These attacks against pregnant Palestinian are not a contemporary phenomenon but has been a tactic of the Israeli state since its inception – a strategy to expropriate Palestinian land. Rabab Abdulhadi argues that rhetoric employing sexualized, racist, Orientalist, and Islamophobic tropes intensify during Israel bombardments against Gaza, but it is a “constant feature of Israeli settler colonialism rather than an aberration from its mythical image.”<sup>330</sup> Since Israel is defined as a Jewish state, Palestinians are characterized, especially those living within its borders, as an undesirable problem population whose fertility and reproduction are highly threatening. Through Israeli discourses, images, and media, Palestinians are often represented as breeders, irrational out of control reproducers, where Palestinians outnumber Jews and that there is a strong connotation that “‘they’ need to stop breeding” in order to maintain Israel as a progressive, modern, and developed nation.<sup>331</sup> During a conference in 1995, for instance, the renowned Israeli geographer Arnon Soffer declared that “the most serious threat that Israel faces is the wombs of Arab women in Israel.”<sup>332</sup> In his pamphlet entitled “The Demographic Jinni: The End of the Zionist Dream?,”

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<sup>330</sup> Rabab Abdulhadi, “Israeli Settler Colonialism in Context: Celebrating (Palestinian) Death and Normalizing Gender and Violence,” *Feminist Studies*. 45(2-3), 2019), 541-573.

<sup>331</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (University of California Press, 2002), 105.

<sup>332</sup> Rhoda Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (University of California Press, 2002), 74.

Soffer argues that high Arab birth rates threaten Israel's national security. Further, Golda Meir, the first female Prime Minister of Israel, publicly declared that her nightmares were caused by the realization that upon waking up, "another Palestinian child will be born."<sup>333</sup> The targeting of Palestinian reproductive bodies, discursively and materially, is thus structural to Israel's settler colonial project of racialized elimination.<sup>334</sup> For instance, Israeli troops targeted Palestinian women in their systematic massacres and mass evictions during the destruction of Palestinian villages in 1948. As part of the Deir Yassin massacre, Zionist gangs raped and butchered young girls and women, cut open the stomachs of pregnant women and ripped out the fetuses before killing them.<sup>335</sup> This was a deliberate attempt to instill fear among Palestinians and empty out the villages as a means of annexing more land for the Jewish state. Israel's attacks against Palestinian reproductive bodies, through targeting of their homes via airstrikes or through direct violation of women's bodies, are not the only forms of reproductive control of Palestinians. Such spectacularized forms of violence occlude the everyday forms of violence that take the form of laws and policies directly controlling reproduction.

I situate these attacks against Palestinians, designed to control their reproductive abilities, through the lens of Israeli settler colonialism. Framing Zionism as a settler colonial practice rather than simply as a nationalist ideology fundamentally alters the understanding of the role, function, and goals of population management, or what Michel Foucault has framed biopower. Biopower is

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<sup>333</sup> Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance* (Syracuse University Press, 1995), 65.

<sup>334</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Sarah Ihmoud, and Suhad Dahir-Nashif, "Sexual Violence, Women's Bodies, and Israeli Settler Colonialism." *Jadaliyya*. Accessed March 13, 2021. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31481/Sexual-Violence,-Women%E2%80%99s-Bodies,-and-Israeli-Settler-Colonialism>.

<sup>335</sup> Julie M Petet, "The Palestinian Women's Movement: Organization and Representation." In *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement.*; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera, Sarah Ihmoud, and Suhad Dahir-Nashif. "Sexual Violence, Women's Bodies, and Israeli Settler Colonialism." <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31481>; Fatima Kassem, *Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gendered Memory* (Zed Books, 2011).

a technology of power that through regulation seeks to control and manage its subjects' lives. As he writes in *The History of Sexuality*, biopower is “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.”<sup>336</sup> Biopower serves as a useful framework to explain Israel's power over the intimate in Palestine, including regulating marriage, controlling Palestinian's reproductive decisions, constructing an Apartheid wall that creates hindrances for Palestinian women to cross to get to hospitals, and through disciplining their very bodies behind bars. The administration of life, or its absence – through its regulation of reproduction and Palestinian family – forms a central tenet of Israel's settler colonial regime, where control over women's bodies becomes a tool for Palestine elimination.<sup>337</sup>

Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval Davis define settler colonialism as: “a specific type of European expansion that resulted not in overseas empires but in societies in which Europeans have settled, where their descendants have become and remained politically dominant over indigenous peoples and where a heterogenous society has developed in class, ethnic, racial and gendered terms.”<sup>338</sup> Zionism is an ideology and a political movement that subjects Palestine and Palestinians to structural and violent forms of dispossession, land appropriation, and erasure in the pursuit of a new Jewish state.<sup>339</sup> These forms of violence is accompanied by an epistemic form of violent Palestinian erasure, and what Palestinian scholars have referred to as memoricide: “the systematic erasure of the expelled Palestinians and their mini-holocaust [the Nakba] from Israeli collective

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<sup>336</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: An Introduction (Vintage; Reissue Edition, 1990)

<sup>337</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Infiltrated Intimacies: The Case of Palestinian Returnees*, *Feminist Studies*, 42 no 1 (2016): 166-193.

<sup>338</sup> Daiva Stasiulis et al, “Introduction” in *Unsettling Colonial Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class*, ed. Daiva Stasiulis et al (SAGE Publications, 1995),

<sup>339</sup> Omar Salamanca et al., “Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1-8.

memory and the excision of their history and deeply rooted heritage in the land, and their destroyed villages and towns from Israeli official and popular history.”<sup>340</sup>

Israel is ultimately premised on demography. Since its early inception in 1948, the Israeli state has sought to maintain a Jewish majority to preserve its definition of Israel as a Jewish state. Israel thus chronically suffers from a national and existential preoccupation over having too many Palestinian and Arab bodies, where they outnumber Jewish bodies in Israel. According to the United Nations, in 1947, 45% of the population living on Jewish land was Palestinian; by 1951, this percentage had fallen to 11%. This is due to the expulsion of Palestinians by emigration of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees due to fear of physical “transfer” of Palestinians. Since the physical presence of Palestinians pose a problem for the completion of the Zionist project, they must be eliminated, leading to one of Zionism’s proposed solutions to this problem: to transfer the indigenous Palestinian population to neighboring Arab land.<sup>341</sup>

The attempt to create a Jewish majority in Israel is not only a utopian idea, but a material practice. Israel has attempted to create a Jewish majority in two vital ways: Firstly, through issuing the Law of Return, which automatically grants every Jew in the world the right to Israeli citizenship and nationality. This law attracted Jews from the Diaspora from Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. This law worked to simultaneously deny Palestinian refugees, many of whom either fled from the Nakba out of fear or were expelled to make room for the Israeli state, the Right to Return. The second way that Israel attempts to create a Jewish majority is through issuing pronatalist reproductive policies that would encourage Israelis to reproduce the nation.<sup>342</sup> Although there was

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<sup>340</sup> Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (Zed Books, 2012), 10.

<sup>341</sup> Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of ‘Transfer’ in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*, (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

<sup>342</sup> Kanaaneh, 2002, 70.

no formal Israeli fertility policy, founding Israel have promoted Jewish over Arab population growth through immigration law, economic incentives, targeted modernization programs in Arab communities, and subsidizing governmental coverage of reproductive health services.<sup>343</sup>

A final way that Israel maintains a Jewish state is through the control of Palestinian women's reproductive bodies. This chapter focuses primarily on this last method of population control. I analyze three different ways that the Israeli state disciplines, contains, and targets Palestinian women's bodies. In the first part of the chapter, I explore the ways that Israel has historically depended and currently depends on spectacularized forms of violence against pregnant Palestinian women. I begin with the Nakba in 1948 and end with the Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip during the summer of 2014. The second part of this chapter examines how Israeli law, including the 2003 Citizenship and Entry law, impacts the intimate lives of Palestinians. I focus on how the color-coded Israeli identification system disrupts the intimate lives of Palestinian families, including their reproductive decision making, as a method of appropriating land for the Jewish State. The complexity of the administration of IDs impinges on Palestinians' right to family unification and affects the reproductive decisions that Palestinian families make. For Palestinians on the different sides of the green line, the Citizenship and Entry law creates even more complications. In the last section of this chapter, I explore the experiences of pregnant Palestinian political prisoners through a reading of Mai Masri's film, *3000 Nights*, which depicts the story of a Palestinian woman named Layal who is arrested and falsely accused by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of helping a teenage boy suspected of attacking a military checkpoint. While in prison, Layal becomes pregnant and delivers a baby boy she names Nour, whom he is forced to raise behind

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<sup>343</sup> A more in-depth analysis of how Israeli pronatalism helped shape Zionist political thought around establishing a Jewish state in historic Palestine is detailed in my first chapter, "Speculating the Holy Land: Disability, Colonialism, and the Rise of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs)."

bars. This section uses this film as a case study to examine the plight of Palestinian pregnant women who are jailed and forced to deliver while in prison.

These examples suggest that the space of intimacy is a site of colonial violence and dispossession for Palestinians. As feminist scholars have argued, state surveillance and control over geographies of the intimate have played central roles in gendered-racial colonial power. Spheres of the intimate are critical sites “for the consolidation of colonial power, that management of those domains provides a strong pulse on how relations of empire are exercised, and that affairs of the intimate are strategic for empire driven states.”<sup>344</sup> As in other colonial contexts, Israeli laws and policies have attempted to police the intimate spheres of Palestinian life in order to demarcate who belongs and who does not belong to the Jewish nation, including the construction of the separation wall that cuts throughout the Green Line, slicing through Palestinian communities, agricultural fields, and farmland; the demolition of Palestinian homes, often with very little, if any, notice, leaving Palestinian families out in the streets; the increased surveillance and warfare technologies that precisely target Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip, often killing whole families at a time; and the discriminatory laws that designate who can marry whom. Ariella Azoulay argues that since its founding in 1948, the Israeli settler colonial project turned the home into “the arena where the boundaries of the body politic are demarcated,” where boundaries “separate those whose homes are protected - and worthy of protection - from those whose house walls are exposed, penetrable, given to violation and demolition.”<sup>345</sup> Palestinian homes are vulnerable to raids in the middle of the night, demolitions by bulldozers, dropping of bombs from the skies (as was witnessed in Gaza during the attacks in 2014 and others), and shootings that make them

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<sup>344</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, "Introduction" in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>345</sup> Ariella Azoulay, "When a Demolished House Becomes a Public Square," in Ann Laura Stoler's, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Duke University Press, 2013).

uninhabitable. In some instances, the separation wall, which already cuts through Palestinian homes and villages, are made penetrable to target homes. Through his interviews with Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers, for instance, Eyal Weizman describes a 2002 military practice called “moving through walls,” where IDF soldiers use explosives or tools to create holes in the wall to physically pass through them, rather than going through the public streets, roads, alleys, and courtyards that make up the city.<sup>346</sup> With this tactic, they often assemble behind the wall, shooting or throwing grenades through the ways, targeting Palestinians walking or confining entire Palestinian families into one room, sometimes for days, turning their homes into spaces of confinement. Here, warfare is not limited to the streets, but takes place in half demolished living rooms, bedrooms, and corridors. While the Palestinian home is presented as the problem, often constructed as a security threat, military intervention becomes the solution. As Azoulay concludes, the “Palestinian house has thus lost its sanctity as a home and can therefore be violated.”<sup>347</sup> This chapter looks at Palestinian marriages, relations, and bodies as similar sites which can be violated. Constructing these spaces as subject to “violation and demolition” constructs Israeli marriages (particularly between European Ashkenazi Jews) and bodies as legitimate and normative under the eyes of the state.

### **Family Separation in the Citizenship and Entry Law 5763**

In previous chapters, I focused on how Israeli immigration laws constructed and racialized bodies deemed undesirable through the politics of reproduction. This chapter takes a different direction by analyzing Israeli family reunification laws, focusing primarily on the Citizenship and

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<sup>346</sup> Eyal Weizman, *Walking Through Walls: Soldiers as Architects in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, *Radical Philosophy*, 136 (2006), 8-22.

<sup>347</sup> Ariella Azoulay, "When a Demolished House Becomes a Public Square," in Ann Laura Stoler's, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Duke University Press, 2013).

Entry Law of 2003, to understand its impact on Palestinian reproductive lives and the reproduction of the Israeli national body. Israeli biopolitics manages who can and cannot enter East Jerusalem (and by extension, Israel), and who cannot stay with their family and on their land, which I argue in this section, as necessary component of Israel's elementary logic of the settler colonial regime. The Citizenship and Entry Law of 2003, calls attention to the intensification of surveillance of the private and most intimate sites of everyday life: marriage and family. The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law 5763 makes Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ineligible for the automatic granting of Israeli citizenship and residency permits that are usually available through marriage to an Israeli citizenship, called family reunification. While initially passed as a temporary law,<sup>348</sup> the Knesset has renewed it every year. I argue that this law, through its separation of families, is foundational to Zionist logics, tied to a larger project that seeks to demarcate and police social and geographic boundaries and national belonging, in attempts to shrink the Palestinian population.

After Israel declared statehood in 1948, one of its first legislative acts was the Law of Return, which stated that “all Jews, wherever they come from, are entitled automatically to Israeli citizenship, [to immigrate to and settle in Israel with the aid and assistance of the state], while according to the Israeli Nationality Law, non-Jews, even if born in Israel, unless born to Israeli citizens... are not.”<sup>349</sup> It was passed simultaneously with the “denationaliz[ation] of 1.4 million non-Jewish Palestinians,” forcing thousands of refugees out of Palestine.<sup>350</sup> This is part of Israel's “dual objective” of controlling what it calls its “Arab problem” – that is the native Palestinian

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<sup>348</sup> Although the law was originally enacted as a temporary order, its validity has been repeatedly extended by the Knesset, thus, reinforcing it in effect as a permanent law, despite the Israeli High Court of Justice describing it as “a disproportionate violation” of the rights of Arab citizens and residents of Israel.

<sup>349</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, “The Jewish collectivity and national reproduction in Israel,” libcom.org, accessed May 24, 2020, <https://libcom.org/library/jewish-collectivity-national-reproduction-israel-nira-yuval-davis>.

<sup>350</sup> Nabila El-Ahmed and Nadia Abu-Zahra, “Unfulfilled Promise: Palestinian Family Reunification and the Right of Return,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45 no. 3(179), (2016), 24-39.

population--and to ensure a Jewish majority.<sup>351</sup> A group of seventy three Palestinian women and children were allowed to return to their homes in December 1949; however, by the end of 1949, only 700 of the 8,000 applications were allowed to return through the family reunification program. In fear that the return of Palestinian refugees would challenge the maintenance of a Jewish majority, this motivated the establishment of a bureaucratic regime to “legalize and to facilitate the denial of future citizenship to Palestinian returnees, as well as to a large number of those who had never left Palestine.”<sup>352</sup> In order to establish this regime, Israeli leaders began referring to the population registry resulting from the census conducted in November 1948, whose job it was to register as few Palestinians as possible. For instance, the census did not count any of the Palestinians who were “absent” – a term which included those who were not in their homes during the time the census officials appeared to take count. As a result, only 69,000 of the original Palestinian population of 1.4 million were included in the census. The census became a means of denationalizing, dispossessing, and expelling Palestinians. Consequently, being absent from the registry meant that those Palestinians would never gain the right to citizenship or right to return via the 1950 Law of Return and 1952 Nationality Law. Thus, citizenship was not a right, but rather a privilege, granted to those who were now constructed as the “original inhabitants” of Palestine.

In 1965, Israel passed the Population Registration Law, which required all residents of the state to register their ethnic group and religion with the population registry and to obtain identity cards that usually indicate these differences. In June of 1967, Israel took control over the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip – thus annexing all of historic Palestine as well as the Golan Heights from Syria and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. Consequently, 150,000 existing refugees from the war in 1948 fled to Jordan and “an additional 240,000 residents of the West

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, 32.

Bank and Gaza registered in Jordan as refugees in the second major expulsion of Palestinians in a twenty-year period.”<sup>353</sup> A census of the newly occupied territories was conducted in 1967; those who were counted were recorded in the registry and issued identification documents, where they were required to obtain permission from the military governor to enter or leave the occupied territories.

In addition, tens of thousands of Palestinians fled their lands to other countries, only to come back immediately after the war to find that they lost their right to residency under military orders. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues that this military order legally situated indigenous Palestinians as “foreigners” and “invaders” in their own land.<sup>354</sup> The only way to regain it was through the procedure known as family reunification – a process to apply for residency for their “first degree relatives who were once ‘permanent residents’ prior to becoming refugees abroad.”<sup>355</sup> Since 1967, 29 military orders have been issued introducing and amending regulations concerning the registration of the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories. The most significant change included Military Order 1208, implemented in September 1987, which dictated that only those children born to a mother who is herself a resident can themselves be registered and become residents of the Occupied Territories.

In July of 2003, the Israeli parliament passed the Citizenship and Entry law 5763, which banned Palestinians from the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) from living in Israel with Palestinian spouses who have Israeli IDs, or in occupied East Jerusalem.<sup>356</sup> In the context of the aftermath of the second intifada, the process for family reunification became stricter and has had

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<sup>353</sup> <sup>353</sup> Nabila El-Ahmed and Nadia Abu-Zahra, “Unfulfilled Promise: Palestinian Family Reunification and the Right of Return,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45 no. 3(179), (2016), 33.

<sup>354</sup> Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian, “The Politics of Birth and the Intimacies of Violence Against Palestinian Women in Occupied East Jerusalem,” *British Journal of Criminology* 55 10.1093/bjc/azv035. (2015): 1187–1206.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>356</sup> Sanja Bahun, *Violence and Gender in the Globalized World: The Intimate and the Extimate* (Routledge, 2008).

substantial impact on Palestinian families waiting. For instance, a 2005 survey of West Bank and Gaza Strip residents indicated that 78 percent had submitted a request for family reunification that had not been processed.<sup>357</sup> The law prohibits Palestinians from obtaining citizenship, permanent residency, and temporary residency status in Israel by marriage to an Israeli citizen. This provision extends towards children from the OPT who wish to live with their Arab parent with Israeli citizenship. Residents of East Jerusalem are permanent residents in accordance with the Entry into Israel Law, 5712-1952. This law was retroactive and impacted couples whose application was not approved before May 2002.

The law gives the Minister of the Interior almost complete discretion to terminate permanent resident status if the resident settles in another country, and to refuse to grant automatically to a resident's children born in Israel the status held by their parents.<sup>358</sup> Possession of an identity card became a condition for the right to not only reside in the Occupied Territories, but also, the right to work without a work permit. If a resident travels abroad, they are only permitted to stay out of the country for a certain period. If they fail to return within this period, or to renew their travel document, they forfeit their identity card. Palestinians who were abroad during this time were excluded from the subsequent population census and were not granted identification papers. The Israeli military created a color-coded identification system in 1981 through its Civil Administration branch; Palestinians must be included in the Palestinian population registry to obtain ID cards and passports.<sup>359</sup> Palestinians who live in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have green IDs, while Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Israel have blue IDs.

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<sup>357</sup> Nabila El-Ahmed and Nadia Abu-Zahra, "Unfulfilled Promise: Palestinian Family Reunification and the Right of Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45 no. 3(179), (2016), 34.

<sup>358</sup> B'tselem. "Forbidden Families: Family Unification and Child Registration in East Jerusalem." B'Tselem. Accessed March 31, 2021. [https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200401\\_forbidden\\_families](https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200401_forbidden_families).

<sup>359</sup> Bethany M. Nikfar, "Families Divided: An Analysis of Israel's Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law," *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* 3 no. 1 (2005).

Palestinians living in Jerusalem, however, have what is called “permanent residency” status. The color of your identification card determines Palestinian livelihood, from their freedom of movement to family unit. Palestinians in the occupied territories cannot visit family in Israel and East Jerusalem, and Palestinians in Israel are not technically allowed to enter Gaza. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are the most isolated and suffer the most in terms of restrictions in movement since they cannot leave the Gaza Strips, even to visit the West Bank for medical reasons. Israel’s blockade on the Gaza Strip, where it dictates what can and cannot enter, including visitors and humanitarian aid, restricts Palestinian movement even more.

Section 2 of the Citizenship and Entry into Israeli Law specifically limits citizenship and stay in Israel:

[T]he Minister of the Interior shall not grant the inhabitant of an area citizenship on the basis of the Citizenship law, and shall not give him a license to reside in Israel on the basis of the Entry into Israel Law, and the Area Commander shall not grant a said inhabitant, a permit to stay in Israel, on the basis with the security legislation in the area.<sup>360</sup>

This law effectively annulled all the procedures for family unification, where families were forced to split apart, move abroad, or live in Israel in fear of deportation. While this law does not rescind citizenship that has already been granted, it does impact couples who had been living together in Israel while trying to get reunification approval. In the OPT, “the policy is implemented without reference to any law,” which has caused some Palestinians with foreign spouses to leave the OPT to enjoy a normal family. Palestinians in Jerusalem would lose their residency and their right to live in Jerusalem if they moved out of the city. If they move, “[they] are considered non-residents by the Israeli authorities and are denied the right to re-enter Jerusalem.” An additional amendment

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<sup>360</sup> Bethany M. Nikfar, "Families Divided: An Analysis of Israel's Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law," *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights* 3 no. 1 (2005): 1. The law defines “area” as Judea, Samaria, or the Gaza Strip; Judea and Samaria are more commonly known as the West Bank.

in 2007 later expanded the order to include citizens of Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, and added further restrictions for residents of the Gaza Strip were included in 2008. Interior Minister Avraham Poraz argued that this law is an “essential security measure,” as spouses from the occupied territories and their offspring misused citizenship to join terrorist attacks.

The military orders and procedures passed since its inception reflect an Israeli policy of preventing Palestinian families from unification and should be contextualized as part of the Israeli settler colonialism structure. Since it is illegal for Palestinian citizens of Israel to enter the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, couples are left to contend with one of them living illegally or with living separately. Al-Haq, an independent Palestinian non-governmental human rights organization based in Ramallah, West Bank, and works to protect and promote Palestinian human rights in the OPT, has compiled testimonies of Palestinians from the West Bank, impacted by the Citizenship and Entry Law. On the basis of these case studies, al-Haq concludes five things: Israel considers family unification for the Palestinians in the OPT a privilege, not a right; the granting of family reunification applications and visitor permits for those who are refused reunification are used in several cases to pressure Palestinians into collaborating with Israeli authorities by betraying others in order to be able to see their family; the cost of renewing visitor permits, as well as the tax on the right of a family to be together, including travel expenses, has left many in financial debt; the right of residency, even when it is granted, is always conditional; and finally, amendments to the laws of registration for newborn children have effectively deprived a large number of Palestinian children from the right to live permanently in the place they were born or where their father is legally a resident.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Al-Haq, *Application Denied: Separated Palestinian Families Tell Their Stories*. Prepared by Rizeq Shuqair and Randa Siniora (1991). This document is the work of al-Haq fieldworkers who interviewed 1609 Palestinians, all of whom had their applications for family reunification rejected. Out of the 1609 interviews, 15 were chosen to be a part of the collection of case studies. Moving forward, I would like to gain access to the other testimonials to make it

Family reunification laws in Israel impact decisions around pregnancy and birth among Palestinian residents in the West Bank and further shows how the Israeli bureaucratic and military occupation hinders Palestinian reproduction. In one study of the reproductive health of women in the Kufr ‘Aqab neighborhood, the effects of having a child as different ID holders are detrimental.<sup>362</sup> As stated earlier, Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip hold green IDs, and have limited or no access to Jerusalem<sup>363</sup>, including East Jerusalem, since it was separated from the rest of the OPT in 2000.<sup>364</sup> Kufr ‘Aqab is an occupied territory in East Jerusalem, a neighborhood that was excluded from East Jerusalem after the construction of the separation wall constructed in 2002. It is often seen as the “bordertown” between the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Since the 2003 Citizenship and Entry Law suspending family unification processes, green card holders in the West Bank can no longer acquire permanent residency through marriage. Couples where one spouse carries a Jerusalem ID while the other has a West Bank or Green ID, live in Kufr Aqab, since it is a neighborhood of East Jerusalem that has remained accessible to West Bank holders after the construction of the separation wall. To ensure that their children are eligible for “permanent residency,” or become Jerusalem ID holders, women from Kufr ‘Aqab have to cross military checkpoints to give birth in hospitals in Jerusalem. This status of “permanent residency” is required for Palestinians to live and work in Jerusalem, and can only be passed down to their children if they are born in Jerusalem. While Palestinian babies must have at least one parent born in a hospital located in Jerusalem to qualify for residency, it is not automatically

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the bulk of the chapter for my book manuscript.

<sup>362</sup> Layaly Hamayel et al, “Reproductive Health and Rights in East Jerusalem: The Effects of Militarisation and Biopolitics on the experiences of Pregnancy and Birth of Palestinians living in the Kufr ‘Aqab Neighborhood,” *Reproductive Health Matters*, 25, no 1 (2017), 87-95.

<sup>363</sup> It is possible for residents of the West Bank to apply for permits that enable them to pass through checkpoints and enter East Jerusalem. However, these permits are temporary, where they range from a day to a year (overnight stay not permitted), depending on what specific purposes, but are oftentimes given for work, health appointments, religious tourism and business.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.* 89

guaranteed; instead, a parent who is a resident parent must apply for their children's residency years later. These requirements only apply to Palestinians and not to Jews, who can be born and live outside Jerusalem's boundaries without losing the right to reside there.

Once Palestinians are considered permanent residents, they must continually prove that they are residing within the boundaries dictated by Jerusalem's municipal authorities so as not to lose their residency status and be deported to the West Bank. Israel passed this "center of life" policy in 1995, where Israel bureaucratically and legally cleansed more than ten thousand Palestinians from East Jerusalem from Israel's population register, what many call "quiet deportations."<sup>365</sup> Some reports claim up to 14,000 individual residencies have been revoked since 1967, on the claims by Israel that these individuals failed to prove they live within Jerusalem municipality boundaries. The "center of life policy" emerged from a 1988 ruling of the Israel High Court but was not implemented until 1995. This policy has led to regular unannounced night raids, in which the Israeli military bombards families in the middle of the night to ensure residency. This policing not only of where Palestinian families can live and travel, but also of where they can give birth functions as a form of biopolitics to control the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem, and at large.<sup>366</sup>

### **Political Captivity and Motherhood**

Our Spring in Palestine is born in a prison cell  
Our Spring in Palestine is born shackled to a hospital bed  
Our Spring in Palestine is born with an administrative order against it.  
But, our Spring in Palestine blossoms even in hunger  
-Cultivate Hope by Rafeef Ziadah<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Danielle C. Jefferis, "The 'Center for Life' Policy: Institutionalizing Statelessness in East Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no 50. (2012), p. 94.

<sup>366</sup> After studying this topic for the purpose of this chapter, I realized that there are more questions than answers that a section in a dissertation cannot encompass. But realizing that this has been one of the most important ways to think about the interlocking of citizenship, reproduction, and nation, I hope that this becomes a more central part of my book manuscript.

<sup>367</sup> Sami Kishawi, "Rafeef Ziadah: 'Cultivate Hope' for Hana Al-Shalabi (with lyrics)," *Sixteen Minutes to*

In Palestine, political captivity and mass incarceration are crucial to the Zionist settler colonial regime. Physical and psychological forms of torture and violence are employed against Palestinians to not only intimidate Palestinians through terror, but to prevent and stifle any form of resistance to the Jewish State. After the Israeli annexation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, there was a shift in strategies of control around the Palestinian population, towards “a great enclosed, complex and hierarchize structure... integrated into the very body of the [Israeli] state apparatus.”<sup>368</sup> The desire to create a “Greater Israel” - after the capturing of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights--led to a period of occupation in which Palestinians experienced shifting forms of Israeli military and civilian rule.<sup>369</sup> With over 1,400 military orders and regulations by the British Emergency Regulations forming the British Mandate Period, as well as Ottoman legal precedents, the Israeli military was able to provide a basis for enforcing military rule over Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. The rise in Palestinian nationalism, including the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in the late 60s called for new methods of suppression to meet future resistance.

To govern Palestinians in the West Bank, Israel established its military court system in 1967. On June 7, 1967, in the aftermath of the Six Day War - also called the “Arab-Israeli War,” which was fought between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Jordan - Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF) issued its first military order, which stated that all legal authority over the residing Occupied Territories would fall into the hands of the Israeli military

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*Palestine*. <http://smpalestine.com/2012/03/27/rafeef-ziadah-cultivate-hopefor-hana-al-shalabi-with-lyrics/>(accessed May 20, 2020).

<sup>368</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon Books, 1977), 116.

<sup>369</sup> B'tselem. “Forbidden Families: Family Unification and Child Registration in East Jerusalem.” B'Tselem. Accessed March 31, 2021. [https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200401\\_forbidden\\_families](https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200401_forbidden_families).

commanders in the interest of “security” and “public order.”<sup>370</sup> The order granted tremendous power to the military commander by way of an ability to incarcerate any person deemed a “security threat” to Israel, which effectively criminalized any act of dissent or political struggle against the state. As a result of this order, over 700,000 Palestinians have been forcibly detained, many of whom were arrested because of resisting the occupation through protests and demonstrations. During the first Intifada, or uprising, which lasted between 1987 to 1993, “Israel/Palestine had the highest per capita incarceration in the world.”<sup>371</sup> According to the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, “[s]ince the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory in 1967, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians have been detained under Israeli military orders in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), which constitutes 20 percent of the total Palestinian population in the OPT, and as much as 40 percent of the total male Palestinian population<sup>372</sup>,” and an estimated 15,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and/or detained.<sup>373</sup>

Most Palestinians held in Israeli prisons are not incarcerated for matters such as theft, rape, or murder, but rather for defending themselves against Israeli attacks, or attempting to protect their homes from demolition, or for creating other structural impediments to the occupation. The use of Israeli technologies has made it possible to gain access to individuals’ private lives. Many Palestinians are arrested and incarcerated under administrative detention - a tactic that first emerged during the British Mandate era to suppress Arab uprisings but that now serves as a tool

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<sup>370</sup> "Carceral Politics in Palestine and Beyond: Gender, Vulnerability, Prison", Center for Palestine Studies (April 5, 2012). <http://palestine.mei.columbia.edu/events-spring-2012/2012/4/5/carceral-politics-in-palestine-beyond-gender-vulnerability-prison>; Lisa Hajjar, *Courting Conflict: The Israeli Military Court System in the West Bank and Gaza* (University of California Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>372</sup>

Miriam Pellicano. “Israeli Law Tears Palestinian Families Apart.” Middle East News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, July 19, 2013. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/07/20137813932642619.html>.

<sup>373</sup> “More than 15,000 Palestinian Women Arrested by Israel since 1967.” Middle East Monitor, March 8, 2018. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180308-more-than-15000-palestinian-women-arrested-by-israel-since-1967/>.

to arrest and detain Palestinians based on suspicious behavior. According to BTselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, administrative detention allows Israeli forces to hold Palestinians without trial or charge for an lengthy and unmarked period of time, “alleging that a person plans to commit a future offense.”<sup>374</sup> According to Military Order 1226, Israeli military commanders have the power to detain an individual or up to six months if they have “reasonable grounds to presume that the security of the area or public security require the detention.”<sup>375</sup> Although the state claims that administrative detention is used in cases necessary “for imperative reasons of security,” in practice it is often used to restrict non-violent political activities. For instance, a number of Palestinians from the village of Budrus, who engaged in a series of non-violent protests against the construction of the Israeli West Bank barrier, were placed under administrative detention for taking part in a peaceful ten-month campaign.<sup>376</sup> Israel’s military rhetoric defines all Palestinians as “security” prisoners, what Abeer Baker calls “collectivization,” which blindly “transforms thousands of Palestinians imprisoned today in Israel into a single group that poses, as such, an identical level of danger.”<sup>377</sup> This not only violates their rights as individuals, but denies their political existence and conceals the background and reality behind the imprisonment. This categorization is “a tool used by the state authorities to promote an ideological outlook that regards a Palestinian, as such, as an existential threat lacking any humanity or political existence, and whose place is behind the walls and fences.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> “Administrative Detention.” B'Tselem. Accessed March 31, 2021  
[https://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative\\_detention](https://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative_detention).

<sup>375</sup> “Administrative Detention.” B'Tselem. Accessed March 31, 2021.  
[https://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative\\_detention](https://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative_detention).

<sup>376</sup> “Palestinian Political Prisoners,” factsheet by Palestine Solidarity Campaign (April 2013),  
<https://www.palestinecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/prisoners-factsheet-WEB-April-2013.pdf>

<sup>377</sup> Abeer Baker, “The Definition of Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Prisons as ‘Security Prisoners’ - Security Semantics for Camouflaging Political Practice,” *Adalah*, 65.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

Administrative detention orders are often based on secret information collected by the Israeli Security Agency, and they are often made available only to the military judge; the information is never shown to the detainees or their lawyers. With administrative detention, Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have the option to renew the detention order either on or just before the date of expiration, for any arbitrary reason. Because the maximum time that IOF can detain an individual is not made explicit, this leaves room for indefinite detention.<sup>379</sup> The ambiguity of administrative detention reveals the arbitrary yet insurmountable power of the Israeli military in their ability to shift laws and policies during any “state of emergency.”<sup>380</sup> The repetition of arbitrary arrests and interrogations again reifies Palestinians as constant “security” threats and “criminals,” which is contradictory because while “dispossession is a criminal act, in the case of Israel-Palestine, it is the dispossessed who are made to be the bearers of the criminality in question.”<sup>381</sup> This sort of “cognitive dissonance” from the perspective of the Israeli state, absolves its criminal acts of dispossession, as well as mass evictions, killings, and incarceration, by constructing Palestinians as the perpetual threats.

Imprisonment is not only an intensification of occupation, but rather inherent to the occupation. It is for this reason that patterns and experiences of arrest, torture, interrogation, and detention are familiar to all Palestinian families and disrupts the intimate realms of Palestinian lives, impacting their homes, marriages, and families.<sup>382</sup> Janan Abdu, a prominent Palestinian human rights activist, mother of two daughters and wife of Ameer Makhoul, a Palestinian

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<sup>379</sup> This is a very familiar and widely practiced by other carceral regimes in Europe and North America, including the United States, who holds detainees indefinitely in places such as Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay detention camps.

<sup>380</sup> Reference to Giorgio Agamben’s “State of Exception.”

<sup>381</sup> Caroline Rooney (2014) Prison Israel-Palestine: Literalities of Criminalization and Imaginative Resistance, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50:2, 134-147, DOI: [10.1080/17449855.2014.884264](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2014.884264)

<sup>382</sup> Elham Bayour. "Occupied Territories, Resisting Women: Palestinian Women Political Prisoners." In *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex*. New York, 80 NY. Routledge, 2005. 201-214.

community leader serving a nine-year sentence in an Israeli prison reveals the intricacies between the prison and colonial system: “It’s not [just] one issue, the political prisoners; it became our life.” Her husband Ameer Makhoul was the director of Ittijah, the Union of Arab Community-Based Associations, a network for Palestinian organizations. In 2010, sixteen agents of the Israeli internal security agency, called Shin Bet or Shabak, arrested Makhoul during a 3 am house raid in his Haifa home, where they confiscated his family’s computers, cell phones, and other personal items. Abdu describes this late-night disturbance into their private home and the effects of the arrest of her husband on her children: “It was a traumatic arrest for [myself] and for my daughters. [They spent] two weeks not seeing their father. I lost my two parents during the month of [Ameer’s] jailing and I wasn’t able to even see Ameer or hug him. My daughter graduate from school without her father beside her. When you speak about the personal level, it’s so hard.”<sup>383</sup>

### **The Politicization of Palestinian Birth: *3000 Nights***

This section presents a reading of Palestinian filmmaker Mai Masri’s first featured film, *3000 Nights* (2015) as a window into the relationship among Palestinian reproductive life, confinement, and the struggle against Israeli settler colonialism. *3000 Nights*, follows the story of a Palestinian woman, Layal, who gives birth to and raises a son in an Israeli jail. It was filmed in an old, fort-like prison once used by the Jordanian military in the desert, adding authenticity scenes set an Israeli jail. The film is based on actual intimate stories of Palestinian women prisoners that Masri experienced in her 30 years as a documentary film maker. In particular, the story of protagonist Layal, played by Palestinian actress Maisa Abd el Hadi, is based on the actual

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<sup>383</sup> Jillian, Kestler-D’Amours, “Ameer Makhoul: Still shaking the foundations of Israeli Apartheid after 2 years in jail.”  
<https://electronicintifada.net/content/ameer-makhoul-still-shaking-foundations-israeli-apartheid-after-2-years-jail/11229>

experience of a Palestinian woman who Masri met while filming in Nablus. The woman who was wrongly accused and, consequently, gave birth and raised her child in an Israeli prison. According to Masri, the prison in the film is a metaphor for the plight of all Palestinians, and in particular, Palestinian women.

At the start of the film, Loyal is a young, newly married school teacher from the Palestinian city of Nablus who plans to leave the West Bank for Canada with her husband, Farid. One night while driving home in the middle of a storm, she gives a Palestinian teenage boy a ride home. Soon after, Loyal is arrested and falsely accused of helping the teenage boy, who is suspected of attacking an Israeli military checkpoint. When asked to testify against him in court, Loyal refuses and is charged with being an accomplice and sentenced to 8 years in an Israeli prison.

*3000 Nights* opens up immediately with “Nablus 1980” on the screen, against the pounding rain on a dark road in the middle of the night, with a speeding Israeli military jeep. The scene transitions to allow the viewer to witness a group of prisoners inside the jeep, all blindfolded. The jeep stops abruptly, and still pouring rain outside, a woman - who we find out later is Loyal - is forced out of the jeep - blindfolded, barefoot, and wearing her nightgown as she runs with the guards inside the prison. This scene opens up to silence and terror: Loyal’s face is terrified, pale, young as she is dragged through the shadowy corridors, as a fierce dog barks at her, and a military interrogator yells at her. She is cuffed to the wall in a small cell alone, hair and gown soaked, dripping from the rain, overnight for hours. The next shot portrays one of her interrogation scenes where she is accused of being an accomplice to the boy who is being accused of killing an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint. The prison director, who we learn is named Ruti, exclaims: “You gave a boy a lift in your car,” to which Loyal replies: “he was hurt, I was trying to help.” The prison guard eases up, and calmly tries to extract information from Loyal about the teenager, asking about where

he lives and where he was going, to which Layal had no information about and could not respond. Frustrated, they forcibly removed her earrings, pulls her hair, pushes her around, continuously yells at her in both Arabic and Hebrew, and is placed in a cell with all Israeli prisoners, all of them arrested and detained for crimes such as possession and use of drugs. Immediately upon entering the cell, Layal is attacked by one of the drug addicts, Shulamit, played by Raida Adon, who comes up to her blowing smoke into her face inches away. Another one pleads with the Israeli guard: “She is a terrorist. Why bring her here?”

The Israeli prisoners are all dressed in their shorts, skirts, and T shirts, while Layal, and other Palestinian prisoners, don a dark blue uniform; their uniforms are all numbered, Layal’s being 735. This shot initially shows the intrinsic difference between Israelis and Palestinians in terms of criminality - that Israelis are allowed their individuality while Palestinians are reduced to numbers - another terrorist. Layal is frightened and isolated, emphasized as the camera moves to the cell of the blue uniformed Palestinian women seen across the corridor, who are all staring at her, suspiciously, wondering if she may be a collaborator. All of these women are imprisoned for political reasons. Layal crouches down against the cell wall, wrapped in a blanket and spends the night on the ground, while the camera focuses on her terrified face. She is moved into a cell with women including, Sanaa Bitar - a Palestinian woman and resistance fighter from Lebanon, who lost her arm in war; her prosthetic arm becomes confiscated by the guards immediately upon the viewer meeting her, and they mock her for her disabled arm; Um Ali, a grandmother with two grandsons who are staying at the prison next to the women prison; and two sisters - Fidaa and Jamila - inseparable, teenage schoolgirls who were arrested in their classrooms. Finding herself different from the others, Layal is similarly isolated and afraid here too, as her cellmates suspect her of being a collaborator - the guards indeed have asked Layal to conspire against her cellmates

in exchange with visitation rights and calls from her husband. In response to this part of the movie, Mai Masri writes: “Layal stands apart from the others because she’s not any part of the resistance, she’s an ordinary school teacher.” As a result of being falsely accused of assisting a Palestinian teenage boy, accused of attacking an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint, Layal is sentenced to eight years in prison.

Layal’s life takes another shocking discovery - while getting examined by the doctors, as she is shackled, he reveals to her that she is pregnant. The prison director, Ruti, comes in after and tells Layal, “you can’t have a baby in prison,” and convinces her, in Arabic, to abort the baby, “You have to get rid of it,” she tells her, while Layal looks at her horrifyingly. While telling her husband about the pregnancy, he is shocked to hear the news, insisting that she “cannot have the child in prison” and urges her to have an abortion. As insulting, he questions how she became pregnant, implying that she conceived with someone else. He then reveals that he has decided to leave for Canada under their visa without her. Repelled at him leaving as well as asking her to have an abortion, Layal decides to precede with the pregnancy: “I’m having my baby and that’s final. If you want to leave, then leave.”

One scene from the film that particular demonstrates how Palestinian reproduction is deemed a security risk, is through an exchange between the prison director and Layal’s lawyer, Rachel. Rachel, an Israeli lawyer, actively fought for Layal before and after her sentencing. In the scene, Rachel walks into Ruti’s office with a box of books for Layal and her cellmates to read. Ruti angrily responds that they must be approved for “security reasons,” in which Rachel realizes that the books will not actually make it to the prisoners. During their conversation, Rachel requests from Ruti that Layal’s mother is present during Layal’s delivery of her child, to which Ruti hastily replies, “No. Security.” Instead of accepting this decision, Rachel fights back pleading, “For

heaven's sake, a little humanity won't hurt you." Ruti angrily responds, "Should I remind you of how your son died?" – a reminder that the Israeli settler colonial project is a reproductive project that impedes both Israeli and Palestinian reproduction, while disproportionately impacting the reproductive decisions of Palestinian women and the safety of Palestinian children. Angrily that Ruti attacked a vulnerable topic, Rachel responds: "Do you think that I can ever forget or forgive them for sending an 18 year old boy to fight in their dirty war? (Referring to the Israeli state). This time Ruti gets up, pounds her hands on the desk, and replies: "You think this is a dirty war? That woman you are defending has blood on her hands. We can't bend the rules to fit everyone's needs." Rachel quickly replies that Ruti has no problem "bending the rules" for the Israeli inmates, and walks out, citing even the separation of groups behind bars.

Layal's political consciousness, as well as her physical body, is transformed in the scenes that follow leading up to the birth of her son, Nour. Before she goes into labor, she is in the cell with the other Palestinian prisoners, who are collectively singing and repeating: "As usual, my cell saved me from death... on its ceiling, I found the face of my freedom, the orange grove, and the faces of those who yesterday lost their names on the battlefields." While singing along, she goes into labor and the scene immediately shifts over to her being taken by the Israeli guards to the hospital and forcibly shackled, with her arms fixed above her head and one foot shackled, to the prison hospital bed. The scene is harrowing and captivating of the viewer's attention, as it focuses in on the parts of her body that are shackled and the pain in her face from the pregnancy labor pain. Pushing and pushing, she gives birth to a baby boy, who is brought up to the light by the doctor. Without even taking a moment to breathe after the pain and trauma of giving birth, while literally shackled, Layal pleads "give me my baby," as the doctor and Ruti mockingly suggest finding him a new home: "We won't have a problem finding him a family," expresses Ruti, incapable of

understanding Layal's right to motherhood, as a Palestinian woman. After demanding that they give her child, the doctor eventually gives Nour to Layal. They remain in the hospital for a day and are both sent back to the prison cell, where Nour becomes the youngest Palestinian prisoner in the film.

The physical act of shackling Layal's body while giving birth to her child shows how national security becomes tethered to securing the domestic and reproductive body.<sup>384</sup> The project of security enlists domesticity as prerequisite the future of the nation, which has often meant governing reproduction through the differential surveillance and control of women's bodies and behavior. Nour - which means "light" in Arabic - is emphasized by the act of the doctor bringing him into the light, and is symbolic of what he becomes later on for Layal, as well as the Palestinian prison community - a source of light, hope, and the desire for freedom, especially for Layal, whose name, which means "Nights" in Arabic, was the antithesis. When Layal brings him back to now both of their cell, the women all greet him, tenderly and in solidarity with Layal, who are collectively bound to raise this child behind bars together. Because the guards prohibit access to toys and clothes from the outside, as exemplified by a scene between Layal and her mother as she tries to give Layal clothes for Nour and a prison guard curtly yells at her, "That is forbidden" or "Mamnoo" in Arabic, the women use their imaginations and limited resources around them, to make him toys, including a ball and a doll, as well as making gestures of a "bird" with their hands, as they tell him stories. Another toy that he has is a wooden bird made for him by Ayman, a Palestinian prisoner nurse who tends Nour and later Layal in the hospital after she became hurt, who falls in love with her.

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<sup>384</sup> Natalie Fixer-Oraiz, *Homeland Maternity: US Security Culture and the New Reproductive Regime*, (University of Illinois Press, 2019)

“He looks just like you,” says Um Ali to Layal, to which she smiles gently, the moment Layal brings Nour into the cell. This moment where the other prisoners greet mother and child is beautiful, as it portrays moments of intimacy as they play and tenderly caress Nour, displaying their love and affection for the child. They collectively become his mother, exemplified by Jamila shouting to the other prisoners, “*We* had a baby boy! His name is Nour!” The collective “we” reveals how Nour transforms all of the Palestinian female prisoners, as the next scenes portray their newfound resistance struggle against the guards after learning about the Israeli attacks on Lebanon, where the Israeli military attacked Lebanon, surrounding the capital, killing civilians, and cutting of water and electricity in Palestinian refugee camps. Sanaa, a Palestinian prisoner from Lebanon, whose family remain there, calls for a strike to demand better prison conditions and demand an end to the Israeli occupation. She cries, “Let me out so I can bury my family.” As a result, the Palestinian prisoners, including Layal, immediately begin a hunger strike, as well as striking against their laborious prison duties, including cooking, cleaning, and sewing the military uniforms for the Israeli military and prison guards. The Israeli guards switch tactics and begin to appeal to their weaknesses - by threatening to take away Nour from Layal, as he had turned two and legally, they are able to take him from her: “If you don’t pull out of the strike, you will lose your son - you must decide.” This places Layal in a position to choose between the right to keep her child, her motherhood and the fight for Palestinian rights and self-determination. This is ironic because earlier, her journey to motherhood was so intertwined with the harsh realities of being a Palestinian in an Israeli jail, which led to them both being held in captivity. This scene not only strikes the violence of Israel’s policing of Palestinian reproduction but illustrates something often missing from official and nationalist discourses– the collective pleasure, joy, and resistance that

the women display around Palestinian reproduction, highlighting how the Israeli settler colonial project is never complete, but how Palestinians are constantly challenging that discourse.

In an exchange between Layal and another Palestinian prisoner named Rihan - which later Layal later finds out is actually the one who has been gathering intel in the Palestinian cell and feeding it to the Israeli prison guards in exchange for early release - Rihan urges Layal to join her in ending the strike for sake of their kids, whom Israeli authorities similarly threatened to keep her kids from visiting if she does not personally end the strike: "We're mothers. No one can judge us for thinking of our kids first." Thinking of her son Nour, and having to struggle what is best for her child and what is best for herself and other Palestinians in captivity, she chooses to end the strike, temporarily. In one scene, Layal is held in a cell alone with Nour, away from the others on strike, during the hunger strike. The camera is focusing on the interaction between the mother and the Nour bonding as they play with the wooden bird that was given to him by Ayman. We, as the viewer, are given an inside to Layal's mind and transformation of her political consciousness, as she tries to transform her child's real experience of captivity into one of the imagining the bird's life of freedom and flying. Whenever Nour begins to cry, she either shows him the toy bird or gestures with her hand's images of a bird along the shadows on the wall, as she recites to him a short poem:

Once there was a bird  
One day it saw a white horse galloping through the trees  
When they saw each other they fell in love  
And what did they get  
A little pony with wings

As she sings the story to Nour, a real bird flies inside the cell window and the wooden bird is transformed into a real one as Nour falls asleep with the toy in his hand. The reoccurring symbol and metaphor of the bird throughout the film is symbolic of imagined freedom, especially

Palestinian's desire for freedom out of captivity of not only the physical cell, but the Israeli occupation. The "wings" symbolize the will to flee, to emerge out of the space of captivity. Throughout the film, Layal often looks out of the cell window, and we are shown her point of view - of birds sitting on the wire around the prison.

### **Shackling of Palestinian Pregnant Prisoners**

Palestinian women who are arrested and detained by IOF are typically held in Hasharon and Damon prisons, both located inside Israel. Both prisons are held outside of the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip), which directly violates Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that "an occupying power must detain residents of occupied territory in prisons *inside* the occupied territory."<sup>385</sup> As Israel prevents Palestinian residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) from entering in and out of Israel, families of detainees are often denied access to visit their relatives in prisons, including mothers of young children. In addition, basic gynecological care, food, and proper hygiene are denied to women, violating again Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva convention. Prison cells are not well kept - prison cells are often infested with insects, cockroaches, and rodents. One Palestinian woman in the film, *Women without Borders*, describes her experience: "No matter how hard I try to describe the cell to you, I cannot. It is like an underground grave... there are so many insects in the cell; the mattresses and cover sheet were damp and smelled awful. Sewage was overflowing. I could barely make my ablutions to pray."<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Emphasis is mine; Mehru Jaffer. "Interview: Palestinian Women Prisoners Shackled during Childbirth." The Electronic Intifada, February 12, 2017. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/interview-palestinian-women-prisoners-shackled-during-childbirth/9822>.

<sup>386</sup> Mehru Jaffer. "Interview: Palestinian Women Prisoners Shackled during Childbirth." The Electronic Intifada, February 12, 2017. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/interview-palestinian-women-prisoners-shackled-during-childbirth/9822>.

Between 2003-2008, there were four cases of Palestinian women detainees who were forced to give birth while held in Israeli prisons. In all four of these cases, the detainee received little to no prenatal and postnatal care while imprisoned. Those who are transferred to hospitals to give birth are subjected to strict security supervision, and the woman's hands and feet are typically shackled with metal chains. These women are chained to their beds until they enter the delivery room, and are shackled once again after delivery. This shackling violates international law, as well as Israel's own laws. According to Article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Israel on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1981, "States parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement, and the postnatal granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation."<sup>387</sup>

The story of Samar Isbeh, a then 22-year-old Palestinian woman, illustrates the brutality that pregnant prisoners experience in Israel prisons. In 2006, Isbeh was arrested and detained following a student protest. She was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison. She explains her experience: "I was arrested three months after my wedding. I was the head of the student council at the Islamic University. We organized a protest against the occupation. I was arrested in my husband's home in Tulkarm. Two days later my husband was arrested too, and sentenced to 9 months in prison, although they had nothing to charge him with whatsoever."<sup>388</sup> When Isbeh was first arrested, she was in the beginning stages of her pregnancy. Knowingly, the Israeli authorities tortured her verbally and physically in an underground cell for 66 days, where they made her balance on a child's chair and keep her in a freezing cold disciplinary cell. She recounts her experience:

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<sup>387</sup> Addameer. 2012. "Women." Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association. <http://www.addameer.org/etemplate.php?id=295> (accessed February 27, 2021).

<sup>388</sup> "Surviving Israeli Jail: Torture, Humiliation and Giving Birth." RT International, April 27, 2012. <https://www.rt.com/news/hunger-strike-israeli-jail-144/>.

My hands and feet were tied when I was going through labor. They C-sectioned me, not because I required it but simply out of hatred. They let me have the child but treated him as a prisoner, too. They gave us no milk or diapers, or only expired ones. I was kept in terrible conditions during and after I gave birth. I wasn't allowed to go out for fresh air. The only medicine they ever gave me and my child for any condition was paracetamol.

After her release, she was deported to the Gaza Strip and is denied entry into Tulkarm, so she can see neither her husband nor her children. The act of her being deported to the Gaza Strip is a common occurrence in releasing political prisoners from the West Bank. After 1948, Egypt assumed control over Gaza; how it was immediately seized by Israel during the Six-Day War, with the West Bank, where it assumed military control. When Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005 and left it to the control of Hamas, the occupation had not ended, but merely taken a more cruel and inhumane form, as the “jailer pulled out of the jail and was now holding its prisoners captive from without.”<sup>389</sup> It is within this context that we can understand Gaza as another prison, often referred to as an “open air prison.” For instance, in October 2011, Hamas and Israel agreed to a prisoner swap, where Israel released 1,027 Palestinians in exchange for Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldiers captured by Hamas in 2006. Out of the 477 Palestinians rebased during the first wave, Israel deported 164 Palestinians originally from the West Bank or 1948 territories (modern day Israel) to Gaza; Israel deported forty Palestinians deemed “too dangerous” to Syria, Turkey, Jordan, and Qatar and banned them from returning.<sup>390</sup>

Another Palestinian woman, Fatima Al Zak,<sup>391</sup> mother of eight, was arrested and detained around the same time as Samar Isbeh's arrest, in 2007. Fatima is from the city of Shuja'iyah, a

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<sup>389</sup> Levy, 2011, viii.

<sup>390</sup> Exile functions as another form of imprisonment, and functions as a method of shrinking the Palestinian population. Edward said writes: “[Exile] unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land [and] their past... Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology of a restored people.” Quoted from Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. (2002).

<sup>391</sup> Fatima Al Zak's testimony is documented in two separate interviews. In the first, her experience is documented in an interview with Samidoun, where they use “Patima Zakka” as a pseudonym to protect her identity. The second

neighborhood in Eastern Gaza City, an area that Israel seriously devastated during Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" attack on Gaza in the Summer of 2014. Fatima used to be an organizer for the Islamic Jihad, but since her release from prison, she has been working as an independent activist on issues around prisoners' rights. She begins her story with her arrest. She had been arrested in 2007, inside the Erez checkpoint, while she was traveling from the Gaza Strip into Israel's 1948. She had been charged with conspiring the suicide-bomb a bus full of Israeli military personnel. In her own words, she says that she was on her way to commit the bombing targeting Israeli soldiers and army recruits. In the time she was arrested, Fatima had obtained a permit to cross the checkpoint for medical treatment and left her husband and eight children behind. When she got there, she had been intercepted by the Israeli military and charged with attempted murder.

Upon being detained, the Israeli soldiers told her to remove her hijab and took her to a separate room to be searched by a body scanner, before she was handcuffed, blindfolded, and transferred to an isolated cell for the initial interrogation. She was refused access to a lawyer or to speak with her family. Fatima expressed that "The first interrogation lasted around two hours... they tried to blackmail me by saying that if I co-operated and gave them information they would not arrest me but just send me back to Gaza. They asked me about other people involved in the operation but I did not give them any information and just kept smiling."<sup>392</sup> They interrogated her to extract a confession or find out information about the operation, including who else was involved. They threatened her children and husband, a common form of blackmail against Palestinian women, by getting their families involved. After the initial interrogation, Fatima was

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interview is with "Corporate Watch" and in "Electronic Intifada", where they use her actual name of Fatima Al Zak. The interview was conducted 8 months after the bombing in Gaza, where Shuja'iyah was devastated. I have decided to use her actual name as she gave the rights of the interviewer with Corporate Watch to use her actual name, and they expressed that she was really open about her experience and wanted to remain transparent.

<sup>392</sup> Corporate Watch, "Born in an Israeli Prison," *Corporate Watch*, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://corporatewatch.org/born-in-an-israeli-prison/>.

taken to a detention facility in Ashkelon prison in Israel where the nurses medically examined her and asked if she was pregnant. She expressed that she did not know and asked for a pregnancy test, which they eventually gave her after “kicking up a fuss.” There she found out she was pregnant. In her words, she reveals: “I did not know I was pregnant before I got arrested... my eight children were left without me at home. No one had instructed me to blow up anybody. It is true that they [Israelis] had killed my brother and a number of relatives - but that is the case with most people in Palestine.” The pregnancy test was an immediate test, but Fatima was not aware of the results until after two days. She indicates in her interview that they don’t “[ask] about the pregnancy for medical reasons but to find out a prisoner’s weak point.”

During her interrogation, the IOF subjected her to numerous forms of torture to extract information from her, knowing that Fatima was pregnant. “They tortured me while I was pregnant... They kept me in an ice-cold cell, relocating me from one cell to another time and again. They wanted me to have a miscarriage. This mistreatment got me to the point of bleeding.”<sup>393</sup> She was handcuffed and blindfolded when taken to the interrogation room, and once there the interrogators removed her blindfold and kept her on a small metal chair, often with her hands cuffed behind her back. Sometimes the handcuffs were attached to leg cuffs, hindering her ability to sit upright. After a week of intense interrogations, she called the interrogators from her cell and told them that she had something to tell them. “They thought I wanted to confess and made a great atmosphere for me, brought me snacks and restaurants food to tempt me to eat for the baby.” She then proceeded to tell them “I left Eight children and one granddaughter. I left all my friends in Gaza. My I left a good position of work [...] I was prepared to leave all this and do the action

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<sup>393</sup> Charlotte Silver. "Women prisoners Tell Their Stories in ‘Suspended Lives’." *The Electronic Intifada*. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/women-prisoners-tell-their-storiessuspended-lives/10202>; RT: News. 2012. "Surviving Israeli jail: Torture, Humiliation and Giving Birth." RT: Question More. <http://rt.com/news/hunger-strike-israeli-jail-144/> (accessed February 27, 2013).

because of the daily killings and demolitions in Gaza. My punishment come from God, not your prisons.” She entered a hunger strike, joining other Palestinians behind bars on a hunger strike.

Humiliated they could not get any detailed information out of Fatima, the Israeli soldiers changed tactics and put someone in her cell, who Fatima is convinced was a collaborator, whose job it was to get Fatima to talk. Collaborators are commonly used by the Israeli army to extract information which can then be used in prosecutions. After the Israeli soldiers placed two boys in a cell next to hers, she gave them advice not to give in or give any confessions they were being accused of. As a result, the Israeli guards came into her cell in the middle of the night, blindfolded and handcuffed her and took her to the “Dog house” to die. The “dog house” is a small and dirty cell, about one point five times one meter, with no air circulation, full of insects that bite, nada small thin mattress on the ground. During the first three days other time in the “dog house” she underwent lie detector tests for eight to twelve hours a day, where she was shown images of other people and repeatedly asked for information about them. She was routinely beaten as she refused to give any information. However, the beatings had an impact on her mental and physical health: “Two days after being moved there I started to have bleeding, and I thought I was losing my child, which is what they wanted. As this was happening, they were mocking me and laughing at me. I was there [at the dog house] for one week.”<sup>394</sup> Until this point, Fatima was repeatedly denied access to a lawyer, but on day 18, after she began bleeding, a lawyer from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited her and appealed to the high court to allow her to go to the hospital. On day 21, she was moved from Ashkelon to Hasharon prison, in Israel, despite the court ruling that she should be taken straight to the hospital. 12 days after she was moved to Hasharon, she was finally taken to a hospital and given an ultrasound scan to check on the baby’s health.

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<sup>394</sup> Corporate Watch, "Born in an Israeli Prison," *Corporate Watch*, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://corporatewatch.org/born-in-an-israeli-prison/>.

After this incident, Fatima was allowed regular checkups at the prison and was allowed to visit the hospital. However, Israeli soldiers continued to take advantage of her being pregnant. The doctor who regularly saw her demanded that she be shackled when she was brought to visit him, where she was then shackled from the hands and legs. Approaching her delivery date, she began experiencing strong delivery pains and was taken from the prison to Kafr Saba. Fatima says, “the pain disappeared but then the same thing happened a week later. Both times I was kept chained to the delivery bed and was arguing with them to unchain me.” She complained to the ICRC to argue her right to not be shackled while giving birth; her wish was fulfilled, as they said they would let her deliver the baby unchained but that she would be cuffed immediately afterwards. She was also denied her request to have a family member with her while she gave birth. Despite the torturous conditions, she made it to her delivery, where the prison authorities made it just as difficult as her pregnancy. The delivery itself took four hours and she was denied any form of pain relief, until the very end. She recalls the experience of her birth:

The obstetrician yelled at me and treated me like I was an animal... She refused to put me on an IV, and she denied me anesthesia. She was calling down terrible curses upon me. But you know, punishment ensued for her right away: she hit her head real bad right in my cell. Allah [God] helped me. She told me, ‘You are a terrorist, and your child will be a terrorist.’ But I relived my beautiful Youssef. And the real terrorists are those medics in Israeli prisons.<sup>395</sup>

On January 17, 2008, Fatima gave birth to a baby boy, whom she named Youssef. She saw him for a few minutes before he was taken away and as they said earlier, she was immediately shackled. She stayed in the hospital for three days, where she was allowed to breastfeed him and see him for merely 10 minutes, three times a day, while the rest of the feeding being done away from her. Fatima and Youssef were released three days later, to the Ha’sharon prison, where they were kept in a cell with three other prisoners. She, like Layal, was left to raise this child behind bars. Youssef,

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

like Nour, spent the first 21 months of his life behind bars, where prison authorities denied any requests to bring him any clothes or toys from outside. They denied him baby formula or milk, and he struggled to breastfeed, as Fatima was not being adequately cared for in her diet. Similar to the film, Israeli authorities constructed Fatima's child as a "terrorist." Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian writes that the construction of Palestinian children as "terrorists" or a "potential terrorists," "is tied to the commodification of their lives in which their bodies become experimental objects for the Israeli military, defense contractors, and security corporations."<sup>396</sup> They become a terrorist and subjected to death and violence before they are born. This depiction as Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues, constructs Palestinian children as "vital political capital for the settler colonial regime... that can be made and unmade, can be defined along the continuum of the helpless, uncivilized, dangerous, and terrorist Other."<sup>397</sup> Fatima recalls that the most difficult part of it all, was the lack of stimulation and connection with other children. She mentions that there was one other small child there, Ghada Abu Omar, daughter of Khoula Zitawi, a prisoner from the West Bank, in which Youssef became good friends with. She recalls: "Youssef and this girl were great friends, and he cried a lot when she left... when Ghada and her mum were released he had no other child to play with." Fatima and Youssef were released from prison, along with twenty Palestinian female prisoners, in exchange for a video tape featuring Gilad Shalit during his captivity. The video was passed by Shali'ts captors just before Fatima was due to stand trial and was released on day short of the hearing.

Israel's control over pregnant Palestinian women in prison is not an anomaly, but again, reflects a microcosm of Israel's discourses, places, and practices over Palestinian women's bodies,

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<sup>396</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge Studies in Law and Society, 2015).

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

designed to eliminate Palestinians entirely.<sup>398</sup> According to the Health Ministry's September Report in 2006, between the years 2000 and 2005, at least 68 Palestinian women forcibly gave birth at Israel checkpoints after being denied safe passage to nearby hospitals; this led to 34 miscarriages and the deaths of four Palestinian women.<sup>399</sup> An Amnesty International report, published in March of 2005 entitled "Conflict, Occupation, and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden," contains narratives by Palestinian women of their heartbreaking experiences of living under Israeli occupation. Rula Ashtiya's story is harrowing, revealing the brutality of giving birth by an Israeli checkpoint.

We took a taxi and got off before the checkpoint because cars are not allowed near the checkpoint and we walked the rest of the way; I was in pain. At the checkpoint there were several soldiers; they were drinking coffee or tea and ignored us. Daoud [her husband] spoke to them in Hebrew; I was in pain and felt I was going to give birth there and then. I told Daoud who translated what I said to the soldiers but they did not let us pass. I was lying on the ground in the dust and I crawled behind a concrete block by the checkpoint to have some privacy and gave birth there, in the dust, like an animal. I held the baby in my arms and she moved a little but after a few minutes she died in my arms.<sup>400</sup>

Daoud (Rula's husband) explains his perspective of the story in the report, which is just as shocking:

I pleased with the soldiers to let us pass; I spoke to them in Hebrew; I know Hebrew because I used to work in Israel; they understood what I was saying but did not let us pass. After the baby was born Rula screamed, then after a while she screamed that the baby died. She was crying. I burst into tears and ran toward the cars on the other side of the checkpoint, ignoring the soldiers; I brought a taxi and went back to Rula; I felt so bad to see her in such condition; she was holding the baby in her arms, covered in blood and the umbilical cord was on the ground, in the dust and still attached and I had to cut it with a stone; I didn't have anything else to cut it with. Then I picked up Rula in my arms and she was holding the baby and I carried her to the car, and we went to the hospital.

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<sup>398</sup> IRIN. 2006. "Pregnant Palestinians Give Birth at Israeli Checkpoints." The Electronic Intifada. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/pregnant-palestinians-give-birth-israeli-checkpoints/2835> (accessed March 27, 2013).

<sup>399</sup> IRIN. 2006. "Pregnant Palestinians Give Birth at Israeli Checkpoints." The Electronic Intifada. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/pregnant-palestinians-give-birth-israeli-checkpoints/2835>

<sup>400</sup> Amnesty International, "Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden," 2005.

Articles 38(5) of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that “pregnant women and mothers of children under seven years shall benefit by any preferential treatment to the same extent as the nations of the State concerned.” Article 16 further addresses that “the wounded and sick, as well as the infirm, and expectant mothers, shall be the object of particular protection and respect...” Rula Ashtiya exemplifies the “civilian,” the harmless and powerless: “she has the right gender (woman), carrying the archetypical motherhood signifier, pregnancy, in the precise physical status, woman in labor.”<sup>401</sup> Her husband who witnessed and cried over his wife, “holding the baby in her arms, covered in blood,” with the umbilical cord still attached, is an unthreatening Palestinian man, whose powerlessness as a Palestinian fails to convince the soldiers to let his wife cross the checkpoint. The shackling and strict surveillance of Palestinian women while giving birth in Israeli prisons, as well as the negligence of Palestinian women in labor at the checkpoints highlights the gendered dimensions of colonialism and occupation, through the control over Palestinian women’s fertility and reproductive bodies.

“Our martyrs are convoys and our bones are mountains  
 We don’t surrender to the lowly  
 We aren’t deterred by imprisonment  
 Palestine is etched on the heart of the fetus  
 A proud martyr in his mother’s womb  
 And the Arab state will remain ours - Arab, Arab Palestine...  
 We [hold] the rifles to our chests and our eyes are raised to you  
 Our homes are trenches and our souls are the sacrifice for you  
 O Jerusalem, you will not remain stolen”<sup>402</sup>  
 Official PA TV, June 19 and 26, 2018

In a famous song, entitled “أولى القبلتين” which translates to “The First Direction,” Syrian singer Assala Nasri sings about the Palestinian resistance movement, in protecting the holy city of Jerusalem, highlighting its religious significance as the third holiest place in the world for

<sup>401</sup> Ghanim 2008

<sup>402</sup> Awla-alqibltin أصالة أولى القبلتين – <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x86pfi>

Muslims, for being the first direction of prayer for Muslims all over the world. “The First Direction” is also calling similarly for the Arab world to reclaim Jerusalem, and more generally Palestine, as an Arab state. This song is originally written and composed by Libyan poet and composer Ali Al-Kilani, who has written several popular songs about Palestine, including his most famous “Where are the Millions?” sung by Lebanese singer Julia Butros, which calls on the Arab world to be more conscious of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and calls for Arab nations to unify and counter the effects of European colonialism, to focus on the modern-day colonial structure against Palestine. The song, produced in X, was most recently broadcast on an official Palestine Authority (PA) television show, *The Voice of Palestine*, in 2018, in a moment in which the United States, under Donald Trump’s administration, formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Prior to this moment, Jerusalem was designated as international territory, despite being under Israeli military occupation since 1967. While the song’s focus is on Jerusalem, at its heart, both figuratively and in the middle of the song, is the line “Palestine is etched on the heart of the fetus, A proud martyr in his mother’s womb.” I read these lyrics, in relation to the entirety of the song, in multiple ways, as I use it to wrap up this chapter. Firstly, the line “Palestine as ‘etched’ on the fetus” signifies how the role of the “mother’s womb” is a vulnerable space, subject to Israeli harassment and violence. The politization of Palestinian reproduction, concerning the production, maintenance, and the control over Palestinian populations as undesirable populations, reconstitute the Palestinian woman’s birthing body as a security threat, and a body that should be made to disappear. Secondly, “Palestine” is constructed as a “martyr” in the womb, which signifies the ongoing Nakba, or Israeli settler colonial structure, which designates the Palestinian fetus as a possible terrorist and threat to the Jewish state, even before they are born.

Although Israeli propaganda websites such as “Palestine Watch Media” or “Jihad Watch” have used these lyrics to racially construct Palestinians as barbarians who “hate their kids” or who only have children to become martyrs, the Israeli settler colonial project has already dictated Palestinian lives, from the moment they become a fetus until they are born. As children, Palestinians are subjected to constant harassment by Israeli soldiers at the checkpoints on the way to schools, unjustly incarcerated and placed behind bars, and regularly attacked by Israeli settlers. This significance of Palestine as written on the heart of the *fetus*, symbolizes Palestinian biological reproduction as a form of a resistance to the Israeli settler colonial project.

## CONCLUSION: Covid-19 and the Future of the State

During the early days of the vaccine distribution against the global Covid-19 pandemic, Israel made headlines for its quick and mass dissemination of the vaccine to its citizens, far exceeding rates in the United States, China, and Britain. Under Benjamin Netanyahu's rule in December 2020, health minister Yuli Edenstein said in an interview that Israel is "leading the world race thanks to our early preparations," citing Israel's H.M.O.'s reputation for efficiency and gathering reliable data.<sup>403</sup> In addition, Netanyahu was credited for announcing an initiative to send over 100,000 surplus jabs from its well-appointed stock of Covid-19 vaccines, stating that Israel had "more than enough" vaccines for its own population.<sup>404</sup> Although this gesture had not been a part of COVAX, the global initiative to provide equitable access for poor and vulnerable countries, but according to the Times of Israel as a bribe that would "exchange vaccines for diplomatic support," including providing vaccine support to Guatemala which quickly followed the United States in relocating its embassy to Jerusalem or Mauritania which declared that it would seek diplomatic and formal relations with Israel. This initiative has been since suspended by Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz in February of 2021. While Israel continued to be applauded for its rapid distribution of the vaccine to its citizens and the world's most vulnerable, Israel continued to withhold its Covid-19 vaccines to approximately five million stateless Palestinians living under military occupation under Israel's rule – what many journalists and analysts are referring to as "medical apartheid." Edelstein provided rationale that it is not Israel's legal obligation to provide Palestinians with vaccination, stating that Israel has no more obligation to them than the Palestinian

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<sup>403</sup> Israel's heavily digitized, community-based health system requires that by law, all citizens must register with one of the country's four H.M.O.'s. See more: Isabel Kershner, "How Israel Became a World Leader in Vaccinating Against Covid-19," *The New York Times*, accessed April 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/01/world/middleeast/israel-coronavirus-vaccines.html>.

<sup>404</sup> AP and TOI Staff, "Netanyahu: Israel giving countries vaccines 'for things we already received,'" *Times of Israel*, accessed January 21, 2021. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-israel-giving-countries-vaccines-for-things-we-already-received/>

minister of health must “take care of dolphins in the Mediterranean.”<sup>405</sup> Given that under Israel’s differentiated citizenship laws, Israel became the first state to introduce color-coded identification documents to differentiate the vaccinated from those who are potentially infectious.<sup>406</sup>

Israel’s failure to vaccinate stateless Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for Covid-19 is not an anomaly but is reflective of its larger policies of restricting Palestinian movement, erecting a separation wall cutting through Palestinian villages and homes, and restricting access to medical care. This has included the many instances where Israel has denied access to chemotherapy treatment for cancer patients of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The biopolitical management of health is a key pillar of the colonial violence.

While Covid-19 was ravaging families across the globe, impacting the most poor and vulnerable, this did not stop other incidents of racial and colonial violence, tying together incidents of police violence and public health. 2020 signified a moment of uprising against police brutality and the killing of unarmed Black people in the United States, with the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd. This sparked national outcry, where an estimated 15 million to 26 million Americans have taken to the streets to protest police violence and advocate for Black lives. One year later, in May 2021, the world witnessed the escalating violence and crisis unfolding in Palestine. Residents of a small neighborhood in East Jerusalem named Sheikh Jarrah, protested daily to protect their homes from the imminent threat of Israeli expulsion. Palestinian residents were terrorized, attacked, and beaten by Israeli settlers waiting to confiscate their homes under the protection of the Israeli police, often time participating in these assaults. During the final week of

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<sup>405</sup> While Israeli authorities argue that the responsibility for vaccinating the five million Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip falls on the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accords, the Fourth Geneva Convention requires Israel to ensure access to vaccines to Palestinians, especially given that it’s under military occupation; Thus, Israel maintains exclusive control over Area C of the West Bank, encompassing more than 60 percent of the West Bank, requiring Israel to provide vaccines to those Palestinians.

<sup>406</sup> Mouin Rabbani, Medical Apartheid in Palestine: The Case of COVID-19 Vaccinations,” *Jadaliyya*, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/42475>

the holy month of Ramadan, Israeli soldiers attacked and assaulted Palestinian worshippers in Al-Aqsa, wounding hundreds of Palestinians. Palestinians all throughout historic Palestine, including Haifa, Lydd, Akka, and Yaffa, rose in solidarity with Palestinians from the West Bank and as a result were similarly tormented, beaten, arrested, and even killed by Israeli state and settler violence. Moreover, Israel launched an 11-day bombing campaign, which Israel dubbed Operation “Guardian of the Walls” – against the Gaza Strip, which killed 248 Palestinians, 66 of whom were children; destroyed over 2000 homes; displaced 107,000 people; and destroyed crucial infrastructures, including media buildings and the only Covid lab testing site in the Gaza Strip. Saree Makdisi argues in his piece in the *Nation*, this moment where Palestinians are being displaced, assaulted, and killed is a part of the ongoing *Nakba*, the Arabic word for catastrophe, which began with the forcible removal of Palestinians from the land to create the Jewish State in 1948 - a reminder of a project that never really - and never will be - completed. As signs circulated in protests all over the world reminded us: Every Israeli City was once Sheikh Jarrah.

These moments of increased precarity of racial and colonial violence as it relates to health and medicine is a key component of this dissertation. This dissertation is an attempt to critically engage with race and racialization in the Middle East, focusing on biopolitical regimes of control through reproductive violence. *Chosen and Imagined: Racial and Gendered Politics of Reproduction in Palestine and Israel, 1948-2003*, traced how Israel manages, subjugates, and seeks to erase populations deemed threatening to the modern nation-state and its pursuit of homogeneity and construction of a normative body politic through practices of racialization and reproductive control. Employing an interdisciplinary and transnational methodology, *Chosen and Imagined* combines archival research, oral history, testimonials, legal analysis, and cultural studies approaches, including film and media analysis to reveal the state’s efforts to deploy reproduction

as a path to become part of the civilized, modern, and “superior” West. Through an analysis of cases studies, including state-sponsored child kidnapping and adoption, forced sterilization, family separation and abortion laws, and deployment of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), I examined how laws, discourses, and public debates around reproduction and immigration are couched within eugenics.

This dissertation asked: How does reproduction policy function (like segregation, like incarceration, like criminalization, like expulsion, and like extra-legal violence) as a (settler) colonial project of antiblackness and white nation-building? Departing from this question, I shift my thinking to think about how Israel’s management of racialized reproduction is predicated on who gets to live and who must die, by examining Israel’s control over these populations in their post-mortem state and how it relates to reproductive violence. This shift necessitates a reengagement with these spaces that I examined in this dissertation as spaces of death – the hospital, absorption camps, military checkpoints, and cemeteries – and to think about how the control and criminalization of Black, Jewish, and Arab bodies through dictating who must die, is necessary to Israel’s settler colonial project and desire to expand its territory. These racialized bodies essentially become the territory for conquest and necessary for the reproduction of the entire national body. This focus through necropolitics<sup>407</sup> uncovers how certain bodies are cultivated for life and (re)production, while others are systemically marked for death, and how the control and violence inflicted upon them even after they are dead (i.e., Palestinian bodies) is necessary for the (re)production of Israeli life. I plan to engage more so with Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Israel, focusing on the practice and ethics of posthumous reproduction, where Israeli soldiers preserve their sperm to be used in case they are killed. In thinking about the management of life

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<sup>407</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2020).

after death, this also forces me to think about Israel's practice of delaying the burial of Palestinian dead bodies by withholding them in freezers and morgues, which scholars have written about as part of the ongoing struggle to return the remains of Palestinians held captive by Israel.

I am in awe of the communities that I write about and their willing to continue to resist in the face of extreme forms of racial and colonial violence. For instance, in the face of constant violence against their reproductive bodies since before 1948, Palestinians have engaged of a practice called sperm smuggling<sup>408</sup> as a form of what Sigrid Vertommen calls a "biopolitical act of resistance" in carceral spaces, as well as Palestinian women choosing to raise their children behind bars. As I continue this project, I aim to center these moments of "life-making" to showcase that the Israeli settler colonial project, like other structures of settler colonialism, are never and will never be completed.

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<sup>408</sup> Mohammad Hamdan, "Every Sperm is Sacred": Palestinian Prisoners, Smuggled Semen, and Derrida's Prophecy," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 51, no 4 (August 2019): 525-545.

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