Preface

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In early December 2013, just days after the death of Nelson Mandela, a fascinating photograph (by Abbas Momani of Stringer Agency) was distributed worldwide. The image was taken at a demonstration held near the village of Nabi Saleh, which lies to the west of Ramallah. On one side of the frame is a smiling Palestinian protester, dressed in a dark suit and black tie. His hair is streaked with shades of grey and he is shaking his fist at a border police soldier, who is staring back with a look that wavers between enmity and astonishment. The soldier standing beside him is biting his lip, looking vaguely amused.

AFP / **getty**images

The facial expressions of the soldiers reflect the strangeness of the situation, for not only is the protester's hair dyed, but his face is covered in dark brown make-up. The application is uneven: Around the eyes and beneath the temples it is thickly, almost grotesquely, layered – while lower down, above his pristine white collar, his lighter skin is exposed.

The demonstration was intended to tie the Palestinian struggle for independence (specifically the struggle of the people of Nabi Saleh against the inhabitants of the nearby settlement of Halamish, who had seized control of the Al-Qus spring) with Mandela's struggle against the oppression of his people. The protest and the photograph both make the point that Israel is an apartheid regime in the occupied territories, and perhaps even inside the Green Line. Nevertheless, the image, intended to draw an analogy between the Palestinians and the blacks of South Africa, also creates an ironic distance between them. The black makeup reinforces the liberating carnivalesque atmosphere, but also evokes the controversial aspects of such imitation, known as "blackface," in western culture. The fact that the protester elected to dress up as Mandela-the-venerable-statesman-in-a-dark-suit (and not Mandela-wearing-an-"authentic"-colorful-shirt) makes it even more difficult to unpack the situation. Moreover, the presence of the "black" protester not only stressed the parallel between the Israeli occupation of the territories and the apartheid regime, but was also preface to, and prescient of, events that would take place just weeks later. In early January 2014, thousands of asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea took to the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in protest, standing up for themselves for the first time after years of denigration at the hands of the Israeli establishment.

Various parallels and analogies can be drawn between the provocative appearance of the Palestinian protester and some of the texts published in this issue. The opening article, by **Hassan Jabareen**, centers on an equally fascinating performance that took place at the opening session of the first Knesset (the Constituent Assembly) in February 1949. "After the singing of *Hatikva*, only two speeches were made that day," writes Jabareen. "The first president, Haim Weizmann, delivered a patriotic speech at that festive occasion. The second speaker was not the founder of the state, David Ben-Gurion, nor was it the leader of the opposition Menachem Begin, but rather an Arab member of the Knesset, Amin Jarjora, who spoke in Arabic." Jarjora, one of two elected representatives of the Nazareth Democratic Party, quoted the Declaration of Independence in order to express his hope that the state would be

based on "equality and justice" for all its citizens, but for the most part he declared his allegiance to, pride in, and optimism for, the new state. Wearing a Turkish Fez, he defined the Arabs not as "Arab Israelis" or a "national minority" but as "the Arab citizens of Israel." This was the first formal usage of the term by an elected Arab official. He made no mention of the Nakba.

Thomas Hobbes observed that members of a defeated population, who fear for their lives, will affirm all acts of the sovereign power. According to Jabareen it was this kind of humiliating, unconditional submission that was at the heart of the process whereby the Palestinians in Israel became citizens. He avers that the Palestinians did not join the new political entity when they were defeated and conquered in 1948, nor when the Citizenship Law was enacted in 1952. In his opinion, the "Hobbesian moment" occurred in 1949–1950, when the Palestinians "assented" to participate in the first parliamentary elections and adopted the Israeli language of rights, obligations and loyalty. "This Hobbesian moment cannot be comprehended as distinct from the Nakba," writes Jabareen, "and the language of rights cannot be understood as being separate from the Hobbesian moment."

The latter half of the article, which leaps ahead to the "constitutional revolution" of the early 1990s, challenges a central claim in liberal legal discourse, according to which political participation – in the form of the right to vote and run for office – along with the language of rights, are the foundation of individual and civil rights. Here, the discussion of the elections for the first Knesset is augmented by a sober analysis of election campaigns in recent decades: The State of Israel's "celebrations of democracy" amount to events that delegitimize and disparage the Palestinians, who are repeatedly forced to contend with calls to disqualify Arab parties and candidates. The result is a paradoxical situation: The Arabs are not permitted to challenge Zionist values but their electoral participation is not only desirable but essential to the preservation of the myth of a "democratic Israel." Thus, writes Jabareen, "the doctrine of 'separate but not equal,' which emerged during the formative period in response to the Nakba, is perpetuated." In effect, the law and language of rights are a continuation of the Nakba by other means.

The connection between the description of Jarjora's speech and the image of the protester, with which I began, is based on a rather loose analogy between different types of performance (at the Knesset lectern, on the hills near Ramallah), which portray the transition from humiliation to resistance, from acceptance to agitation. The image calls to mind Homi Bhabha's discussion of colonial mimicry that

threatens to undermine power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Still, the situation here seems particularly complex: The protester is not imitating the oppressive ruler but rather the image of a different oppressed colonial subject. The resistance thus derives from the parallel that emerges between one colonial context and another. The appearance of the made-up protester – a self-conscious theatrical version of racial-national performance, or, in other words, a kind of ethnic drag – engages, in various ways, three of the articles in this issue. These articles directly address various manifestations of performance as discussed by Erving Goffman, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, and others. Reading these three pieces together reveals the reciprocal relations between various types of identity performance in Israel: ethnic, gendered, and national. As a group, and individually, the articles posit the body as the central locus of the formation of social order and of attempts to challenge that order.

Orna Sasson-Levy and **Avi Shoshana** offer a critical consideration of ethnicity in Israel by way of investigating a specific ethnic performance: *hishtaknezut* ("Ashkenazification") – that is, how people with a marked (Mizrahi) ethnic identity "pass" for individuals of the privileged, non-ethnic, or ethnically transparent Ashkenazi identity. The article traces the social significances attributed to such passing in terms of a denial of ethnicity in Israel. The authors contend that *hishtaknezut* is a form of identity performance which responds to the national "melting pot" discourse (assimilation) and the neo-liberal demand for non-ethnic identities. Nevertheless, the failure of such passing is already inhered in the term itself: Trying to pass for Ashkenazi involves a dual experience of shame – shame of the ethnic identity but also shame of the attempt to pass for something different. "Exposing the performance of the Mizrahi attempting to pass for Ashkenazi is itself the significance of the term *hishtaknezut*," claim Sasson-Levy and Shoshana. The wide dissemination of the term, and the built-in failure that accompanies it, attest to the stability of the ethnic order in Israel.

Aeyal Gross's article examines the "passing" phenomenon as the juncture where national and gender questions coincide. Gross, who has written about gender impersonation before (in connection to the Hen Alkobi case – a young individual who, born with female genitalia, presented himself as a man) focuses this discussion on the Sabbar Kashur case. Kashur was convicted of fraud pertaining to national identity (when it was ruled that he "fraudulently" presented himself as a Jew named Dudu to a woman with whom he was having sexual relations). A comparative

reading of the two cases illustrates how the state harnesses the principles of criminal law that apply to rape by deception in order to protect the national-gender order from transgression of forbidden boundaries. Such transgression might undermine the “natural” identity categories on which this order is based. Both Alkoby and Kashur were punished for crossing the boundaries of the gender/national identity assigned them by Israeli society and passing for another, more privileged identity. “Both the gender markers and the national markers are representative operational markers that actually form the identity they purport to express,” writes Gross: “And like gender, nationality is a type of imitation that has no original.”

Finally, **Limor Meoded Danon**’s article deals with questions of imitation and identity formation in situations in which the body itself refuses to comply and be static. Such cases go beyond obedience to social policing that demands certain gendered behavior, ostensibly dictated by biological sex, and touches on accepting the authority of surgical intervention that tries to enforce a defined sex on the body itself. The article endeavors to challenge the therapeutic practices currently employed in Israel with intersexual subjects – people who are born with bodies that feature sex markers, gonads (sex glands), internal and external sexual organs and sex chromosomes that are neither characteristically female nor male. The intersex body is perceived as pathological and in need of medical intervention with a view to classifying it and determining its belonging to one of the two genders. This process of physical normalization, which is forced upon intersex people from birth and throughout their lives, is referred to in this article as *minguf* (“bodysexing”). Meoded Danon adumbrates the existing tension between the process of bodysexing – which is meant to erase the ambiguity and otherness of the intersex body and form in its stead a social, normative, gender-specific body – and the subjective, particular body which in its existence, senses, and material conditions contradicts and opposes the bio-social body. This tension produces a physical duality, as if two bodies are cohabiting in one individual’s body, struggling with one another and hobbling the intersex subject within an inescapable loop.

The connection between the formation of identity and empowerment, suggested in the articles mentioned thus far, is at the center of **Amalia Sa’ar**’s article, which deals with the meaning of the word “empowerment” – in this case, the “economic empowerment of women.” According to Sa’ar, this term rolls naturally off the tongues of a great many agents active in the field, “from representatives of the establishment, politicians, various philanthropists, professional women and project coordinators to

the actual clients of those projects." Given the ambiguity and fluidity that characterize the use of the term, it is no wonder that the various users imbue it with diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings. They appear to be using the same language but often in reference to decidedly different, sometimes contradictory, ideas. The "empowerment" discourse hence affects a dynamic arena in which opposing opinions are mediated, unconventional human encounters take place and practices advocating resistance are pitted against those preaching adaptation. At the same time, this dialogue engenders a paradoxical and complex scenario. On the one hand, it neutralizes critical consciousness among underrepresented women and channels them in the direction of cooption. On the other, it generates a counter dynamic that enables representatives of the establishment and others in positions of power in the capitalist system to cast ethical and moral aspersions on the new-liberal logic.

Efrat Even-Tzur and **Uri Hadar** examine the image of the "good soldier" in Israeli culture – the moral warrior who, despite participating in warfare and oppression, tries to reduce their effects and pays an emotional price for this. As sociologists and psychologists have demonstrated, this image has helped soldiers who come from the hegemonic group to contend with the guilt that their violent activities in the territories engender, by dissociating and projecting it onto other soldiers who are perceived as taking pleasure in violence. The article invokes Lacanian theory in order to examine the gradual decline of the phantasm of the humane soldier from a psychoanalytic point of view. According to Lacan, the role of law is to regulate the distance between the subject and the real. The absence of such distance is inherently fraught with the danger of unfettered jouissance and its destructive potential; and, indeed, the law that holds in the occupied territories is unusual, arbitrary, and discriminatory, giving soldiers extreme authority over civilians. Even-Tzur and Hadar argue that the conflicts experienced by some soldiers are not merely the result of cognitive dissonance, or the divide between their moral sensibilities and their actions in the territories, but also in the excitement that derives specifically from the violent power relations that are regulated by law.

Yochai Oppenheimer's article returns to the 1920s poetry of Avraham Shlonsky, Yitzhak Lamdan and Uri Zvi Greenberg. Oppenheimer contends that the principal poets of the Third Aliyah invited their readers to perceive the Diaspora in a manner that exceeded the official ideological framework of "the negation of the Diaspora" – and, at the same time, to see the pioneering life in the Land of Israel not only as a return to the homeland but also as a form of exile. The article links the ideology of

"the negation of the Diaspora" with what Freud terms "melancholia," a state caused by the repression of personal and collective loss. The works of the poets in question become a sort of exercise in mourning, seeking to contend with the traumatic core of immigration to the Land of Israel. Therefore, their modernism was based not only on innovative poetic stances in comparison with the norms created by Bialik and his contemporaries, but also on their ability to extend the Zionist discourse and have it include all those repressed aspects that were inimical to it. At the same time, they undermined the central status of melancholia and sought to position mourning as the preferred ideational and experiential possibility.

Gideon Sulimani and **Raz Kletter** bring us back to the Nakba in their article, which examines the relations between Israeli archeology and abandoned Palestinian villages. The focus of the discussion is a forgotten document from 1964 in which Avraham Eitan, at the time a young student and later director of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, proposes investigation of the destruction of abandoned Arab villages as a comparative tenor for understanding the destruction often manifest in archeological excavations. Eitan's proposal to study the ruins of villages as an "archeological exercise" totally ignored the loaded political and historical context in which living villages were rendered into archeological remains. Still, unlike most of his colleagues, Eitan at least acknowledged the existence of the abandoned villages. One year later, in 1965, the "village survey" began. Archeologists did a quick survey of about a hundred villages before they were destroyed by the Israel Lands Administration. Armed with the best of skills and methods, Israeli archeology moved in disparate directions, write Sulimani and Kletter: "On the one hand, extensive excavations, documentation and publications of the distant past, thousands of years old but close to the heart; on the other hand, neglect and avoidance of a different past, one chronologically closer but further from the heart."

This issue contains two essays that deal, each in its own way, with the role of intellectuals and artists in the political arena. **Liran Razinsky** discusses the critical ethos of the humanities and social sciences, an ethos which is directed at repairing and understanding society. However, "because it comes in the form of criticism, it is a 'gift' that no one wants to receive." The bulk of the essay focuses on the direct political aspects of this unproductive dialogue in contemporary Israel – that is, on the public grudge against the critical humanities and the negative image they have acquired. "The humanities' political onslaught," writes Razinsky, "is combined with complex pressures brought to bear on practitioners of the humanities, by

the universities and governmental institutions, to be apolitical and uncritical." It seems, however, that the real danger lies in the tendencies toward introversion and separatism of the critical discourse, forgoing any real attempt to change the face of Israeli society.

Theater researcher **Dorit Yerushalmi** gives us a glimpse into the activities of the Oyoun Theater, founded in Majdal Shams in 2003. Yerushalmi learned of the theater through discussions with students in Haifa University's theater department – students from Majdal Shams and Buq'ata, some of whom had studied at the Damascus Theater College, returned to their villages following the war in Syria, and continued their studies in Haifa. Focusing on the representation of the "critical" in the theater – the condition in which the borders between fiction and reality are blurred – Yerushalmi discusses the connection between the occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel and the civil war in Syria in order to expose "the covert artistic activity taking place in this theater in the middle of nowhere, in the midst of the ongoing conflict on the border between the two countries, in a region branded on the Israeli consciousness as the 'eyes of the country'" – a conflict which "disrupts the lives of the people and places impossible restrictions on them since the war of 1967." The artistic practice offers a means of resisting oppression and formulating possibilities of freedom, albeit temporary ones, writes Yerushalmi. Thus, she takes us back to the same playful carnivalesque moment that characterized the Palestinian tribute to Nelson Mandela with which I began.

The concluding book review section focuses on the encounter between Judaism and modernity, past and present, in Israel and abroad. **Rivi Gillis** reviews four books that illustrate different aspects of Jewish identity in Israel. She writes that debates about *datlashim* ("formerly religious"), traditionalism, Mizrahi "soft" ultra-orthodoxy and the "religious renaissance" that are taking place in Israel in recent decades highlight not only the reciprocal relations between religiosity and secularism, but also the difficulties that essentialism poses for the study of identity. The critical framework laid by these books challenges the theory of secularization that appears to contrast religion and tradition on the one hand with secularization and modernization on the other. A historical perspective on the theory of secularization in Judaism is provided by **David Sorotzkin**. He reviews current studies of secularization in European Jewry in the early and late Modern periods and ties them to Talal Asad's influential work, *Formations of the Secular*, as well as to his own work which claims that secularism is not a heretical process that occurs outside the religious arena, but a dialectic that is

facilitated by and within religious life. **Ofer Schiff**'s review essay deals with American Jewry's critical view of the State of Israel – as reflected, for example, in the works of Judith Butler and Peter Beinart. The critical discussion of Israel, claims Schiff, expresses the ambivalence of American Jewry as a minority in their country and the internal-external role of Israel in their religious and political identity.

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This is the first issue of *Theory and Criticism* under my editorship. In the two decades since its inception, the journal has become a focal and highly significant locus of critical, interdisciplinary discussion of Israeli society and culture. The tremendous importance of this journal has been evident, all along, in two parallel areas: the emergence of a discourse that processed and adapted developments in critical theory worldwide towards specific application in the Israeli context; and the creation of a research community committed not only to the regular publication of the journal but also to the fundamental program motivating it – that is, the need to decode and expose the mechanisms of representation, reproduction and shaping of power relations in society (as members of the editorial team repeatedly stated in the early issues).

Naturally, changes occurred over time. The spectrum of topics covered in the journal broadened; the community of authors became larger and more diverse; and the countenance of academic discourse in Israel changed: Critical discussions that, twenty years ago, were scorned and delegitimized by the "conventional academic practice" (another expression that recurs time and time again in the early issues) gradually became part and parcel of the mainstream, legitimate, academic enterprise. Other platforms, not academic but dynamic in nature (like *Haokets* website or *Eretz HaEmori* blog) now channel this discourse in much more accessible and immediate conduits.

Given these changes, I perceive the unique strength of *Theory and Criticism* as rooted in three central elements, all of which align with its original objectives: persistent commitment to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary discussion, at the highest academic level; the formation of an academic community that is committed to the regular publication of the journal, with the composition of this community reflecting the personal and professional changes that have taken place over the years; and recognition of the connection between the journal and the community surrounding it with the institution that offers it a home – the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, which hosts a plethora of research groups that share the theoretical

discourses and the critical ethos on which *Theory and Criticism* is based. As editor, I hope to promote these three interrelated foundational principles while maintaining the journal's recognized quality and finding a balance between academic research, which demands a certain distancing, and hands-on dealing with the reality taking shape before our eyes.

In the current political climate, in which ostensibly dissenting voices are being silenced, it is even more important to ensure that the journal not only continues to provide a critical perspective but also pushes, time and again, the boundaries of theory and criticism – "rethinking the possible," to quote Adi Ophir. The important observations made by Liran Razinsky in this issue point to the dangers that threaten theoretical and critical thinking from within as well as without. This refers not only to academics' withdrawal to the ivory tower, which is threatening to collapse, or to their fear of addressing apparently incendiary questions, but also to academics' growing tendency to write and publish exclusively in English. The existence of *Theory and Criticism* is rooted in the fertile dialogue it conducts, and will continue to conduct, with the community within which it operates. To this end it is not sufficient to simply write in Hebrew: It is also necessary to keep the language as clear as possible, to include new authors, and especially to encourage the publication of articles and essays that are not predictable, nor have predictable conclusions. This, ultimately, is the complex task that faces the editorial board of *Theory and Criticism*: to make the journal more accessible, open and friendly – but without compromising its quality or its ongoing commitment to enhance and update theoretical discourses and to generate critical discussions of society and culture in Israel. I invite you, my colleagues – researchers and students in Israel and abroad – to join us in this important endeavor; submit your own articles and encourage your students to do the same. We also welcome proposals of articles or texts that merit publication in Hebrew translation.

I would like to thank the chairman of the editorial board and the Director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Prof. Gabriel Motzkin; the Executive Editor and Director of publications, Dr. Tal Kohavi; and the other members of the search committee for deciding to entrust the editorship of *Theory and Criticism* to me. As a student and a young scholar at the start of my career, I followed with awe the work of the first two editors, Prof. Adi Ophir and Prof. Yehouda Shenhav; I am very excited by the opportunity to follow in their footsteps. On behalf of the editorial board, I thank the outgoing editor, Prof. Leora Bilsky, for her contribution to the journal and

I wish her every success in her important work at the Minerva Center for Human Rights at Tel Aviv University. Also on behalf of the editorial board, I thank its members who have retired and I wish success to the new members inducted as part of the board renewal that takes place every few years. Finally, I thank the devoted professional team that labors on the journal every day: the assistant editor, Orna Yoeli; the copy editor, Naama Pinhasi-Zipor; the editorial secretary, Yael Shalev-Vigiser; and the editors of the book review section, Yaniv Ron-El and Ella Glass. I thank everyone for their patience, warm welcome and good will.