

## Editorial

### Yehouda Shenhav

This issue of *Theory and Criticism* is devoted in its entirety to investigating the relevance of the postcolonial perspective for the Israeli context. This inquiry is particularly important because colonialism is a concept that has been repressed in the conversation about Israeli society. This relevance may be manifested in diverse spheres, such as the discussion of the Israeli occupation (as I write, Israeli tanks are besieging Ramallah and Gaza, the Engineering Corps is razing buildings in Rafiah, and, throughout the territories, roads are being built to bypass Palestinians, at a cost of nearly a quarter of a billion sheqels); the discussion about the structure of the labor market and the status of labor migrants in it; the discussion about the Palestinian citizens of Israel; the discussion about the Israeli space; or the discussion about the link between social class, ethnicity, and color. This issue tries to help fill this void and restore what has been repressed to the forefront of the discussion, as part of a give-and-take with postcolonial research in fields such as Middle Eastern studies, anthropology, literature, art, sociology, geography, politics, and history.

The issue opens with a theoretical essay (**Yehouda Shenhav** and **Hannan Hever**) that presents the main tenets of postcolonial thought in the Israeli context. This is followed by ten original studies, a translation of a theoretical article by **Homi K. Bhabha**, and four essays.

**Anat Rimon-Or** raises a disturbing question about the public debate. At times we receive the impression, she argues, that the cries of "death to the Arabs" trouble Israelis' rest much more than the physical death of Arabs caused by Jews, within the State of Israel or outside it. The slogan "death to the Arabs" tends to be identified with low-status Mizrahim, a sector viewed as right-wing and nationalist, whereas the actual killing of Arabs, which is carried out in an institutionalized fashion (and for many years was reserved for the militaristic Left), confers social prestige on its executioners. Rimon-Or deals directly with the divided place of Mizrahim in Israeli society. The claim "death to the Arabs" as a speech act is part of the struggle against the splitting of the Mizrahi identity and includes an attempt to create a coherent position

— which simultaneously supports and undermines the relationship to the Zionist discourse. Rimon-Or's distinction with regard to the Mizrahi "national sentiment" and how its status differs from that of the Ashkenazi "national sentiment" also finds salient expression in the current public debate over the occupation. It is easy to see how the Mizrahi community is depicted as manifesting radical nationalist feelings, whereas the "enlightened public" that backs the occupation and killing apparatus (jurists, bureaucrats, teachers, intellectuals, authors, and poets) is presented in liberal and enlightened terms.

**Sara Chinski** carries readers from the politics of Mizrahi identity to the politics of Ashkenazi identity and argues that Ashkenazi identity has been a victim of the rejection of the Diaspora. Focusing on Israeli art, she points to a systematic bond of silence and repression (derived from the national culture) of Ashkenazi Diaspora traditions. Chinski's article (like Rimon-Or's) engages in dialogue with another article in this issue, Homi K. Bhabha's "The White Stuff." Bhabha challenges the authority of "whiteness" as a substantive category and tries to lay bare, within the envelope of "whiteness," the warring elements that make it what it is — an unstable and insecure form of authority. Chinski uses Bhabha's argument to challenge the link between whiteness or Western-ness and Ashkenazi-ness. Not only are the Diaspora themes silenced, says Chinski; the very existence of the silencing mechanism is denied. This denial is possible because Israeli art takes a regular dose of eurocentric whitener; because Ashkenazi-ness is considered to be equivalent to Western-ness, so that every assertion of the former falls into the trap of the latter; and because critical sociology and history are not arrayed to cope with the classic postcolonial insight, in which the oppressor is simultaneously the oppressed.

**Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin** uses the thought of Gershom Scholem to examine how the dialectic of messianism and redemption is constitutive of the orientalist framework of Zionist nationalism and the place that theological debate occupies within it. The author maintains that although the warning against the perils of messianism does give Zionism an enlightened and secular image, the ostensibly secular nationalist outlook actually has a theological and orientalist core. What is more, in the space between messianism and redemption in the orientalist discussion, no room is left for a discussion of Palestine as a real entity, or for Palestinians, their history, and their social and political reality. This analysis leads Raz-Krakotzkin to consider binationalism as a possible theoretical framework for shattering the mythological system created by the distinction between redemption and messianism.

**Gil Eyal** deals with how Middle Eastern studies emerged as a discipline in Israel and focuses on the creation of the distinction between “orientalism” and “(military) intelligence.” In contrast to the orientalists’ view that there is a clear difference between the two concepts, as well as to critical approaches in which the distinction between the two seems to have been blurred, Eyal maintains that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive but compose a single field of expertise. The distinction between “orientalism” and “intelligence” is discursive, a sort of boundary work whose objective is to protect orientalists’ professional status. The relevance of Eyal’s theoretical analysis is illustrated by a discussion that revolves around the interpretations of “the Arab world” by Israel experts — whether affiliated with academia, military intelligence, or the media.

Three articles conduct a postcolonial analysis of literature. **Eitan Bar-Yosef**’s essay describes a colonial scene of a Zionist who visited Africa in the 1930s and wrote about what is now Zimbabwe — familiar to us as Nahum Gutman’s land of the Zulu. Bar-Yosef exposes not only the orientalist dimension of Gutman’s story, but also what he calls a “distinctly colonialist fantasy in the heart of the Hebrew culture of the 1930s.” Bar-Yosef asserts that the text and Gutman’s bizarre encounter with Jan Smuts, the Boer general whose portrait he was sent to paint, anticipate the future link between Israel and apartheid-era South Africa and point to the status of Africa as the black potential of Zionist Jews as well as their fantasies about whiteness. **Hannan Hever** presents a reading that seeks to expose the fissures and violence associated with the transition from Hebrew literature to Israeli literature and the manner in which this transition serves the national ideology. As an expression of the spatial dimension of the postcolonial idea, Hever analyzes the image of the map — the topographical map — as a key site of the dynamics of power relationships in the evolution of Israeli literature. **Doli Benhabib** uses Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* to analyze two novels by Sami Michael that depict the 1950s and 1960s in Israel — *All Men Are Equal (but some are more equal)* and *Shacks and Dreams*. At the center of her article she places the experience of immigration as a test of the masculinity of Mizrahi men and the link between this phenomenon and the status of Mizrahi women.

**Ilan Pappé** writes about the Tantura affair and the academic, legal, and public commotion over it. The story began with a master’s thesis by Teddy Katz, continued in a suit filed by veterans, and eventually led to a public apology by Katz and the rejection of his thesis by the university. Pappé analyzes these events and portrays the conversion mechanisms that led to the diversion of the discussion from the question of

whether there was a massacre in Tantura to the legal and academic scrutiny of Katz's thesis. As part of this analysis, Pappé evokes the connection between history and memory, between archival documents and oral testimony, between Jewish narratives and Palestinian narratives. Finally, Pappé proposes that we examine the Tantura affair not in the familiar paradigm of military history but in the theoretical context of ethnic cleansing.

**Eitay Mayraz** uses the postcolonial discourse as an arena in which Lacan can be combined with geography. Mayraz's main question is the extent to which the I/Other relationships of the imaginary world of philosophy and psychoanalysis can be extended to the "real space." That is, to what extent is the topology of the concepts that populate theories of the structure of the psyche and mind reflected also at the concrete level of daily space. Mayraz's article provides readers of Hebrew with friendly access to the work of the French psychoanalyst. **Doron Narkiss** considers language as the arena of struggle and focuses on the teaching of English as a hegemonic language in Israeli society. Narkiss points out the dual status of the language for Mizrahi and Palestinian women and for new immigrant women, who learn English in the colleges. Even though English is the strongest expression of the Western hegemony, for these women it is a means to get around their marginal status as well as the oppressive dimensions of Hebrew.

This issue also contains four essays. The first deals with colonialism and Mizrahiness and includes, in addition to a text written by **Shimon Balas** in the 1960s about the link between colonialism and Mizrahiness, an interview with him aimed at elucidating the meaning of this link. The second, by **Abed Azzam**, who refers to himself as an "occidentalizer," deconstructs the link between a Jewish state and a democratic one. **Ronen Shamir** considers the collapse of the World Trade Center and the possibilities for ethical discourse in its aftermath. Finally, **Nadav Gabay** presents first thoughts about the work of the Or Commission investigating the shooting of Israeli Palestinians by the Israel Police in October 2000.