

Lilly White Feminism and Academic Apartheid in Israel

SMADAR LAVIE

On December 26, 2001, Ariyeh Caspi exhorted in Israel's highbrow *Ha'aretz Weekly* that only 8.8% of those holding full professor's rank in Israeli universities were women. In his article "Search for the Woman," the journalist nonetheless neglected to mention that all these women professors are members of Israel's Ashkenazi (US-European) wealthy elite. Most had embarked on their graduate studies and academic careers only after strategically marrying older, wealthier Ashkenazi husbands. Jointly with their moneyed parents, the husbands happily financed the first 20 years of their careers. If one is to add up *Mizrahim* (Jews of Asian and North-African origins) with Palestinian citizens of Israel, the majority of Israeli citizens are of Arab descent. If so, why does Israeli academe bestow the professorial privilege only to a handful of Ashkenazi ladies?

COMMENTARY

Academe in Israel

All Israeli universities are public. One ought to assume that a public institution reflects the citizenry who finances it with its tax money. Presently brandishing the widest relative income gap between rich and poor worldwide, most of these taxpayers, Arab Jews and non-Jews by default, dwell around what the collapsing Israeli welfare system defines as "the poverty line." Nevertheless, the rank and file of Israeli tenured professors consists almost fully of upper middle-class Ashkenazi men. All of Israel's anthropology professors but one, Haim Hazan, are Ashkenazim. The Palestinian-Israeli Majd al-Haj, started as an anthropologist, but got his tenure as a demographer. In the last decade, even Hazan was distanced from his anthropology home department.

Most of Israel's public colleges are in the economically depressed periphery. Not surprisingly, more women are on the faculty in these colleges, where the majority of stu-

dents are Mizrahi, and research budgets might arrive one day in Santa Claus' bag of kudos. Still, in all colleges there are less than a handful of junior Mizrahi faculty women—and only one senior, who is yet to become a professor—none of whom is an anthropologist.

The common argument deployed to explain such exclusivity along racinated ethnic lines is that Mizrahim and Palestinians just can't climb up to the high standards of the Israeli academic threshold. How surprising, though, that Palestinian-Israelis and Mizrahim lucky enough to win scholarships for PhD programs in the US and Western Europe's Ivy League universities do secure tenures in high-threshold Western academic sites. Or like the late Iraqi anthropologist Abner Cohen, the only non-Ashkenazi funded by Manchester's anthropology department to work on a PhD with the legendary Max Gluckman, just to be disinvited back home to a tenure track at any Israeli university like the rest of his cohort was. Yet it is Cohen who ended up with an endowed chair at the School of Oriental and African Studies. But still, the Israeli aristocracy of academic enlightenment uses its Byzantine, highly secretive decision

making mechanisms of hiring, merit and promotion to reject Mizrahim and Palestinians on the grounds of "collegial incompatibility."

Multiculturalism

From the mid 1990s on, top US and Western European universities, both public and private, implemented multicultural recruitment programs. These came about to accommodate the critique that affirmative action faculty recruitment practices were able to attract only the racinated minorities' upper middle classes. No such multicultural recruitment strategies exist in Israel. Enrollment in non-applied PhD programs is still the privilege of the Ashkenazi upper middle-class. The Mizrahi or Palestinian woman who is lucky enough to be admitted to graduate school usually chooses an applied academic vocation that can accommodate her maternal-domestic duties. She knows that even with a PhD scholarship, she is doomed to fail the exams scripted for her by the gatekeepers of the Via Dolorosa leading to an Israeli professorship. She reaches such a conclusion when searching, in vein, for a senior woman-of-color role model. Or when exploring her own bank account, just to discover that it's

almost empty. So even with a PhD in hand, what would lie ahead?

Even if the Mizrahi woman scholar survives the non-applied PhD process, her tenure-track job application goes straight to the circular file. Mirroring the Ashkenazi elite, and composed only of tenured professors, the Israeli academic senate is still a good ol' nostalgic battleground of chummy grantsmanships and colossal citation wars. Yet, like other Ashkenazi upper class liberals, its members could not but notice the first feminist wave of "equal rights." So they agreed to let in a handful of women as long as these resembled their wives: upper middle-class Ashkenazi simulating either the de-Semitized Barbies who embellished their Israel's Defense Force commando units, or the manicured charity aunties who grace their secluded neighborhoods.

Western academic hiring practices moved on to integrate second-wave feminist discourse that focused on the intersection of gender and race. Lower middle class women-of-color thus joined the faculty club. While in the Western liberal faculty club, dark masculinities were perhaps conceived as a bigger threat to the peace than dark femininities, in Israel the hiring practice is the opposite. There are way more Mizrahi men than women among the junior faculty. Perhaps Mizrahi male colleagues present a lesser risk to the peace in faculty feuds in Israel. They have already met them during their army service. When saving their lives in combat, they became brothers, indeed.

The Palestinian PhD candidate or recipient is way beyond the pale, unless the recruitment of a Palestinian-Israeli junior faculty might aid the senior lofty leftie Ashkenazi professor in getting an article published in a prestigious progressive and oft-quoted English language periodical whose editorial board is fashionably critical of Israel. Alas, but the critical Zionist professor can't utilize the PhD Mizrahi woman as a pawn to promote his liberal cosmopolitan career. Devoid of indigenous charm for the Western scholarly community, she just re-

Multiculturalism Movement in Israel

In May the Keshet Demokratit Mizrahit, or Mizrahi (Oriental, Arab-Jewish, Hebrew) Democratic Rainbow, which has been analogized to the NAACP in the US, and Ahoti, or (Sistah, Hebrew) For Women in Israel, jointly protested the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Israeli Anthropological Society. As the Association convened, these NGOs demonstrated against the almost total lack of Mizrahi and Palestinian anthropologists from the tenured body of university professors in Israel, and the total lack of Mizrahi and Palestinian tenured women professors from all disciplines in Israeli universities. In a May 29 statement, the Keshet announced: "Devoid of either jobs or prestige while still being the object of the ethnographic academic industry, we also rally against the lack of any ethics code for ethnographic research and publication that would protect our copyrights to our own cultures."

Critics of the statement support the need for a code of ethics for Israeli anthropologists, but also state that Israeli anthropologists have brought light to difficulties faced by the communities they study; they have not exploited nor made money off Mizrahim and Palestinian informants. Moreover, critics state that the anthropological study of Mizrahim and Palestinians by Israeli anthropologists is not thriving.

The Keshet and Ahoti are in the final stages of submitting an official complaint to the Israeli state comptroller regarding the almost total exclusion of Mizrahim and Palestinian-Israelis from the anthropology faculty, and the lack of any ethics code for Israeli anthropologists.

Sociocultural Anthropology in Israel

Sociocultural anthropology in Israel is a division of the sociology department. There are 5 research universities in Israel with an anthropology division.

Ethnic-Gendered-National Distribution of Israel Anthropology FTEs*

	Ashkenazi Men	Mizrahi Men	Ashkenazi Women	Mizrahi Women	Palest.- Israeli	Total
Junior Lecturer	2	1	3	1		7
Senior Lecturer	3		3			6
Associate Professor	1		2			3
Full Professor	5	1				6
Professor Emeritus	5					5
Total	16	2	8	1	0	27

*Of the 27 Israeli anthropologists working in sociocultural anthropology departments, 7 are immigrants from the US or Canada. Unlike most Moroccan Mizrahim of his age group, the Mizrahi male junior faculty was born in Morocco and raised in France. The untenured Mizrahi woman junior faculty is Egyptian born, was raised in France and England, and was not a resident of Israel before being hired by an Israeli university after graduating from a US university.

Israeli Anthropologists' Fields of Specialization

Mizrahim	11
Palestinian-Israelis	6
General Israel Topics	5
Cultures Outside Israel	4
Ethiopian Jews	1

minds the local Ashkenazi faculty of their sassy maid (before Filipinas became the cost-effective choice). So unlike the Palestinian, no one, left or right, initiates any politically-correct harangue flagellation rituals for her.

Endowments

In the US and Canada, public or private universities and colleges have instituted junior and senior faculty career development funds and massive secretarial help for large-scale extra-mural grant applications. These endowments are meant for those who didn't arrive into academe already equipped with the time and money required for networking into the non-applied disciplines. In Israel, where the body of academe is still anachronistically defined in the white masculine, the working assumption is that such special funds are not needed to help pay the mortgage in addition to paying for humanities and social science research expenses. Most top Western universities have special mortgage programs and excellent benefit packages to compensate the mavericks who

chose to specialize in low-paying liberal arts fields that are not high-end professional "vocations." In Israel, however, the academic administrators' working assumption is that if you choose such fields, you must have rich parents pay for it.

If the Mizrahi woman is lucky enough to win a tenure-track position, she depends on the research moneys dispensed by the buddies from the faculty club. If they reimburse her for such research expenses, she first must spend them out of her own pocket. Only then would she get reimbursed, at least after a month. The reimbursement will often be in the form of adding it to the salary, which would thus become temporarily bigger and therefore taxed more heavily. A portion of the out-of-pocket expenses she has incurred will thus be paid back to the state as taxes. Deploying such monetary shenanigans, the university actually forces her to give it an interest-free loan, and the state further benefits from taxation. There are no regulations or norms in Israel obligating the recipients of research funds to any forms of reflective public accountability. No

schedule Cs either. Always she is bereft of the cash necessary for a canny accountant.

The Publish-or-Perish Game

To spice up Israeli academe, Mizrahi women scholars are invited to teach a course here, a course there, yet, with such part-time income, they can't pay their end-of-the-month utility bills. In order to get tenure one must publish—a lot. But a Mizrahi must invest all of her creative energy in teaching rather than in writing up her ticket to tenure. So she falls behind the normative time. Furthermore, Mizrahi women are often excluded from the academic publish-or-perish game because they are single moms or simply single or married to a lower middle-class Mizrahi like themselves. They have not inherited real estate from their grand-daddies, or were trust fund babes, and can't simply use up portions of their hubbies' parents' or their own parents' savings.

The critical years during which one ought to publish in order to strike permanent roots in academe are those between graduation and tenure, and then those between tenure and full professorship. Israel is an immigrant society, pressing secular women to marry early and breed an average of three kids, particularly if they come from non-Western patriarchal structures. These critical periods coincide with a woman's childbearing years. These are therefore the years that require her high capability to trade off time and money for an academic career, unless she wins sabbatical scholarships that include childcare, and a hubby willing to relocate, so that she can sit and write. Furthermore, she needs to win the lottery just to buy scholarly translator services, since the university requires that she publish in English. These are the years when her class affiliation (swap "class" with "race" here) works against her career aspirations. The lucky 8.8% of women who manage to arrive at the finishing line of Israeli academe can testify that when judging the conservatism of Israeli universities, we can't separate the gender question from racinated ethnicity and the size of the familial bank account. ☐

Smadar Lavie (sinaia5@netvision.net.il) received her doctorate in anthropology from the U of California at Berkeley (1989), and her associate professorship in anthro-

pology and critical theory from the U of California at Davis (1994). In 1999, she had to return home to Israel for family reasons. Since then, because of "collegial incompatibility," she's mainly a welfare mama. A version of this commentary appeared in Hebrew in Yedi'ot Aharonot.

**Correspondence**

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Professor of Pediatrics Emeritus at Duke University and was, along with Nobel Laureate John F Enders, the developer of measles virus vaccines that are used throughout the world today. These vaccines have, according to the World Health Organization, reduced an annual measles mortality of 8 million children to $\leq 800,000$ in 2002. Efforts continue to extend the benefits of these vaccines to all children globally. In this regard, the referendum before you is especially significant as it responds directly to the false claims made in *Darkness in El Dorado* that the Edmonston B measles vaccine initiated and spread an epidemic. In truth it did not, nor has it ever in its history of use from 1963-1975 and nearly 20 million child recipients.

Of equal importance, this referendum focuses on the extreme dangers of publishing false claims about vaccines. The progress noted above in control and eventual elimination of measles would be seriously threatened by false rumors that would arouse parental anxiety and reduce vaccine acceptance. Vaccine safety as well as efficacy is one of the two prime concerns of agencies such as our Food and Drug Administration that licenses such products. Evaluation of vaccines is critically important but must be done with scientific reliability. Reckless disparagement, as was perpetrated with *Darkness in El Dorado*, is egregious and inexcusable, especially when fostered by scientifically capable individuals who should know better. The referendum that you are considering reflects major issues, which impact on human life and well being, especially in the developing world. If I can provide any further information, please feel free to contact me. Meanwhile, I do hope sincerely that my comments will be helpful to you in your decision.

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