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Israel and the Emergence of Mediterranean Identity
Expressions of Locality in Music and Literature

ABSTRACT

The growing use of the term 'Mediterraneanism' (Hebr. *Yam Tikhoniut*) as a model for identity formation and the description of various aspects of everyday and cultural life in Israel as 'Mediterranean characteristics' can be found in the media, in cultural practices, public debates, and everyday culture since the early 1980s. It is argued that *Yam Tikhoniut* offers alternative views of identity, geographical place, politics, literature, culture, and history. Deploying the tools and methodology of Cultural Studies, this article explores the representation of the notion of *Yam Tikhoniut* in Israeli popular music and literature. The specific examples discussed here give evidence of a growing awareness and sense among the Israeli public as to the subject of locality and illustrate the emergence of a place-bound identity and local culture.

POINT OF DEPARTURE

Since it gained statehood, Israel has been engaged in the continuous challenge of constructing a local, authentic, native culture. Over the past decades, different variants for Israel's national, cultural, and religious identity have been the subjects of heated debates. In the founding years, the newly invented mythological *Sabra* (native-born Israeli), disconnected from his traumatic past, was promoted to homogenize the immigrants of diverse cultural backgrounds and to create a monolithic Hebrew culture. Another variant, although far less popular, was the Canaanite approach, which emerged in the 1940s in Israel. A small group of intellectuals and

143

writers considered the new breed of 'Hebrews' as an integral part of the 'Semitic region,' and therefore as natural allies of the Arabs. These Canaanites rejected any connection with Judaism and the Diaspora and declared an historical bond with the land, thereby imposing a somewhat neo-imperialistic vision on the region and re-interpreting history according to their own ideological agenda.

However, among diverse models for society, the Zionist variant prevailed, offering various frames of reference within a set of Western-oriented values. The Zionist movement was highly ambivalent about the status of Jewish religion and ethnicity: for some, Zionism meant the reconstruction of the ancient kingdoms of David and Solomon; for others, it meant the transfer of the East European *Shtetl*—including Yiddish—onto the shores of the Mediterranean. Still others wanted to create a central European society, or even a Soviet-style paradise. None of these variants were fully implemented, nor did they succeed in solving the ongoing struggle over the questions: 'What should constitute native culture and Israeliness?'[1] and 'What is the meaning of the Israeli *Makom*[2] considering its geographical space and emphasizing its location at the crossroads of different continents and mentalities?'

Since the 1980s and 1990s, Israel has undergone extensive changes, initiating transformation processes on political, demographical, cultural, and economic levels. Many aspects of Israeli identity are being deconstructed and reconsidered. The idealized Zionist image of one single Israeli culture and identity is being replaced more and more by the perception of Israel as a pluralistic and, as some put it, even multi-cultural society. The influence of the founding generation and the pioneer elite is slowly fading away, and new currents are undermining the Zionist core values, which had been functioning as social glue for decades. This entails the deconstruction of the hegemonic, secular Zionist national identity, and the emerging Israeli identity is confronted with an increase of individualization and privatization in all sectors of daily life. Since the 1990s, the post-Zionists' demythologizing view of history has made Israelis painfully aware that attempts to force the creation of a common culture and identity, based on the idea of a homogenizing melting pot, have failed. The Zionist meta-culture is declining, and competing cultures and countercultures have risen in its place. The continuous heterogenization of society and the so-called *kulturkampf* among the different ethnic and ideological groups has been subject to increased debate in sociological and anthropological research in recent years.[3]

YAM TIKHONIUT

Within these complex transformations, one concept is referred to with increasing frequency in the scientific and public discourse on new definitions of identity: the so-called 'Mediterranean Option.' The growing use of the term 'Mediterraneanism' as a model for identity formation and the description of various aspects of everyday and cultural life in Israel as 'Mediterranean characteristics' can be found in the media, in cultural practices, public debates, and everyday culture.[4] The various representations of the Mediterranean Option offer alternative views of identity, place, politics, literature, culture, and history. The popularity of Mediterraneanism—or *Yam Tikhoniut*[5]—is nourished by the desire to find a solution for the identity crisis within Israeli society beyond the ideological and religious models that only insufficiently meet the complex demands of Israeli society. Being non-exclusive of other ideologies or concepts makes *Yam Tikhoniut* especially appealing to a society that has dealt with ethnic and religious divisions for decades. Also, the longing to find a place and eventually, to use a term coined by Fernand Braudel, a *longue durée* acceptance in a region that is dominated by Arab societies and culture, is one of the driving forces behind the discourse under exploration here. Since the early 1980s, the notion of Mediterraneanism can increasingly be found in Israel's public discourse. Nevertheless, mention of the Mediterranean context was sporadic and not yet accompanied by a broader public discussion in media and academia. The presence of the Mediterranean topos in the press, academic forums, and everyday conversations intensified significantly in the 1990s, which can be explained by the search for a new frame of reference after the end of the East-West confrontation and by the developments related to the EU activities in the region, which are an outside force emphasizing regional connectedness and enhancing multilateral dialogue. In Israel, the Mediterranean became a viable cultural framework for some, as well as a cultural utopia for others, in which Israeli society tries to position itself. The inner-Israeli discourse on *Yam Tikhoniut* is often linked to an open conflict over the meaning of Israeliness, the specific Israeli identity. One could observe a notable switch in the public discourse and an increasing openness toward the 'Other' since the beginning of the—now defunct—peace process and the signing of the 'Israel–PLO Declaration of Principles' (DOP) in September 1993. This renewed openness in the mid-1990s also influenced patterns of musical consumption in Israel, e.g., for a long time it was nearly impossible to purchase Arabic music in Israeli record stores,

today any self-respecting Israeli music shop carries a wide variety of classical and modern Arabic music from Morocco to Iraq, Lebanon to Sudan. Moreover, Israeli singers successfully started to sing in Arabic, like the Moroccan-Israeli singer Sahava Ben, who recorded a whole CD with songs of Umm-Khoulthoum repertoire in 1995[6] or like the Israeli singer Dikla on her disc *Ahava Musika* (2000). The popularity of Umm-Khoulthoum among the Mizrahi[7] population in Israel tells a story of cultural linkage between Israel and the Arab World. Empirical evidence shows that openness toward, and curiosity about, the Arab world reached an all time high in the mid-1990s and came to a near standstill after the outbreak of the *Al Aksa Intifada* in the year 2000. Especially among young Israelis, the ongoing peace process, as well as the developments related to the *Barcelona Process* and the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Program,* raised expectations for a better future. With the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995, inner-Israeli questions involving identity, civil society, and change in values resurfaced. As a result, Israeli soul-searching developed into a fully-fledged identity crisis.[8] The dispute about the content of Israeliness deepened and to this day is a contested issue in Israeli public discourse.

The academic discussion on *Yam Tikhoniut* covers the whole possible range from its complete embrace to its harsh rejection. On the one hand, there are those who fully approve and who consider *Yam Tikhoniut* as a metaphorical entity, a poetic and elitist concept with the potential to integrate the polarized elements of society. On the other hand, there is complete rejection, which considers the concept as a purely artificial construct, backwards-looking and glorifying the past. Its opponents say that *Yam Tikhoniut* is arbitrary, artificial, and overestimated—a convenient cultural utopia, even Orientalism without the Arabs.[9] Critics argue further that *Yam Tikhoniut* is simply an outlet for nostalgia that arose in cold Northern Europe voicing the yearning for the Mediterranean scenery, the lemon tree, the light, air, sea. Still others see in *Yam Tikhoniut* a dangerous attempt to escape the harsh realities in the Middle East and turn one's back on the region, while indulging in a pseudo-Greek or pseudo-Italian idyll.[10]

Despite all these arguments that question the concept of Yam Tikhoniut, everyday life—which I call here a 'Mediterranean Laboratory'[11]—confirms many aspects of its existence. Tracing the Mediterranean awareness in Israeli daily life shows that *Yam Tikhoniut* has become firmly established in Israel's public debate—"Israel is a Mediterranean country in the making,"[12] as the historian Irad Malkin put it. Just to name a few examples from daily life, one finds restaurants that praise Mediterranean atmosphere, make reference to the Mediterranean in culinary menus, and

an increase of Mediterranean cookery shows on Israeli TV. Mediterranean radio broadcasts, ads for Mediterranean diets, and announcements for products with Mediterranean names like *Mediterranean Kous Kous* by the company *Osem*, *Piraeus-Cheese* (instead of Bulgarian cheese) by *Tnuva,* or *Tapuchips Yam Tikhoni* (Mediterranean potato chips) by *Elite*. Furthermore, the innovative TV channel *Brisa—Aruz Israeli Yam Tikhoni* (Israeli Mediterranean Television Channel) ran successfully between 2000 and 2003 on Israeli satellite television.[13]

It is important to emphasize that by speaking about *Yam Tikhoniut* we are dealing neither with a fixed entity nor with an essence, but with a dynamic process. The concept is in its formative period, still fuzzy at the edges and of hybrid structure. It becomes apparent that *Yam Tikhoniut* is yet another feature in a period of redefinition of ideological and cultural orientations. It is embedded in the discussion of Israeli identity and national ethos and deals with an alternative concept for society, resulting in passionate, often agitated exchanges. Deploying the tools and approaches of Cultural Studies and qualitative research, this paper will focus on the intensified discussion of Israel's location within the region, the Israeli *locus.* I will thereby spotlight the fields of popular music and literature, which are a rich source for tracing the Mediterranean topos and will illuminate the perception of the Mediterranean in the contemporary debate. In the fields of popular music and literature, the specific term 'Mediterranean' is used in different ways. In the field of popular music, the term is used with increasing frequency and is often associated with a unifying cultural model. By contrast, the literary field makes fewer allusions to the specific Mediterranean Option, but rather to ethnicity and ethnoconsciousness, which are, in the case of the literature under observation here, linked to diversified and individualized visions of life. This difference can be explained first and foremost by the accessibility and exposure of popular music in Israeli daily life, where music blasts out of open windows or passing cars, where radios play in public places, offices, or busses, and kiosk-owners play music to attract passersby. Popular music soaks into daily life and finds broad exposure within the urban framework of Israel's cityscapes, as well as in advertising and the media. Literature, on the other hand, is less easily accessible and a somewhat secluded and elitist field of cultural expression, limited to display in books only. Although the two fields under consideration here are diverse in structure and accessibility, a close reading shows in both cases an increase in references to the specific Israeli *Makom* in Israel—whether it is labeled Mediterranean, Mizrahi, Levantine, ethnic, oriental, or otherwise.

MUSIC AS A VEHICLE FOR IDENTITY FORMATION

Zionism created an image of the 'New Jew' that was disconnected from the cultural roots of the Diaspora and symbolized a new beginning in the ancient homeland. Therefore, the heterogeneous society of the *Yishuv*, combining many different cultural traditions, was in desperate need of a set of values that emphasized this new secular identity and bridged over the cultural and ethnic gaps of the immigrant society. The commitment to the idea 'one nation—one culture' was dominant, and art, literature, and music alike were tuned towards the expression of a new locality. The search for the specifically local demonstrates the longing to become part of the region, to find a 'natural' place within the space, and to understand where society is located vis-à-vis its neighbors and vis-à-vis the entire world.

In the development of Israeliness—something specifically Israeli—music plays an important role: many sociological currents that influence and shape Israeliness find their embodiment in the musical landscape, and I argue that the development of popular music in Israel can be seen as an expression of identity formation.[14] Music, particularly in the early years of the state, served as a powerful tool for integration between the different ethnic[15] backgrounds. The Jewish immigrants from Oriental countries found a mainly European musical soundscape upon their arrival in Israel and quickly realized that there was no space for the musical traditions they brought with them. The literary scholar Ammiel Alcalay describes a countermovement, which preserved the great diversity of ethnic music in the new state: "Despite efforts to extricate Israel from the Middle East, along with all the technical and psychological obstacles, there is probably nowhere in the Levant where such a vast variety of music from the region can be found. Against great odds, each group of immigrants either preserved or if at all possible, continued to follow the trajectory of their musical culture from afar."[16] The musicologist Edwin Seroussi pointed out that the initial stages of *Musika Mizrahit*[17] were "not specifically Israeli, but mainly Israeli covers of imported Greek, Arabic or Turkish popular music adapted from records, cassettes or radio performances and 'made' Israeli by substituting Hebrew lyrics for the original ones."[18]

Looking at the field of music in the formative years of the state, the search for a national style, locality, and authenticity becomes apparent: folk songs of the *Yishuv* (known as *Shirei Eretz Israel*—Songs of the land of Israel) are heavily loaded with ideology and with the expectation of serving the new set of values and bridging the various elements of the ethnically diverse society. The musicologist Jehoash Hirshberg calls this new folk song

repertory—mostly including European-style folk melodies—an 'invented tradition': "Folksongs and dances were designated to extol the spirit of the pioneer settlers, whether rural or urban; to depict the romanticized scenery of the land; to enhance the revival of Hebrew through setting of both biblical texts and modern lyrics; and to unify people through communal singing."[19] Inventing a national style was a dominant current; however, we find different expressions of this longing. Looking at the vision and perception of 'the East' in the field of music, we find conflicting approaches that range from enthusiastic embrace to total rejection of the local traditions. Some composers of *Shirei Eretz Israel*, most of them from East-European backgrounds, tried to integrate oriental-Arab elements in their music. "In the attempts to create a national style in music from 1920s onwards one finds many and varied tendencies that range from a call for total adherence to the great musical achievements of the West, with an emphasis on the universal aspects of the new national aspirations, to the urge to adopt the Orient as a source of inspiration."[20]

On the other side of this mainly European musical soundscape was an attempt to define a specific national style by emphasizing geographical and local influences; since the 1940s, the Mediterranean topos can be found in Israeli music.[21] The Hungarian-born composer Alexander U. Boskovitch (1907–1964) made a significant effort to create a national style in music by coining the term 'Mediterranean music' during the 1940s, as he was convinced that music is a function of time and place and not a universal language. As Hirshberg noted: "In Boskovitch's worldview, Israeli music would find its symbolism in the sound and melos of the Middle East." Hirshberg goes on and explains the influence of the *locus* on Boskovitch's tunes after he arrived from Europe in 1938—his engulfment in the scorching Mediterranean sun, the sand dunes, and the vocal gestures of Arabic and Sephardic Hebrew. "In the North, he [Boskovitch] argued, the cold and misty environment leads to seclusion and melancholy—a situation that encourages the use of imagination. But under the blue skies and hot sun of the Mediterranean, things are more sharply delineated, and thus people are more grounded in reality."[22] Connecting musical creativity to the geographical place, Boskovitch argued that only a composer living in Palestine, and being exposed to the climate, atmosphere, and scenery of the place—the Eastern Mediterranean—could indeed create a national Jewish style of music.

Moreover, in the search for a new locality, the Yemenite cultural traditions were regarded as authentic and native by the Ashkenazi establishment, for whom they embodied the image of the 'noble savage' in their

orientalist fantasies. "The Yemenite was accepted into the culture as an authentic Hebrew figure that preserved the image of the biblical Israelite, the surviving remnant of the ancient Hebrew nation, and was regarded as an archeological-ethnographic discovery whose existence verified the distant past, the biblical Hebrew culture that preceded the Exile."[23] In his study *Die Musik Israels,* the author, critic, and composer Max Brod (1884–1968) emphasized the enormous influence of the Jewish-Yemenite singer Brachah Zefira as a main factor in the introduction of Middle Eastern and Oriental musical heritage—including Persian, Turkish, Sephardic, and Yemenite folklore—to Western oriented audiences in the formative years of the state. In fact, it was Max Brod who attributed the term 'Mediterranean style' to the compositions of Boskovitch, linking them with the strong influences the Jewish-oriental folksongs, collected and performed by Brachah Zefira, had on him.[24] Brachah Zefira's role as a musical mediator between the Eastern and Western musical traditions has often been emphasized; she worked with local composers of European origin, notably Paul Ben-Chaim who provided her with the arrangements for the ethnic songs in her repertoire, whereas—according to Max Brod—her originality and greatness were never sufficiently appreciated.[25] Edwin Seroussi points out the presence of Yemenite motifs and performers in relation to musical styles still described today as 'Mediterranean' and explains how the label 'Yemenite' was used to indicate something 'aboriginal'—the 'Other' in Israeli music: "The incongruence between the geographical location of Yemen and the Mediterranean Sea is irrelevant, showing once more that the Mediterranean signifier in Israel does not refer to a well-defined geographical area but rather to the vaguer signified of 'non-European'."[26]

However, there are also those scholars who contradict the existence of a 'Mediterranean school' and even call it a "fallacy."[27] The veteran composer, pianist, and music professor Josef Tal strongly rejects the attempt to take west European musical traditions as a base, and simply add oriental motifs as an ornament to make the piece sound more exotic and local. This is nothing more than ethnic coloring of a basically Western culture, as Tal argues.[28] Nevertheless—over the years the discussion on the Mediterranean topos as an expression of locality did not lose its appeal—on the contrary, it continues in Israeli artistic discourse up to the present and has been subject to increased attention in the last decade, as I will outline below. Also, in art music the label 'Mediterranean' remains in use; Ami Maayani, a composer born and educated in Israel, mentioned a classical concert with the title '*Mediterranean Fantasy: On the search for an Israeli musical identity*' which took place in 2000, wherein different generations of

Israeli composers (among them Maayani himself) and their diverse styles were performed.[29]

MUSIKA YAM TIKHONIT ISRAELIT
VERSUS MUSIKA MIZRAHIT

Israeli popular music today borrows more and more Mediterranean themes and rhythms, especially Greek and Turkish. The emergence of the so-called *Musika Yam Tikhonit Israelit* (Israeli Mediterranean Music) combines Hebrew, Arabic, Mediterranean, and Western elements, and is deeply rooted in both Arabic and Jewish culture. This Mediterranean soundscape challenges and reshapes the musical landscape of Israel, which has been dominated by the Eastern-European influenced *Shirei Eretz Israel*. Shimon Parnas, a popular host of Mediterranean music programs on television and radio, sees great potential for reconciliation through the Mediterranean Option, even the only cultural refuge for Israel: "If there is a bridge or a common denominator for this society of immigrants that came together here from all over the world; [. . .] if there is any chance to connect all of them and make them into one people, or to create one culture, the hope is to be found in *Yam Tikhoniut*. Not in Arabness, or in Mizrahiut, and surely not in Western Europeanness or in Americanization. The territory here is Mediterranean and Middle Eastern—because of the political conflict the Middle Easternness will be extremely difficult to digest in the Israeli society. The hate is so strong [. . .] and this Middle Easternness cannot function as a bridge. The only bridge that can function is the Mediterranean bridge. [. . .] That is the only alternative."[30] The musicologist Amy Horowitz, too, sees great potential within *Musika Yam Tikhonit Israelit* since it is performed across internal ethnic frontiers and could possibly provide a cultural common ground in the region's long history of enmity and distrust.[31] The Egyptian playwright Ali Salem refers to the potential of music as a cultural bridge and its cross-ethnic references, when he discusses the similarities between Egyptian and Israeli musical expression. Yet, this proximity with regard to the political tensions and hostilities is also an irritating factor and, according to Salem, is condemned by Egyptian intellectuals as the 'Israeli cultural invasion.' During his legendary drive with his private car to Israel in 1994, Salem met his distant, and at the same time nearby, neighboring country with great curiosity, even with the analytical eye of an anthropologist. Upon his return he wrote a book about his experiences in Israel, which was a bestseller in Egypt and has been translated into

English and Hebrew, but led to his expulsion from Egypt's cultural circles. During a taxi-ride in Israel, Salem heard 'a sad and beautiful music with a sweet, consoling refrain' and was flabbergasted: "The song is in Hebrew but the tune is familiar. Have I heard it before? Where? [. . .] I'd known that there are Egyptian tunes sung in Hebrew, but it's one thing to hear of something and quite another to experience it."[32]

In today's discussion, *Musika Mizrahit,* which incorporates 'Greekness', 'Middle Easternness', and 'Israeliness', as well as Turkish, Persian, and other influences, is a cultural hybrid itself and confusingly intertwined with Israeli Mediterranean Music. In contrast to Israeli Mediterranean Music, *Musika Mizrahit* incorporates a position of ethnicity and is associated with the low status of Mizrahi Jews and therefore with the 'Other' within Israeli society. Other often derogatory names given to *Musika Mizrahit*—like *Musikat ha-tahanah ha-merkasit* (Central Bus Station Music), *Musikat Kasetot* (Cassette music),[33] *Musika Etnit* (Ethnic Music), *Musika Shrorah* (Black Music)—prove this association with cheapness and 'Otherness' and locate it outside of the musical mainstream.[34] As a result, *Musika Mizrahit*—as well as Mizrahi-culture in general—was marginalized for a long time, considered inferior, too 'Arabic', and banned into the inferior position of 'ethnic' culture vis-à-vis dominant 'elite' culture. The national radio stations only opened specific segments and certain hours per week to it—like *Al ha-dwash we-al ha-kefak* (Honey and good times), *Libi ba-mizrah* (My Heart is in the East), or *Agan ha-Yam ha-Tikhon* (Mediterranean Basin), which were perceived by the artists as an act of delegitimization, even ghettoization. Yet, by the 1980s, the presence of *Musika Mizrahit* in the media changed as it slowly entered mainstream popular music and was noticeably associated with the label 'Mediterranean'. Regev and Seroussi argue that *Musika Mizrahit* "[. . .] had an affective power in Israeli social life by being instrumental in defining mizrahi Israeliness."[35] However, while *Musika Mizrahit* is still limited to a certain ethnic group within society, producers and performers of *Musika Mizrahit* have strong aspirations to represent authentic Israeliness, which is not restricted to Mizrahiut only. This ambition is especially emphasized by the musical and ideological work of the composer and singer Avihu Medina, who strongly criticizes the alleged discrimination of *Musika Mizrahit*, especially by the state-run media. His allegations led to the establishment of the non-profit organization AZIT[36] that is dedicated to promoting the interests of *Musika Mizrahit* artists and composers and is campaigning against alleged marginalization by the cultural establishment.[37] By adopting the label 'Mediterranean' in its name, AZIT is contributing to further confusion

and blurring of the terms *Musika Mizrahit* and *Musika Yam Tikhonit Israelit*. This is another indication of the continuous 'Mediterranization' of *Musika Mizrahit* and Mizrahiut in general.

In contrast to Avihu Medina's claim that *Musika Mizrahit* should become mainstream Israeliness, Shimon Parnas has emphasized the eclectic character of this genre that fuses influences from several music traditions and mixes them with basic rock instrumentation. In addition, Parnas also sees a great potential in this hybrid—even the emergence of something 'typically Israeli': "We are lacking a cultural identity. There is not really such a thing as Israeli music: we steal here and there and take it all to the food processor and are processing it. But—if there is a clue of something original, a beginning of something uniquely Israeli, it can be found in *Musika Mizrahit Yam Tikhonit* and not in the Israeli Western music."[38]

Turning towards the emergence of Mediterranean music in Israel, Amy Horowitz argues: "'Israeli Mediterranean Music' made its commercial debut in 1974 among the vegetable and household appliance stalls in Tel Aviv's central bus station marketplace."[39] Politically, the rising public awareness of *Musika Mizrahit* must be linked to a major turning point in the history of the state of Israel; after almost three decades of rule by the socialist Labor party, the right-wing Likud party—empowered by the vote of Mizrahi Jews—won the national elections in 1977 under Menachem Begin. After that victory, a position of ethnicity won growing legitimacy as the new political establishment made efforts to place its supporters within the national culture and the historical narrative. The emergence of *Musika Mizrahit* has also been interpreted as a result of a growing feeling of self-esteem and pride and served more and more as an instrument to preserve ethnic singularities and emphasize the cultural uniqueness of the diverse immigrant groups. "A feeling that their 'own' were governing gave Easterners a sense of added legitimacy and allowed them to express their ethnicity without endangering their status as Israelis."[40] Speaking politically, Amy Horowitz goes even further and sees in the emergence of *Musika Yam Tikhonit Israelit* a "counter-hegemonic challenge to existing power structures."[41] Indeed, *Musika Mizrahit* has become a major form of cultural expression of Mizrahiut, ethnic oriental Israeliness, providing a long marginalized group with growing social significance and legitimacy within the public (in this case musical) sphere. The increased reference to the Mediterranean topos in Israeli musical discourse occurred in the 1980s and became an alternative name for what was previously referred to as *Musika Mizrahit*. We observe the emergence of two different labels—*Musika Yam Tikhonit Israelit* and *Musika Mizrahit*—for a similar musical phenomenon. Shimon

Parnas even creates a blend out of the two terms and calls the object under discussion here: *Musika Mizrahit Yam Tikhonit* (Oriental-Mediterranean Music). Further, in a survey, realized for the newspaper *Ha'aretz,* a representative sample of the adult Jewish population was asked about their musical preferences: the category *Musika Mizrahit* was substituted with the genre "so-called 'Mediterranean music'."[42] I argue that this is a question of labeling only: *Musika Mizrahit*, associated with Arab-oriental music, is being replaced by the magic formula *Musika Yam Tikhonit Israelit*, which symbolizes openness and mix across ethnic borders. My claim is that these examples prove once again a central feature in the general discussion on the Mediterranean topos in Israeli society: there is no uniform code, no consensus on the different names and labels used in this context. We have already seen that the "war on words," as historian David Ohana calls it, and the "competition over who fills the notion with content"[43] runs like a thread through the Israeli discourse on *Yam Tikhoniut* as a whole.

As an example of the emphasis of the specific *locus* in contemporary music, I wish to mention the ethno-pop group *Tea Packs*, which uses neither the term Mizrahi nor Mediterranean to characterize their work. Kobi Oz, the singer and songwriter of *Tea Packs*, emphasizes his Levantine identity instead, and confronts new 'locality' with the omnipresent influences of globalization on Israel's culture in his work.[44] He calls his music "a bit of Tunisia, a bit of MTV."[45] In this case, his Tunisian family roots, symbolizing the local, are juxtaposed to the worldwide operating *Music Television Channel* (MTV), which is used here as a symbol for the global. Oz calls this intertwining and *Tea Packs*' distinctive east-west hybrid sound, the "Israeli Alchemy," which blurs the dichotomies and creates "new Israeli folklore."[46] Kobi Oz explains: "This is what Levantinism is all about—the ability to see all sorts of different things at the same time. [. . . T]he availability to enjoy all worlds; it's the ultimate form of post-modernism."[47] The biography of Kobi Oz, who grew up in the poor neighborhood of the provincial development town of Sderot in the Negev desert, is a story of life at the periphery of Israeli society. However, Oz explains that he had enough of the constant attempt to integrate and fuse a heterogeneous people into one entity. He speaks about the big advantage of those development towns, where the paralyzing dichotomy and competition between Mizrahiut and Western values never existed: "In Sderot, you can hear Moroccan music without being worried what the neighbors will say, because they are Moroccan too. You could speak Moroccan; you could do everything that people living in poorer neighborhoods in the city were too embarrassed to do. I could be as Moroccan in Sderot as I wanted to be."[48] The example of *Tea*

Packs impressively illustrates the local adaptation of the effects of globalization. On one hand, *Tea Packs* uses musical know-how on a sophisticated world standard; on the other hand, Kobi Oz captures a local flavor in tunes and lyrics that relate to Israeli realities. As for *Tea Packs* place of origin—Sderot—it should be mentioned here that the socialization process within a homogenous community in the development towns had a vital impact on musical repertoire and several other successful popular music bands, such as *Sfatayim* (Lips), *Knessiat ha-Sekhel* (Mind Church)*, Tanara,* and *Renaissance*, emerged from the city of Sderot.[49]

TAVERNA VERSUS SHIRA BE-ZIBUR

Looking at the emergence of Mediterranean music, we need to discuss the popularity of Greek musicians in Israel, like Aris San and Trifonas, as well as Turkish and Arabic popular music in the 1950s and 1960s. Israeli singers and composers regarded Greek music as an inspiration, adapted typical musical codes, and recorded Greek-style music with Hebrew words. The influences of these musical traditions laid the foundations for the development of *Musika Mizrahit* and led to the popularization of the concept of the Israeli-Greek *Taverna*, and later to the popular television program of the same name (discussed below). The different influences from Greek, Turkish, and Arab musical traditions were eclectically absorbed—"essentially Western music overlaid with Eastern 'codes' and ethnic 'colours'"[50]—in order to create something new. Shimon Parnas argues that many Mizrahim embraced Greek music as a possibility to exit from a cultural framework, which was (by the mainly European establishment) considered as backward and primitive: "The immigrants from the Arab countries in the 1950s were ashamed of their culture and left it at home. [. . .] They did not connect to Israeli culture. [. . .] In the Greek music they found a substitute for the music that they were ashamed of from home."[51]

Even if opinions are divided on the artistic value of the popular TV program *Taverna*, the high ratings speak for themselves. Shimon Parnas, who created this format for television, replies to charges that he is deforming a culturally valuable Greek tradition: "Every time I go on stage I speak to the audience and explain to them that I don't imitate an authentic Taverna, this is not a Mizrahi Café, nor a Mediterranean night club. It is an Israeli Taverna and I invented it."[52] Asked how he evaluates this trend, the writer A. B. Yehoshua explains the legitimization these programs have in his eyes: "Brisa and all this is very important, the Taverna and all these

things are real. You see how Israelis are connected to it. There are many Israelis that came from the Mediterranean, from Greece, from North Africa. [. . .] There are many Jews who perceive *Yam Tikhoniut* as a natural thing. They feel at home when they come to Greece. And—there is no other country where I feel closer to Israel than in Greece. [. . .] Why impose and say this is artificial? No—it exists at the vernacular level."[53]

The program *Taverna* has flourished across the television networks for a number of years, reaching a peak of popularity between the years 2000 and 2003. One could find prime time television programs like *Harif Ba-Osen* (Spicy in the Ears) on channel *Brisa* (YES), *Ba-Taverna* (In the Tavern) on channel 1, *Reiach Menta* (The Smell of Mint) on channel 3, *Ezel Parnas ba-Taverna* (With Parnas in the Taverna) on channel 2. It is interesting to note that in 2003, some new aspects of music entertainment became evident on Israeli television, actually referring to an earlier period in Israeli history. Channel 10 hosted a show by Sarahle Sharon, the Ashkenazi singer who grew up in a kibbutz, *Saraleh shara le-kulam* (Saraleh Sings for Everyone). She sits at the piano, plays and sings songs from different periods of Israeli history that present a potpourri of *Shirei Eretz Israel* as well as popular songs that were written by Ashkenazi and Mizrahi artists, thereby encouraging her audience to sing along and dance. Yonnie Ro'eh, who used to host a *Taverna* program on channel 1, now has a program called *Shira be-Shidur* (Singing on Broadcast). The recent nostalgic turn in popular music entertainment programs can be explained by the general feeling of fatigue, bitterness and weariness as a reaction to the problem-torn day-to-day life. In the press and in everyday conversation, there is evidence of a certain frustration and disillusionment within the Israeli public. Embracing music traditions from the founding years of the state, like *Shira be-zibur* (Singing in Public),[54] that emphasize togetherness and seek to unify people through communal singing, implies a return to their roots and has become very popular in recent years. The reassurance of the country's idealized cultural past with a romantic group image offers warmth and security in a time of harsh political confrontations with the Palestinians and waves of anti-Israeli sentiment in Europe. Today, Saraleh Sharon and others regularly perform in clubs, presenting their popular sing-along shows to an audience that is diverse in terms of both ethnic origin and age. *Shira be-zibur* performances on the roof of the newly built Azrieli Towers were especially fashionable in Tel-Aviv and have now become a trendy happening. This sort of entertainment for a younger audience has swept the whole country, and the timing of its success is clearly linked to the outbreak of the Intifada in 2000, as students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev confirmed:

sing-alongs are also a favorite pastime in Beer-Sheva for their age group. After the American attack on Iraq in March 2003, an increase in soothing Hebrew songs from the past was noticeable on the radio. Gideon Samet, a commentator for *Ha'aretz*, clearly links the retro-wave to the increasing feeling of anxiety in a deteriorating security situation: "Like the wave of nostalgia for sing-alongs which has done wonders for the ratings of certain TV programs, so the old bleating of army entertainment troupes and the folksongs of the Gevatron and Naomi Shemer provide a cozy buffer against the shrill cries of war."[55]

EXPRESSIONS OF LOCALITY IN LITERATURE

Development from a utopian Zionist vision to Israeli reality is reflected in the cultural currents, especially in literature. Much has been written about the impact of Hebrew literature on the formation of Israeli national identity and culture. Without going into much detail, I would like to make some general remarks on Israeli literature. During the formative years of the Israeli state, the mainstream literary expression was called *Dor ba-Aretz*[56] or *Dor ha-Palmach*[57] (generation in the land; generation of the Palmach) referring to the native-born children of immigrants who began to publish in the late 1930s. Similar to the *Shirei Eretz Israel* in the musical field, the 'generation in the land' is characterized by strong involvement in the invention and construction of the 'New Jew,' the embrace of the collective and adaptation to new realities in Israel.

Even before the country actually existed as a realistic option for Jewish immigration, it was already omnipresent and manifest in literature. Over centuries Israel was being described, lamented over, and praised, with the yearning desire to return into the land of the fathers; thereby, the Mediterranean Sea itself was less important than the act of crossing it to reach the desired land. Literature in Israel can be regarded as a seismograph for cultural and spiritual currents; today, many writers and intellectuals are intensely involved in the public political discourse by writing essays and articles in the daily press or actively participating in the peace movement.

The group of well-established veteran writers, the *Dor ba-Aretz,* dominated the literary tone in the first decades. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, a new voice in Israeli literature rose, the *Dor ha-Medina*[58] (generation in the state) or *New Wave*, and began to challenge their predecessors and deconstruct the core values of Hebrewism. Their work expresses critical

allegories of the Israeli political situation and the figures in their novels are often in a troubled search for meaning and identity. The 'generation of the state' rebelled against the prevailing national experience adopted by the previous literary generation, which until then was dominated by the Ashkenazi, male, secular, and socialist narrative. Unlike in musical expressions discussed above, we do not find a specific 'Mediterranean style' in literary works at that time. My argument is that symbols and images of the 'local' can be found throughout the literature of the *Dor ba-Aretz* and *Dor ha-Medina*, as their works are strongly connected to the questions of belonging and identity. This 'local' element, however, is not homogeneous, but appears in different forms and contexts. In the period that led up to 1948, the local elements had strong Zionist allusions, whereas after 1948 the local was supplemented by different nuances and alternative interpretations, as the diversification of Israeli society grew as a whole.

Recently, the literary establishment has been joined by a new generation of writers who brought with them new approaches to the ever-changing Israeli realities. Contemporary literature is characterized by a flourishing of prose writing by this younger generation of Israelis, among them many women. With this new generation, a new spirit and subversive counter-narratives enter and challenge the literary mainstream of the *Dor ba-Aretz* and *Dor ha-Medinah* generation that was for many years dominated by the codes of invention and imagination of one uniform national culture. The new generation of writers, also referred to as the 'post-Zionism' or 'post-ideological' generation, is influenced by the Israeli realities of the present, and daily life is a powerful source for their stories. We find a colorful variety of settings and genres, including different kinds of fiction, thrillers and mysteries, which prior to this have mostly been translations from other languages. A group of writers, inspired by the city life of Tel-Aviv, reflects on urbanization, consumerism, and growing individualism. Avner Holtzman, a scholar of Hebrew literature, observes a pluralistic variety as well as experimental tendencies in contemporary Hebrew literature and determines six alternative narratives: the surrealist-fantastic narrative; the narrative that escapes to geographically far-away worlds; narratives from the Jewish orthodox communities; the pre-Israeli Jewish narrative with a nostalgic tendency; works by the children of immigrants of North-African origin; and finally the homosexual narrative.[59] Generally, he determines two main themes which provide the platform for contemporary narratives in Hebrew fiction: intimate private details versus the larger societal context. A certain feeling of locality serves as a common denominator in this diverse field of literature, as he quotes Assaf Gawron, the young writer and editor of

an literary anthology, who stresses the Israeli *locus*: "It happens [in modern Hebrew literature] what happens to all the young people all over the world, but they [those stories] include a strong feeling of *here*—the violence is noticeable in the background, the situation is hiding between the lines, religion, Arabs, Shoah—to make it short: the whole chaos."[60]

The literary critic Miri Kubovy notes that the process of Americanization in Israeli life finds its various expressions in contemporary literature: English is being intertwined into contemporary literary Hebrew and gives the speaker an illusion of status, being urbane, and up-to-date. Kubovy sees the Americanization of contemporary Hebrew literature as a component in a complex process that includes both Israeli phenomena and global cultural developments.[61] As the young writer Dorit Rabinyan put it: "In order to say far less sacred things, we put the Hebrew language on a diet: we anglicized it."[62] The enormous pluralism in the writing of this young generation makes generalizations impossible; however, we observe the emergence of sub-national identities and cultures that attribute more attention to individual aspects of identity formation and indigenous culture. This new wave of writing is dominated by personal and human encounters, coping with the *'mazaw'* (i.e., the political situation) and the uncertainty of daily life. Instead of being considered on in a political or national framework, the heroes and characters are individuals trying to master the challenges of daily life and being caught up in their private worlds. The collective 'we,' characteristic of literary expressions by the *Dor ba-Aretz*, is now being replaced by the individualistic 'I.' Unlike their literary predecessors, this group, equipped by their parents with relative economic well-being and the illusion of security, is taking the existence of the state of Israel for granted. In addition, by the choice of their supposedly shallow topics, this group is undermining the ideological values of the *Dor ba-Aretz* writers. "There is a deep feeling of being lost after the destruction of all the myths and of all social and national agendas of progress. In the past there were meta-narratives that gave hope for a better future, and people sacrificed everything for that future with feelings of heroism and elation. The present young generation has been witnessing the bitter disillusionment and deep disappointment of the previous generations."[63]

The secular individualism of this young generation is often blamed by the 'old guard Zionist ideologues' of being apolitical and indifferent, even hedonist and decadent. Their critics argue that their subjects are private, superficial, and disconnected from the Israeli realities. The writer Etgar Keret explains this detachment from current political events: "I do not want to find absolute answers in my literature, like the A. B. Yehoshuas in

the country. [. . .] If my girlfriend left me it is not important who is prime minister."[64] Etgar Keret, whose parents are Holocaust survivors, represents a group of Israeli authors often referred to as the post-ideological generation that, with regard to the growing globalization, discusses the 'loss of ideology,' even the end of ideology. In an increasingly fragmented society, they made their confusion into a state of mind: "My generation has the privilege of being confused. My generation is like a Bagel: many run in circles and stare into a hole."[65] Asked what could fill this vacuum, he answered: "I don't really know what could fill it, but one huge step in filling it would be admitting that it exists. [. . .] We [the Israeli society] should admit: we have a problem. We don't have much in common."[66] Reading the texts of Keret carefully, there is indeed a 'shortcut to everyday life' and at first glance it seems that he is simply collecting the surreal, moving, absurd, and funny scenes of the confusing Israeli normalcy and putting them into minimalized texts. But beyond the simple collection of the sounds and flakes of daily life, Keret manages to draw a picture of the Israeli state of mind, which can be found in the streets or in the open-air market of Tel-Aviv, where many of his stories are set. Although Etgar Keret does not specifically relate to ethnic issues, he should serve as an example for a new generation of writers, who deal with the realities on the ground. His writing is distinctively local, since it links specific local (Israeli) experiences, such as the tense security situation or the military service, to universal concepts and questions. By capturing the sub-currents of Israeli daily life, Keret is neither escaping, nor idealizing Israeli realities, but taking them for granted—as they are—with all their distinguishing characteristics and shortcomings.

In this new generation of writers, one finds less concern for national subjects like nation-building, absorption of immigrants, or the construction of the heroic mold of the pioneer, and more subjects committed to the private sphere and the main characters' pursuit of individual happiness. Looking at the literary themes as well as and the authors' self-representations, a growing manifestation of ethnically related awareness becomes evident. Yet, this specific ethnoconsciousness is not necessarily a representation of a specific Israeli state of mind, or evidence for an unequivocal counter narrative. This 'ethnic turn' has its equivalents in contemporary world culture and needs to be evaluated within a global context. Nevertheless, in the following, I wish to trace the specific Israeli components within this 'ethnic turn.'

Looking at representations of the Levant and the Mediterranean in literary works in Israel, Ammiel Alcalay has brought together numerous references in a long-overdue compilation of literature in the Levant: *After*

Jews and Arabs; and his anthology of contemporary Israeli writers with family roots in the Arab world: *Keys to the Garden*. He determines a "veritable explosion of creativity [from the 1970s on] emerging from mizrahi consciousness"[67] and is convinced that some of the most vibrant elements in contemporary Israeli literature originate from authors with oriental background. Their contributions to the debates on remembrance, the search for identity, and language—not to mention their role in discussions on the reevaluation of the past and minority-majority relations—are, according to Alcalay, of central importance in the development of a specifically Israeli culture. "The work of these writers has, and continues to have, a tremendous impact on the direction Israeli culture as a whole can take, an impact that cannot be measured by opinion polls but one whose true implications have barely been recognized or acknowledged."[68] He further denounces the lack of acknowledgment of important writers of Mizrahi origin like Sami Michael or Shimon Ballas in Israel and abroad. According to Alcalay, these writers have not yet found the receptive space and approval in Israel to be translated and exported as a genuinely Israeli cultural product. Alcalay partly blames this on the selectivity and superficiality of the established literary critics who have a strong influence on the perception of Hebrew literature abroad and on the translations being made.[69] Alcalay even assumes: "For [Gershon] Shaked and others in the literary establishment, these [Mizrahi] writers simply do not exist,"[70] and argues further that the establishment "consistently ignored, maligned or, at best, misinterpreted this work."[71] Alan Mintz, too, notices a manipulation of the reception of new books by the press since "a handful of powerful editor-professors attempt to shape the tastes of the serious reading public"[72] and Hanan Hever calls for an alternative reading of Hebrew literature and major narratives in modern Hebrew literature in order to recognize the repressed, silenced, and erased ethnic (Mizrahi) narrative.[73] Over ten years have passed since Alcalay's critical remarks and today the situation has changed: the subject of ethnicity and minority discourse in contemporary Israeli literature has slowly entered both literary criticism[74] and public discourse, and translations of Mizrahi writers are now more easily accessible.[75] Nonetheless, it is obvious that the choice of authors discussed by veteran literary critics is highly selective and it is striking to find only marginal discussion of the contribution of Mizrahi writers—or the "non-Askenazi Jewish writers,"[76] as this group is labeled simply by exclusion—in books like *Modern Hebrew Fiction*. Other examples, pointed out by Alcalay include *Israeli Poetry: A Contemporary Anthology*, which does not mention any Israeli poet of Middle Eastern descent.[77]

Nancy E. Berg discusses the terms and categories involved in the discourse on modern Hebrew literature and finds it problematic to categorize 'Sephardic writers' as a unity, in spite of the great diversity within the group. In the end, Berg argues, the only commonality they have is the way "the mainstream readership/establishment responds to them."[78] Also, the fact that these writers are labeled as *'ethnic'* writers—"using the term here in a uniquely Israeli sense where nothing Ashkenazi is ethnic"[79]—binds them from the beginning to a certain discussion about ethnicity and otherness. "If we persist in reading them as ethnic, we deny them full voice, miss much of their texture, and may, on occasion, invert their meaning."[80] She argues further that the ethnic label nevertheless becomes less and less of a marker, since the authors under observation here have entered the literary arena, moved from the margins towards the center and broken out of the one-dimensional ethnic category.

In the discussion on Israel's locality, important thought-provoking impulses came from writers of Mizrachi origin, who deal with heritage and cultural roots in the region. Baghdad-born veteran writer Sami Michael perceives the history of the Levant as an experience of dialogue and multicultural coexistence. His novel *Victoria*, an expansive family saga set in Baghdad and based on his mother's story, her youth in Iraq, and the hardship she encountered upon her immigration to the new state, was a bestseller in Israel. A. B. Yehoshua, son of a Sephardic family that came to Palestine in the 19th century, never explicitly called upon his ethnic roots in his early works. By contrast, in his family saga *Mr. Mani*, labeled by critics as a 'passionate Mediterranean epic,' he created a distinctly Sephardic protagonist. Also, his novel *Journey to the end of the Millennium*, [81] a historical fantasy describing the encounter of Jewish Oriental and Jewish Occidental cultures, takes place on the Mediterranean Sea and is an example of the flowering of Israeli literature inspired by the geographical *locus*. A. B. Yehoshua himself labels his writing as 'Mediterranean'—as opposed to the labels 'East' or 'West'—and explains this by referring to his personal feeling of belonging to a cultural entity: "If I see a Greek tragedy I feel at home, not like in Hamburg. [. . .] I don't want to present myself as being between East and West—I am 'Yam Tikhoni' [Mediterranean], and my books are 'Yam Tikhoni'im.' *Mr. Mani* is a Mediterranean book and the *Journey to the end of the Millennium* is Mediterranean."[82]

My thesis is that in the last decade, the subjects previously central to the Israeli literary canon—the quest for the 'New Jew,' the Israeli-Arab conflict and the inner ethnic divide—have been pushed into the margins. Instead, personal reflections and an increasing self-centeredness, beyond

the story of the collective, have become a central focus. Accordingly, the 'personal place' is becoming the center of attention and some writers with oriental family background have begun to collect family memories, thereby rediscovering their individual roots in the East. The Alexandria-born author Itzchak Gormesano Goren was a pioneer in bringing to the surface the undercurrents of the Egyptian-Jewish consciousness. In 1978, he published *Alexandrian Summer* which is set in the Jewish middle class of pre-1952 Alexandria, and other young writers followed his example of reviving long forgotten family roots in Arab countries. Unlike their predecessors, this young generation of writers does not approach the Diaspora with a depreciatory or even negative sentiment, but rather approaches the exotic worlds of the past with no ideological bias. Thus, by de-centering the consensus, this young generation becomes significant in defining identity and Israeli locality. They include authors like Ronit Matalon, who discusses the Levantine past in her work as a concept for future coexistence in the region. Her book *The one facing us* (first published in 1995), which recounts an Egyptian Jewish family's history, has several references to the Egyptian writer Jacqueline Kahanoff and is preoccupied with the 'Levantine option' for society. Matalon's collected essays[83] also contain some ideas in the style of Kahanoff, where Matalon often refers to Kahanoff's perception of *Levantiniut*.[84] Matalon sees in Zionism only one possible cultural option for Israel and even puts forward a post-Zionist reading of Jacqueline Kahanoff's writings: "As an Israeli, I was very, very attracted to the cultural and moral richness of the wandering Jew, who does not have one nationality or one country, has many languages, is open to everything human, and does not always close himself off from [foreign] influences. In this sense, the Levantine option of live and let live, which in my opinion is the opposite of Zionism, very much attracted me."[85] In the production and promotion of Ronit Matalon's work (especially *The one facing us*) and in the reassertion of Egyptian Jewish identity in post-1977 Israel, the scholar Joel Beinin sees a potential that reaches beyond the literary world: to construct a viable political vision for Israel's future relations with its Arab neighbors.[86] Further, the stories by Dorit Rabinyan, for example, are inspired by her grandmother's personal experiences in Iran. Her first book, *Persian Brides,* is set at the turn of the century in a fictitious Persian village, her second novel, *Our Weddings*, is an enchanting family saga that tells the chronicle of an Israeli family of Persian descent.[87] Rabinyan's plots are sensuous fables, full of fantasy and the smell of exotic spices, and she does not shy away from drawing on existing stereotypes. Rabinyan describes harsh sexist patterns in traditional Mizrahi family structures, as well as the way mysticism

and the supernatural are interwoven in her heroine's everyday life and how they protect themselves from the evil eye.

The examples discussed here show an increased ethnic awareness and takes Israeliness back to 'personal, individual places' defined by ethnic group or biography. The inclination towards the personal *Makom* concurs with research by sociologists and political scientists over the past decade, who have been emphasizing the increasing ethnic consciousness, even the development of ethnic ghettos and a move towards 'tribalization', within Israeli society. Nevertheless, beyond the ethnic component, the constant threat of daily life in Israel as well as general worldwide literary trends need to be considered as driving forces behind the development of contemporary Israeli literature. Sami Michael explained the tendency in Israeli literature to escape reality, thereby putting it into a global context: "[. . .] all postmodernism in literature is a kind of flight from reality. But it's impossible to flee in Israel. Therefore, postmodernism in Israel is different from postmodernism that's written in France, or Italy or England. Because Israeli postmodernism has a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear, a lot of worry, a lot of despair."[88]

Looking at the literary and intellectual landscape of contemporary Israel, we find evidence of a growing awareness of Mizrahi issues in the public sphere and the media. There are those who have gone to visit their childhood homes, like the historian David Ohana who visited Morocco in search of roots, [89] and those who cannot return for political reasons, but reflect on their memories in fiction or biographical-historical essays. Sasson Somekh, a scholar of Arabic literature who was born and grew up in Baghdad, recently published his memoirs.[90] His recollections on a lost world include family stories intertwined with general reflections on the Baghdadi community and its transition to Israel, as well as personal nostalgia about Iraqi spices or smells: "The heavenly flavor of 'amba [spicy, yellow condiment with pickled mango] on fresh-baked sammon lingers on my tongue to this day."[91] Especially in the days of the Gulf War in 2003, interviews with Jewish immigrants from Baghdad and the representatives of Iraq's intellectual community now living in Israel were omnipresent on Israeli television. Their memories of places in the old *heimat*, accompanied by current images of the Allied air raids on Baghdad, sustained the general wave of nostalgia. The documentary essay *Forget Baghdad*, filmed in 2002 by the exiled Iraqi who calls himself Samir, talks about the identity conflict of Iraqi Jews in Israel, among them the writers Shimon Ballas, Sami Michael, and Samir Naqqash, thereby breaking the existing clichés about the Jew and the Arab as a prototype. Their personal stories elucidate the

problems of identity formation upon their arrival in Israel. Samir Naqqash, who passed away in 2004, continued to write his novels in Arabic, which made him an outsider in Israel. Shimon Ballas sees his mission as bringing Israel closer to the East and—as a product of Arab culture—sees himself today as an "Arab Jew."[92] Hanan Hever comments on this contradictory self-definition: "In contrast to Israeli identity, which appears as natural, homogeneous, local, and, above all, universal, Ballas raises a possibility that is explicitly heterogeneous: the option of being a local yet simultaneously an immigrant from the East—a 'doubly realized' reality, as Ballas put it [. . .]."[93]

The literary manifestations of Mizrahi writers are as diverse as their contributors and the group as a whole: "Some came from the secularized urban professional classes of Cairo, Damascus, and Bagdad; others were shopkeepers with a traditional religious outlook; and still others came from small towns and villages that had hardly been touched by industrial life."[94] As diverse as this group may be, it becomes apparent that topics like identity construction, extensive family sagas, features of sensuousness and exoticness, as well as post-colonial approaches, enhance the process of reassessing and rediscovering the long marginalized fields of literary expression. The young generation of writers—among them Mizrahi writers—is a factor that is reshaping the literary map of Israel and rewriting the Zionist narrative.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Within the transformations of Israeli society that occurred throughout the 1990s, traditional values were challenged and often considered obsolete. The examples from the field of music and literature discussed above illuminate a growing awareness of the *Israeli Makom* in the public discourse. It became apparent that there is no consensus on defining the crucial terms involved in this discussion, and different labels like Mizrahi, ethnic, Oriental, Arab, Mediterranean or Levantine are sometimes mixed or even confused. These are terms associated with a number of ideas, expectations, and views and with countless images, many of which have been idealized or instrumentalized over time. The only constant factor in the discourse under observation here is: the Mediterranean concept is still in its formative period and in constant flux. The search for locality and the associated Mediterranean discourse can be interpreted as a phenomenon within the overall inclination to redefine ideological and cultural orientations. As

an abstraction, *Yam Tikhoniut* suggests the reconsideration of the role of place and space in the Israeli context and thereby offers some promising future directions.

In her study of Israeli identity, Lilly Weissbrod argues that such an extreme situation of disintegration and crisis "can lead to either a total breakup of the social fabric, and in the extreme case to a secession, or to a search for a redefined glue, a reinterpretation of core values adapted to reality and to which all, or most groups can agree."[95] However, the alienation and calling into question of old points of reference do not necessarily lead to the inevitable breakup of modern Israel, although the dangers of dissolution to a society devoid of core values have been discussed in depth in Israeli public and academic discourse. On the contrary: one can also see in this process of separation and polarization a continuous liberalization and plurality of lived experience. I therefore argue that, despite the disintegrating forces within the social fabric, a process of reinterpretation of core values is underway in Israel and as a result new perspectives are unfolding. It became evident that Mediterranean characterizations have importance in everyday encounters and are referred to with increasing frequency. The popularity of 'all things Mediterranean' confirms that there is obviously a demand for a place-bound identity and culture in Israel. My thesis is that beyond the academic and political agendas, Mediterranean reality exists as the broad response to the concept indicates on many levels. Therefore I stress that *Yam Tikhoniut* in Israel is living, always growing, and taking shape.

Notes

A note on translation and bibliography: the translation into English of quotes from Hebrew sources or interviews that were conducted between 2000 and

2005 in Hebrew or German are mine. For works published in Hebrew, I have used the transliterated original title for the identification of the source. The Hebrew titles are followed by the English titles in brackets, which are often not accurate translations, but the English title given by the author in the Hebrew original.

1. The secular concept of 'Israeliness' originates from the idea that Jewishness is not only a religious, but also a national, identity. The Israeliness to which I refer in the following is a set of attitudes, a state of mind, mentality, and cultural entity that is shared by a large group of Israelis.

2. In Hebrew, the term has a dual significance: on the one hand *Makom* refers to the specific physical place, on the other hand *Makom* is equivalent with God's name, and therefore refers to a metaphysical place.

3. I shall not discuss here the extensive literature on this issue. It suffices to mention that leading Israeli academic journals such as *Zmanim*, *Alpaim,* and *Theory and Criticism* [Hebrew], as well as *Israel Studies* and *Israel Affairs* [English] published papers and special issues on subjects such as Israeliness, collective identity, and collective memory. Also, researchers from diverse disciplines dedicated themselves to the subject of identity politics, e.g., Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg (eds), *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham, 2005); Adriana Kemp, Uri Ram, Oren Yiftachel (eds), *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities, and Challenges* (Sussex, 2004); Motti Regev, Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley, 2004); Angelika Timm, *Israel—Gesellschaft im Wandel* (Wiesbaden, 2003) [German]; Michael Feige (ed), "Memory and Identity in Israel: New Directions," special issue: *Israel Studies,* 7 (2002); Tom Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel* (New York, 2002); Lilly Weissbrod, *Israeli Identity. In Search of a Successor to the Pioneer, Tsabar and Settler* (London, 2002); Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military* (Berkeley, 2001); Nissim Calderon, *Multiculturalism versus Pluralism in Israel* (Haifa, 2000) [Hebrew]; Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley, 2000); Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (New York, 1999).

4. e.g., The historian Yaakov Shavit finds this Mediterranean reference "in belles lettres, in cinematic and theatrical reviews, in descriptions of landscapes and character or human behavior, or even in reference to culinary menus." See Yaacov Shavit, "The Mediterranean World and 'Mediterraneanism': The Origins, Meaning, and Application of a Geo-Cultural Notion in Israel," *Mediterranean Historical Review,* 3 (1988) 96–117, here 96.

5. In my comments below I use the Hebrew term 'Yam Tikhoniut' (*Yam ha-Tikhon* means the Mediterranean Sea, literally 'sea of the middle') as a synonym for 'Mediterraneanism' or 'Méditerranité.'

6. Umm-Khoulthoum (1904–1975), an Egyptian woman singer and icon of Arab music in the 20th century, who also enjoys popularity in the Mizrahi communities in Israel. For further reading on the singer Sahava Ben, who performed

an Umm-Khoulthoum repertoire for audiences in Nablus as well as in Tel-Aviv, and at the border opening after signing the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994, see Amy Horowitz, "Dueling Nativities: Zehava Ben Sings Umm Kulthum," in Stein and Swedenburg (eds), *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 202–230.

7. For the definition of the term *Mizrahi* [Hebrew for east], see note 16 below.

8. See Alexandra Nocke, *Israel heute: Ein Selbstbild im Wandel. Innenansichten einer Identitätskrise* (Bodenheim, 1998) [German].

9. In this perception, the thesis brought forward by Edward Said is central to this argument. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978).

10. The different voices forming the public discourse on *Yam Tikhoniut* in Israel are mapped and analyzed in depth in my PhD diss., "Yam Tikhoniut: The Place of the Mediterranean in Modern Israeli Identity," Potsdam University, 2005.

11. See Elie Barnavi, "Israel laboratoire méditerranéen," *Revue Rive*, (1996) 52–55.

12. Irad Malkin, "The Mediterranean and Contemporary Israel," *Technopolis Méditerranée*, 1 (1996) 34–35.

13. It was difficult to get any official information from YES as to why *Brisa* was taken off the air at the end of 2003 despite its success. In telephone conversations with diverse representatives of YES satellite network, I was assured that *Brisa's* rating was excellent and the response from the audience enthusiastic, thus the exact circumstances that led to *Brisa's* decline 'remain a mystery'. *Brisa's* creator and producer Ron Cahlili argues that its discontinuation has to be explained by the unease of the establishment towards *Brisa's* provocative content. Cahlili is convinced that this act was a "political and racist decision," and that *Brisa* was simply too controversial for a broadcasting company that, above all, wants to entertain people. Despite *Brisa's* 'fate', Cahlili is convinced that his channel, the "Israeli-Mediterranean revolution" as he labeled it, was a huge success. In his perception, *Brisa* was a "Trojan Horse" that facilitated the way for the Mizrahim into the mainstream. Ron Cahlili, Interview with the author, Tel-Aviv, 15 February 2005.

14. For a comprehensive discussion on the subject, see Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*.

15. It is important to mention here that in most of the literature dealing with contemporary Israeli subjects, the adjective *'ethnic'* is used to describe everything 'non-Askenazi'. I am aware of the shortcomings of this usage, but to simplify matters I will continue to use the term.

16. Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis, 1993) 253–254.

17. *Musika Mizrahit* is popular music connected to *Mizrahiut*, ethnic oriental Israeliness. This music is associated with the ethnic-oriental identity of those

low-status Israeli Jews, who arrived from North-Africa (especially Morocco) and the Arab states of the Middle East (such as Yemen, Ethiopia, Iraq, Syria). The term *Mizrahiut* today basically indicates everything 'not-Ashkenazi' among the diverse ethnic groups in Israel and is in fact very imprecise. Nevertheless, while using the term 'Mizrahi' in this paper, I am aware that it indicates a multi-layered ethnic complex and many individual identities, a breakdown of which is beyond the scope of this paper. See Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi and Pamela Squires-Kidron, "Musika Mizrakhit: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," *Popular Music,* 8 (1989) 131–141.

18. Edwin Seroussi, "'Mediterraneanism' in Israeli Music: an Idea and its Permutations," *Journal of Musical Anthropology of the Mediterranean,* 7 (2002). See also http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/ma/index/number7/seroussi/ser_oo.htm Date accessed: 19 November 2003.

19. Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880–1948* (Oxford, 1995) 146.

20. Amnon Shiloah (ed), *The Performance of Jewish and Arab Music in Israel Today* (Singapore, 1997) 1.

21. For a detailed description of the emergence of the so called 'Mediterranean school' or 'Eastern Mediterranean school', see Liora Bresler, "The Mediterranean Style in Israeli Music," in Israel Bartal, Amnon Cohen, Yoram Tsafrir (eds), *Cathedra* (Jerusalem, 1985) 136–161 [Hebrew].

22. See Jehoash Hirshberg, "Alexander U. Boskovitch and the Quest for an Israeli National Musical Style," in Ezra Mendelsohn (ed), *Modern Jews and Their Musical Agenda* (New York, 1993) 92–109.

23. See Yael Guliat, "The Yemenite Ideal in Israeli Culture and Arts," *Israel Studies,* 6 (2001) 26–53.

24. Max Brod, *Die Musik Israels* (Kassel, 1976) 58 [German].

25. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

26. Edwin Seroussi, "'Mediterraneanism' in Israeli Music: an Idea and its Permutations."

27. See Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880–1948* (Oxford, 1995) 271f.

28. Josef Tal, Interview with the author, Jerusalem, 25 April 2004.

29. Ami Maayani, Interview with the author, Tel-Aviv, 18 July 2001.

30. Shimon Parnas, Interview with the author, Jerusalem, 22 October 2001.

31. Amy Horowitz, "Performance in Disputed Territory: Israeli Mediterranean Music," *Musical Performance,* 1 (1997) 43–53, here 43.

32. Ali Salem, *A Drive to Israel: An Egyptian meets his Neighbors* (Tel-Aviv, 2001) 92.

33. Despite the fact that *Musikat Kasetot* is generally produced with low quality technology, this music entered the urban and private soundscape of everyday life and became an integrated component of sounds a traveler in Israel is exposed to *Musika Mizrahit* in public transportation, taxis, cafés, restaurants, kiosks, shops, etc.

34. See Amy Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit (Israeli Mediterranean Music): Cultural Boundaries and Disputed Territories," PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994, 7.

35. Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*, 192.

36. AZIT stands for *Amutat zemer Israeli yam tikhoni* (Israeli Mediterranean Music Association).

37. See Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel,* 213ff.

38. Shimon Parnas, interview with the author, 22 October 2001.

39. Amy Horowitz, "Performance in Disputed Territory: Israeli Mediterranean Music," 43.

40. Halper, Seroussi, Squires-Kidron, "Musika Mizrakhit: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," 131–141.

41. Amy Horowitz, "Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit (Israeli Mediterranean Music): Cultural Boundaries and Disputed Territories," PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1994, 36.

42. "Survey by the Mutagim Institute," *Ha'aretz,* 18 April 2003.

43. David Ohana, Personal conversation, office, Sde-Boker, 30 March 2003.

44. Motti Regev discussed the interconnectedness of the global and the local in depth, see "Rock Aesthetics, Israeliness and Globalization," in Adriana Kemp, Uri Ram, Oren Yiftachel (eds), *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities and Challenges* (Sussex, 2004).

45. Yossi Klein Halevi, "The Wizard of Sderot," *The Jerusalem Report*, 22 June (1988) 40.

46. Kobi Oz, interview with the author, Tel-Aviv, 23 February 2000.

47. Neri Livneh, "Call me Levantine," *Ha'aretz,* 13 August 1999.

48. *Ibid.*

49. For details, see Galit Saada, "Attitudes and Strategies of Action for Consolidation of an Oriental Identity: Musical Activity in Shderot" M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999.

50. Halper, Seroussi, Squires-Kidron, "Musika Mizrakhit: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," 139.

51. Shimon Parnas, interview with the author, Jerusalem, 22 October 2001.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Abraham B. Yehoshua, interview with the author, Haifa, 14 October 2001.

54. The roots of communal singing during the *Yishuv* period are explained as the cultural and musical backing of a new ideology being implemented in the ancient homeland. The enthusiastic participation in those communal evenings reflect, according to Hirshberg, the wish of the secular population for social interaction on Friday nights, and identification with the cause of the national folk songs. See Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880–1948.*

55. Gideon Samet, "Oh, what a lovely war!" *Ha'aretz*, 21 March 2003.

56. Named after an anthology that was published in Hebrew under the same

name in 1958. Prominent names in this generation of writers include, S. Yizhar, Moshe Shamir, Aharon Megged, Natan Shaham, Yoram Kaniuk.

57. *Palmach* units were the combat units of the pre-state underground self-defense organization, the *Haganah*, to which some of the writers belonged.

58. This group designates a group of writers who began their career after the state was established. Prominent names in the *Dor ha-Medina* or *New Wave* generation of writers include Amos Oz, Aharon Appelfeld, A. B. Yehoshua, Yaakow Shabtai. Generally, these categorizations, among others also suggested by Gershon Shaked [*Modern Hebrew Fiction* (Bloomington, 2000) 139ff] help to map the diverse literary expressions. Nevertheless, they are static and somewhat simplistic, not giving much space to the diversity within a group and to those writers who, for example, produce counter-narratives within their own generation.

59. Avner Holtzman, "The Hebrew Literature in the year 2000)," *Hebrew Higher Education,* 10 (2002) 43–51, here 48 [Hebrew].

60. Assaf Gawron, as quoted, *Ibid.,* 51 [Hebrew].

61. Miri Kubovy, "Inniut and Kooliut. Trends in Israeli Narrative Literature, 1995–1999," *Israel Studies,* 5 (2000) 244–265.

62. Dorit Rabinyan, "Young, Troubled and Lost in the Promised Land" (previously published in the British Sunday Times, December 2001): http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0702/rabinyan/excerpt.html Date accessed: 1 April 2003.

63. Kubovy, "Inniut and Kooliut. Trends in Israeli Narrative Literature, 1995–1999," 251.

64. Etgar Keret, Panel discussion, Bücherstube Marga Schöller, Berlin, 3 July 2000.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Etgar Keret, interview with the author, Tel-Aviv, 29 April 2002.

67. Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs* and *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing* (San Francisco, 1996) viii.

68. The long ignored literature of the Mizrahim is discussed in Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden,* xi.

69. Striking examples for Alcalay's allegations are two essays that do not mention any contribution of Mizrahi writers to Hebrew literature: Gershon Shaked, "Waves and Currents in Hebrew Fiction in the Past Forty Years," *Modern Hebrew Literature,* 1 (1988) 4–12; Gershon Shaked, "The Arab in Israeli Fiction," *Modern Hebrew Literature*, 3 (1989) 17–20.

70. Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture,* 238.

71. Alcalay: *Keys to the Garden,* viii.

72. Alan Mintz, "Introduction," in Alan Mintz (ed), *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction* (Hanover, 1997) 1–16, here 3.

73. Hanan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York, 2002) 4.

74. e.g., Hanan Hever; Yehouda Shenhav; Pnina Motzafi-Haller: *Mizrahim*

be-Israel: Ayn bikorti mehudesh (Mizrahim in Israel: A Critical Observation into Israel's Ethnicity) (Jerusalem, 2002); Deborah Ann Starr, "Ambivalent Levantines /Levantine Ambivalences: Egyptian Jewish Identities in Contemporary Literature," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2000; Nancy E. Berg, "Sepharadi Writing: From the Margins to the Mainstream," in Mintz (ed), *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction,* 114–142; Nancy E. Berg, *Exile from Exile: Israeli Writers from Iraq* (Albany, 1996).

75. In the last five years we find a growing awareness of and demand for the works of Mizrahi writers outside of Israel in the translations from Hebrew into a variety of languages, including German and English.

76. Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction,* 186.

77. Warren Bargad and Stanley F. Chyet, *Israeli Poetry: A Contemporary Anthology,* (Bloomington, 1986). See also Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture,* 253.

78. Berg, "Sephardi Writing: From the Margins to the Mainstream", 115.

79. *Idem.*

80. *Ibid.,* 137.

81. Abraham B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (Tel-Aviv, 1990) and, *Journey to the end of the Millennium* (Tel-Aviv, 1997).

82. Abraham B. Yehoshua, interview with the author, Haifa, 14 October 2001.

83. Ronit Matalon, *Kroh u-Khtow (Read and Write)* (Tel-Aviv, 2001) 33f.

84. State of mind and feeling of belonging to the geographic region of the Levant. In her collection of essays *East of the Sun*, Jacqueline Kahanoff discusses transforming the Zionist revolution into a Levantine revolution and advocates an open and pluralistic society in the Levant. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Kahanoff's work became the subject of renewed interest as inner-Israeli discussions on identity politics intensified and as social values and the status of the Mizrahi Jews in an emerging civil society entered the public discourse. Jacqueline Kahanoff, *East of the Sun* (Tel-Aviv, 1978). Unpublished texts by Jacqueline Kahanoff are forthcoming in David Ohana (ed), *Between Two Worlds*, (Jerusalem, 2006) [Hebrew].

85. Interview in *Davar*, April 28, 1995; see also Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley, 1998) 239.

86. *Ibid.,* 240.

87. Dorit Rabinyan, *Persian Brides* (Tel-Aviv, 1995) and *Our Weddings* (Tel-Aviv, 1999) [Hebrew].

88. Sami Michael interviewed by F. M. Black, 29 November 2002. http://www.forward.com/issues/2002/02.11.29/arts2.html Date accessed 20 April 2003.

89. David Ohana, *Humanist in the Sun: Albert Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration* (Jerusalem, 2000) 120ff [Hebrew].

90. Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday* (Tel-Aviv, 2004).

91. Sasson Somekh, "Forever 'amba," *Ha'aretz*, 8 March 2002.

92. Dalia Karpel, "An Arab Jew," *Ha'aretz*, 2 July 2003.

93. Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse,* 166.

94. Mintz, "Introduction," 9.

95. Weissbrod, *Israeli Identity: In Search of a Successor to the Pioneer, Tsabar and Settler,* 4.