## Social Identities

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713445719

### 'Both an Arab and a woman': gendered, racialised experiences of female Palestinian citizens of Israel

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# 'Both an Arab and a Woman':
# Gendered, Racialised Experiences of Female Palestinian Citizens of Israel

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ABSTRACT: *Following feminist and postcolonial discourses, this paper uses the concept of 'everyday experience' as a tool to trace the social world of educated Palestinian women in Israel. The term refers to the complex array of these women's experiences in racialised and gendered social sites, as well as within the class, religious, and ethnic contexts in the subordinated group and its relations with the dominant Jewish group. Based on 108 in-depth interviews with Palestinian women citizens of Israel, the paper claims that educated Palestinian women are located in a 'third place' between cultural, gender, class, national and racial structures that generates a continual ambivalence. Within this marginal, 'unhomely' space women negotiate their own identities and challenge dominant social definitions. Women create various modes of interim spaces and multi-dimensional, shifting identities for themselves. The ambivalent attitudes generated by the women's experiences expose the possibility of shedding categorising markers. The omnipresent existence of the gendered, racialised regime of knowledge makes every place a potential site of subversion and resistance.*

Despite a thick description of raced experiences, only 18 of the 108 interviewees used the term 'racism' in my study, which traces the social world and experiences of educated Palestinian women who are Israeli citizens.[1] The paper suggests a theoretical explanation of the avoidance of the explicit term 'racism' in a racialised society. Then, based on in-depth interviews, it describes the gendered and racialised experiences of Palestinian women and finally analyses the ways they struggle with these experiences, claiming that being in a contradictory identity location in highly racialised and gendered reality, Palestinian women create various modes of interim spaces and multi-dimensional, shifting identities for themselves.

## Racism, Nationalism and Women

This article takes as its theoretical point of departure the nexus between post-colonial criticism and feminist criticism. These theoretical approaches are not monolithic and have indeed been modified over time. The discussion that follows will show the theoretical points of convergence between these two

concepts, which are the linchpin for the empirical project of presenting the personal stories of female Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Despite the powerful presence of race and racism within our contemporary society, the terms are notoriously hostile to definition. There is no agreed definition of the terms in the professional literature: not least because of the rejection of the classical model of race, which was based on biological theories and inherited differences. That model was supplanted by hypotheses stating that typologies of races, as well as race-thinking, are social phenomena that spring up and are susceptible to change — historical products of social-ideological mindsets. Many studies maintain that interracial relations should be examined within the context of economic, political and ideological relations (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Banton, 1998; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991). Miles (1982, p. 42) would therefore reject race as an analytical category, 'because it is a category of everyday life and should not be employed analytically' and reserve the term racism solely for racist ideologies (p. 48).

However, in the spirit of the post-colonial school, I will argue that even though race is a socially constructed category, we cannot dispense with this category as an analytical tool. This is because it is impossible to ignore the cultural aspects of the phenomenon and the transition from the colour line to the consolidation of culture lines, in Gilroy's term (1987), or to have racism without races, as Balibar (1991) observes. State practices of exclusion and hierarchisation *vis à vis* certain groups based on ethnic and national origin are no different from racism even if they hide behind the rhetoric of 'belonging'. As Balibar rightly detects:

> It cannot be by chance that the genocide of the Indians became systematic immediately after the United States — the 'first of the new nations' in Lipset's famous expression — achieved independence. Just as it cannot be by chance … that 'nationalism' and 'communalism' were formed together in India … or again, that the independent Algeria made assimilating the 'Berbers' to 'Arabness' the key test of the nation's will in its struggle with the multicultural heritage of colonialism. Or, indeed, that the State of Israel, faced with internal and external enemies and the impossible gamble of forging an 'Israeli nation', developed a powerful racism directed both against the 'Eastern' Jews (called 'blacks') and Palestinians, who were driven out of their lands and colonised. (Balibar 1991 p. 53)[2]

Racism tends to develop within nation-states that seek to consolidate their national project. It springs from nationalism, which is interior- as well exterior-directed (Balibar, 1991 pp. 54–64). The Israeli case is no different. Israel, a self-defined Jewish state, has a minority of Palestinian Arab citizens that constitutes 18 per cent of the population. Formally the Palestinian Arabs have equal rights; in practice, however, the state's classification of its citizens on a national basis — Jews/Arabs — works towards crystallising the Jewish national identity and marking its boundaries. The national classification is the basis for the control, exclusion, discrimination and hierarchisation of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel (Lustick, 1980; Peled, 1992; Shafir and Peled, 2002;

Ghanem, 2001). The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict reinforces discourse construction in national terms and bolsters the national-security argument. The resulting discourse makes it possible to silence any potential civil discourse and to dismiss claims to full equality in civil rights of the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Bar-Tal *et al.*, 1999; Herzog and Shamir, 1994), as well as motivating the establishment of discrimination, domination, and the hierarchical classification of groups on a racist basis.

Similarly, as Gilroy (2000) claims, it is impossible to liberate humanity from the bane of race-thinking without confronting the historical contexts within which it sprang up and the elements of modern Western thought that engendered the race category. However welcome the project of liberation from race-thinking is, it presents enormous difficulties. It is not only that the dominant groups are in no hurry to give up their privileges. The deeper problem is that the groups that have been dominated by race-thinking for generations, and the structural arrangements that bind them to this conceptual mode, have made the category of race a source of identification, cultural crystallisation, belonging and collective strength. Therefore:

> For many racialised populations, 'race' and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not to be lightly or prematurely given up. (Gilroy, 2000, p. 12)

It is no easy matter to escape an imposed racial identity. Societies seeking liberation from race-thinking discover that colonial practices are so deeply etched in their psyches that they have become an inseparable element in the identity of oppressor and oppressed alike, as Fanon (1970), Bhabha (1990), Morrison (1992) and others have shown. The same arguments apply to gender-thinking (Fraser, 1997).

Like race, nationalism is a modern concept and a socially constructed category that creates a basis for population classification and the demarcation of boundaries as well as for belonging, solidarity and identity (Anderson, 1983). In Foucault's terms, racism and nationalism are modes of managing the biopolitics of the population. Implicit within this point of convergence of the two phenomena is the blurring of the boundaries between them. An examination of the methods of population management sheds light on the metamorphosis of ideologies and movements of national liberation into racist policies and attitudes. An array of social arrangements extending from marriage, family, education, social hierarchy and property to the management of the body and everyday hygiene, derive their character and justification from the myth of protecting the purity of the blood and preserving the race; and in nationalism.

> The nation was invested with characteristics associated with biocultural kinship in which new forms of duty and mutual obligation appeared to regulate relationships between members of the collective, while those who fell beyond the boundaries of the official community were despised, reviled, and subjected to entirely different political and juridical

procedures, especially if they did not benefit from the protection of an equivalent political body. (Gilroy, 2001, p. 68)

Racism and nationalism are modes of thought that essentialise biological and cultural differences. They are founded on the binary logic that characterises Western thought and divides the society into those who belong and those who are excluded: 'us' and 'them'. This binary logic sees the social world from the perspective of the dominant groups. In addition to its exclusionary character, it assumes the existence of a hierarchy within the binary world and is therefore accompanied by discrimination, suppression and annulment of the 'Other'.[3] One method by which exclusion is effected is through the need to purify the social body and preserve our identity against attempts by others to draw close, intermix, or invade — actions that are organised around the stigma of 'Otherness' that is signified by name, skin colour, religious creed, or ethnic and national affiliation (Balibar, 1991, pp. 17–18). National and racial borders are preserved and these categories collapse into one another, in places where the dominant culture is that of the state, the ruling classes and the 'national' masses, whose style of life and mode of thought carry establishment legitimation. Any crossing of the boundaries, if this is possible, is a one-way affair and is immediately perceived as liberation, progress and the granting of rights, as a transition from particularism and primitivism to universalism and progressiveness (Balibar, 1991). The transition, if possible, is accompanied by a demand of those defined as 'Others' to forgo their source culture. However, in general any such act of cultural self-abnegation — which amounts to assimilation — is not accepted by the dominant group, to whom it represents a threat or the 'contamination' of their identity (Fanon, 1970; Bhabha, 1990; 1994). It is at the intersection of the demand for assimilation and resemblance accompanied by rejection and labelling that the dominant groups construct their identity (Herzog, 1984; Shenhav, 2003).

In both modes of thought — racist and nationalist — whether it is biological, familial or collective national continuity that is at stake, it is the woman's body that constitutes the criterion for examining the principles of commitment, belonging, obligation and loyalty to the collectivity. Her body becomes the boundary marker. Thus is a gendered regime of knowledge overlaid on a racist and nationalist regime of knowledge (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). This overlapping conjoins to the dichotomous world construct the distinctions between men and women, which are also constructed in terms of biological differences, hierarchical role division and power relations deriving from these differences.

The feminist discourse sought to contest this binary/hierarchical approach by noting the processes by which the gendered categories are constructed and the social arrangements that established and constituted power relations based on biological assumptions as part of the order of the modern Western society (Herzog, 1999). Initially, the feminist discourse emphasised universal categories of women, family, motherhood, patriarchy and reproduction and the challenge to the gendered dichotomy took place within the Western discourse. However, the trenchant criticism levelled by black feminism (hooks, 1981) and by the

Third World (Spivak, 1985) led to approaches that pointed to a plurality of overlapping and interconnected systems of domination. Multiple meanings of race and gender are understood as being 'produced through a variety of both contradictory and mutually reinforcing discourses, practices and social structures' (Dugger, 1995, p. 145).

Women, it is true, are signified according to their gender, but at the same time on the basis of belonging to a national, ethnic and racial group and according to class (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). In Israel, for example, women and women's bodies act as an arena for conducting population policy (Amir and Benyamin, 1992; Melamed, 2002; Kanaaneh, 2002). Among other aspects, this policy involves population classification and categorisation according to regimes of justification that refer to collective traits (race, nationality, ethnicity, traditionalism/ modernism as innate, inherited traits). Women's social experience is thus based on multiple layers of oppression as well as on multiple layers of inclusion. Between and within these processes of exclusion and generalisation identities are forged that are hybrid, changing, multidimensional and often conflicted and contradictory.

In contrast to racism and nationalism, which have both portrayed themselves and often been analysed in binary 'them' and 'us' terms, the post-colonial discourses conjoin with the feminist discourses that seek to challenge the binary approach and adduce a complex, multidimensional viewpoint of oppressor-oppressed relations. The post-colonial discourse takes note of the dual consciousness developed by the oppressed (Du Bois, cited in Shenhav, forthcoming), the mechanisms that expand the perception of reality and identities into a complex, hybrid point of view and the existence of fractured identities by means of which the oppressed are able to view the world simultaneously from the margins and through the eyes of the ruling colonialist (Fanon, 1970), as well as a third space in which the dichotomous rules are not obeyed (Bhabha, 1994). These conceptions make it possible to talk about contingent relations and identities that are dynamic and changing, taking shape in a constant process of reciprocal relations (see Shenhav-Hever discussion, 2002). Such approaches do not claim the existence of equivalence in the power relations between ruler/oppressor and ruled/oppressed, nor do they attest to release from the dominant constructs of knowledge. They point to situations that harbour potential threat to the ruler, and as such they may become a site of subversion and resistance (Hever and Ophir, 1994).

Relations of gender, inequality and oppression must be examined within the context of a racialised and gendered society, as well as within the class, religious and ethnic contexts in the suppressed group and its relations with the dominant group. This complex experiential array is at the heart of our attempt to understand how Palestinian women experience their encounter with the dominant Jewish society.

## Everyday Racism and Women's Experiences

The concept of 'experience' became a cornerstone of the feminist discourse as well as of the post-colonial discourse, because it made possible a different way

of talking about and theorising the society: from a vantage point located on the margins, from places to which groups categorised as marginal and/or Other were shunted (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002; Haraway, 1988; hooks, 1990, pp. 133–45). Comaroff and Comaroff (1987, p. 192) propose the term 'texture of everyday' as the site in which people's consciousness is actualised. In order to monitor people's consciousness, they argue, it is necessary to shift one's view from the formal narrative to everyday life.

It should be emphasised that the concept of social experience does not refer only to the personal aspect. The argument is that the experiences in question are systematic and recurring and include cumulative instantiation and therefore are amenable to generalisation. In the narrative of personal experience, the political dimension mediates through the everyday events. Essed (1990) and, in her wake, Lamont *et al*. (2002) propose that everyday racism should be studied from the point of view of the racialised and how they rebut racism. The reason is that experiences are a source of knowledge that includes the personal but also vicarious experiences of racism. In addition, talking about the experience encompasses also the social knowledge about it.

Accounts of racism, Essed argues (1990, pp. 3–4, 60–65), locate the narrators as well as their experiences within the social context of their everyday life. According to Essed, who conducted a comparative study of educated black women in the United States and the Netherlands in which she analysed their experiences of everyday racism, once it is recognised that racial oppression is inherent in the nature of the social order, it becomes apparent that

> the real racial drama is not racism but the fact that racism is an everyday problem … To expose racism in the system, we must analyse ambiguous meanings, expose hidden currents, and generally question what seems normal or acceptable. (Essed, 1990, p. 10)

The report by black women about their life experience includes information concerning the dominant group, which cannot be obtained if it is the source of the information.

> Only by taking subjective experiences of racism seriously can we study how Black women in their daily lives strategically use beliefs, opinions, acquired knowledge about racism, and other heuristics of interpretation to account for their experiences … (Essed, 1990, p. 59)

Marginalisation is a life experience imposed by the oppressing structure, though it is also a source that enables a different perspective and even more serves as a site for resistance, a location of radical openness and possibility, in the language of hooks (1990, p. 153).

Black, post-colonial feminism makes clear the analytical difficulty of separating the gender- and the race-based elements in women's personal experiences, so it is more apt to talk about gendered racism (Essed, 1990; Collins, 1989; Spivak, 1990). This indeed is the theoretical point of departure of the present article, which examines the modes by which women report their gendered racialised social experience, the modes by which they cope with such experience and the modes they use to construct their universe.[4] The central

thesis is that Palestinian-Arab women create for themselves interim spaces and shifting, multi-dimensional strategies, which are often contradictory and conflicted. Taking these practices as the point of departure, it is possible to discern the ambivalence that informs the attitudes of the dominant group and the dominant knowledge, as well as the attitudes of the dominated group, the object of the knowledge.

## The Study, the Research Population and the Collection of the Data

The data that constitute the foundation of this article are part of a broader study that aims to understand the universe of female Palestinian citizens of Israel. The sample population was selected at two social sites of meeting between Jews and Arabs, which seemed to bear the potential for an encounter on an equal footing, especially between women from the two groups. The sites are peace organisations, which offered the Palestinian women opportunities to participate in reshaping the future Israeli and Palestinian societies, and institutions of higher education, mainly universities, to which Palestinian women were admitted on the basis of merit and excellence. Locating the encounter with Jewish society in apparently more equal situations was only one aspect of the rationale for situating the study in these social arenas. Participation in these sites forced women to leave their villages, be exposed intensively to Jews, be present in Jewish surroundings, be independent in many respects and try to make their own way. What were their social experiences? What was the impact on their social world in the private as well as the public sphere? These were some of the questions asked in the study. In contrast to Essed's study, racism was not at the centre of the discussion but was found to be a central experience in the interviewees' everyday life and is at the centre of this article.

The study is based on 108 open-ended, in-depth interviews that were conducted in two stages. During the first stage, in 1995, female activists in the peace movement were interviewed, the sample population consisting of women who were members of one or more peace organisations, drawn from membership lists of several such organisations. In the second stage, which took place in 1996–1997, 50 university-educated women were interviewed. The research population, which was compiled by means of snowball sampling, consisted of women with a B.A. degree or higher or with a B.Ed. degree from a teachers college.

Despite the difference in the method of locating the interviewees (political activity vs education), it should be noted that among the political activists, too, most of the women had at least a high-school education, while those with an academic education were more highly represented. From this point of view, the sample does not represent the population as a whole and is selectively biased toward an elite group. The women came from different geographical regions in Israel and from both urban and rural locales. They varied in terms of their religious affiliation, age, marital status and field of education. The intention was to arrive at a broad cross-section of women, the common denominator being their participation in one of the two social settings mentioned above.

Half the interviews were conducted in Hebrew by a Jewish interviewer,

representing an 'outsider' and half in Arabic, by a Palestinian interviewer — an 'insider'. All the interviewees spoke Hebrew and the decision about the language of the interview was made randomly. By interviewing in both languages, we sought to obtain a wide range of women's voices.

At the time the interviews were conducted, hopes for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority still ran high and Palestinian citizens of Israel saw this as an opportunity to challenge their own status as citizens of Israel and their place within their own communities (Herzog, 1999).

## Racism without Race

The marking of the women as 'Arabs' is the dominant experience that runs like a thread through all the interviews, as in the following statements: 'You have to remember that I am an Arab [*Araviya*, the feminine form] in whatever I do', 'Whenever there is a Jewish candidate and an Arab candidate, it is obvious that the Jew will get the job', 'There are some tracks that are not worth trying to enter, it's obvious that Arabs have no chance of advancing in them', 'When I go to a shopping mall I try not to speak Arabic, because if they hear Arabic they immediately do a strict examination and search', 'They didn't know I was an Arab until they asked for my army serial number [in a job application]'. 'Marking' — or 'profiling', the term that has become widely used since the events of 11 September 2001 — is at the heart of the racist experience. The 'Other' is perceived to possess essentialist, innate traits deriving from the fact that s/he belongs to an ethnic, national, cultural, or racial group. S/He is marked as threatening the social order, the dominant identity, and/or national security (see, e.g., Hassan, 2003).

The recurrent finding in all the interviews with the female Palestinian citizens of Israel was the fact that the word 'racism' was rarely used. The subject was always referred to indirectly, in phrases such as 'this behaviour', 'this country', 'in this situation' and the like. Only 18 of the 108 interviewees used the term 'racism', divided equally between interviews conducted by the Palestinian interviewer and the Jewish interviewer. In all nine cases in which the term was mentioned by women interviewed by the Jewish interviewer, it was used to describe the attitude of the Jewish population toward the Palestinian population. In five of the nine cases in which the term 'racism' was mentioned in interviews conducted by the Palestinian interviewer, it was used to describe the relations between Druze, Muslims, Christians and Bedouin.[5] In only four of the latter cases was the term 'racism' invoked to describe the attitude of Jews toward Palestinian-Arabs. As mentioned, the present study did not set out to examine the question of racism, but it bears noting that Essed (1991), who specifically examined racist experience and knowledge, also found a tendency to avoid direct usage of the terms 'racism' or 'discrimination', especially among black women who did not give serious thought to the question of racism (Essed, 1991, pp. 77–79). In the Israeli case, even women with highly developed political awareness, such as the peace activists, re-frained from explicit use of the term 'racism'. This phenomenon reflects the absence of legitimacy for the term in the dominant discourse in Israel and a

strong tendency to construct the discourse about the relations between Jews and Palestinian-Arabs in national rather than civil terms.[6] Moreover, it indicates how the dominated women adopt and thus reproduce the language of the dominant group as well as dominant knowledge.

Despite the avoidance of the explicit term — racism — all the interviews contained extensive descriptions of experiences of discrimination, exclusion, abnegation, insulting behaviour and oppression as part of the women's everyday experience. Indeed, many of them said that the experience had only become more pronounced over the years. In the words of a veteran schoolteacher:

> Often the principal would make a mistake or say something offensive, such as you're like an Arab jackass … Arab work [i.e., defective work] … piece of Arab… He didn't notice that I was there and then he would apologise immediately. Nowadays it's not like that anymore. Today they tell you Arab jackass to your face … and if you don't like it … then … [you can leave].

The everyday experience reported by the Palestinian women includes various aspects of the characteristics of racism in different contexts and at different levels of intensity.

> I entered the classroom for the lecture and I couldn't understand what they were talking about [because it was in Hebrew], and on top of that I didn't dare say what I thought, especially since it was a course on Marxism, Leninism, socialism and so forth. So there I was, coming from an experience of oppression … as though I was standing there with a sign on my forehead — oppression — and not daring to say a word.

The descriptions given by the women who used the term racism and those who chose other terms were not substantively different. The experiences that were most widely reported included: prejudice, segregation, and discrimination in housing, hiring, and job promotion. Also reported was lack of respect for Arab culture, which was belittled and/or ignored. These descriptions reinforce our decision to adopt the term 'everyday racialised reality' as the point of departure for this article.

These everyday experiences of racism are rooted in the gendered structure of the entire Israeli society and more especially in that of the Palestinian-Arab community in Israel. Despite the many changes this community has undergone, a patriarchal structure — the authority exercised by the male over the female and her obligations toward him — continues to be a central component of Arab culture overall and in Israel in particular (Abu Baker, 1998; Afshar, 1993). Considerable discussion was devoted to this gendered structure in the women's everyday life. Using colourful language, one of the interviewees described the encounter with the constraints of the gendered, racialised structure:

> The Jews for the most part think I'm like this and like that because they succeeded in running me through the Israelisation line, but it's not like

that. What happened is actually that they … the State of Israel … placed me in a given situation like this … and on the other hand my family in the village, as a family that wants to prove itself [its authority] placed me in a given situation like that … [Laughing] … What a situation! The truth is … [Laughing] … it's a pressure cooker. And look at the creature that emerged from the pressure cooker … [Laughing] … Rolled vine leaves with turkey meat … [Laughing].

We turn now to analyse the way women reported their racialised-gendered experience and to describe their methods for coping with these experiences. The discussion that follows is based on experiences that are located in different social situations (e.g., place of residence, workplace), though in practice the different experiences are interconnected and there are no hard and fast boundaries between them. Thus, for example, segregation in place of residence is not divorced from discrimination and restrictions in the workplace. It bears repeating that the term 'experience' does not refer solely to the subjective-emotional dimension but to the manner in which the social structure is incorporated into the women's life experience.

## Racialised and Gendered Sites of Encounter

The geographical and social segregation that exists between Palestinian-Arabs and Jews leaves limited space for encounters and direct contact between the groups. One important site for such encounters is the university (Kaplan *et al.*, 2001; Al-Haj, 1995). Seemingly, the campus should make possible an equal encounter between young people who have entered the institution of higher learning on the basis of scholastic achievement. For many Palestinian young people, this is the first unmediated encounter with the Jewish society: all these institutions are located in Jewish communities. Another site is the labour market, which women experience for the first time during their studies and afterward as professionals and as working women. Even though these sites are ostensibly founded on meritocratic and universal principles, the everyday texture with which the Palestinian-Arab women have to cope is gendered and racialised.

### *Residence during University Studies*

In many cases studies at a university or other post-high-school institution of learning means leaving home. This is a generalisation that fits many young people around the world. In many universities residence in the student dormitories is a popular choice and in some cases it is mandatory in the first year. This arrangement is based on the assumption that the students are 18-year-olds whose first independent foray this is.[7]

In the Palestinian communities in Israel the decision in favour of women's studies at institutions of higher learning is rooted in the gendered structure of the society. This met with resistance in the past, but it has diminished over the years and in some groups there is a strong tendency in favour of women

pursuing their studies after high school. This is attested to by the significant increase in the proportion of Palestinian women attending such institutions, which is approaching the proportion of Palestinian males with post-high-school education (Herzog and Badar-Araf, 2000). At the same time, many parents want their daughters to choose nearby institutions so that they can return home every day. This arrangement is perceived as helping to preserve the social norms that prohibit free encounters between unmarried men and women, and it also meets the needs of young women who are leaving home for the first time. Many of the interviewees noted that their parents preferred that they attend the University of Haifa, which is close to concentrations of Arab communities in Galilee, or general and teachers colleges close to their homes. In some cases, if the parents were disinclined to let their daughter study, a compromise was reached in which the young woman attended an academic institution close to her town or village.

Dormitory residence is considered a solution acceptable to the parents if the institution is far from home or if the young woman cannot get home every evening due to the exigencies of public transportation. The parents view the dorms as a protected space where the young women live together and are less exposed to encounters with men, still less with Jewish men. In the face of this restrictive gendered norm, many women see college or university as an opportunity to free themselves from close parental supervision and from the tight-knit community. Many students reported that their parents objected to their leaving home in order to study and made their agreement conditional on dormitory residence.

Indeed, in the first year of studies, dormitory residence is the most con-venient arrangement for the Palestinian women, too. Many of them are from small communities and for many this is also their first day-to-day contact with the Jewish society. In addition to the home-leaving experience, university or college studies entail language difficulties and an encounter with unfamiliar norms and cultural codes. Many of the interviewees described the experience as a 'culture shock'.

One of them, who chose to study at Tel-Hai Academic College, in Upper Galilee, explained:

At Tel-Hai you have the option of dorms … I perceived the [teachers] college more as a closed place, with boarding school conditions, like home, as though it was more protected and would protect me … It was my first time outside the house in the village … The girls got together and wanted to go in a group to the 'centre' [of the town of Kiryat Shemona, where the dorms are located]. I refused. I didn't want to take the chance of being seen by someone from the village, walking around the centre of town and they would then go and tell my parents that we saw your daughter walking around the centre of town at night … I studied there, at the college, but I don't know the area, it just never entered my mind at the time. I spent the two years going back and forth between classes and the dorms. Actually, you know, at first I would go back home … They would gather around and ask me how things were

in Kiryat Shemona, whether there are good stores, what the town looks like, whether it is beautiful, and so on … I received contradictory messages from my parents. If only it would end there, the business with the contradictions … My father is full of contradictions. Look, for example, he is one of the 'pioneers' who sent his daughters to study …

However, his daughter notes, he also placed her and her sisters under close supervision, forbidding them to leave the house and strictly upholding the normative boundaries of 'proper behaviour for girls'.

At the University of Haifa, which has the largest number of Arab students of all the country's universities, there are not enough dormitory places to meet the demand. Many residency applications are rejected on the grounds that the students live close to the university. However, even in cases where the village is relatively close to Haifa, public transportation is limited and problematic. For example, to get from a Galilee village that is less than an hour's drive from Haifa is a matter of three buses and takes two hours or more. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees accepted the family's authority and endured the tiring trips. Many women, though, cited this difficulty as a way to gain independence and justify residence away from home:

What's better, I asked my parents, for me to live there [in the Haifa University dorms] with Arab girls, or to come home every day and sometimes maybe arrive late and miss the bus and get to the village at night?! So he [her father] said he preferred that I live with the girls and not come home late at night.

The return of a young woman in the late evening is normatively unacceptable and according to many women, serves as a pretext for gossip, which is the most potent tool of social supervision in the Palestinian community.

As part of their everyday experience, the students coped with the gendered regime. This, though, was embedded in a racialised reality. 'The first year in the dorms', one interviewee related, was

Chaotic … noisy … I felt no rest or quiet there … A lot of girls coming and going all the time … One wants to have a cup of coffee with you … Another wants to tell you her troubles …

So she and her roommate, along with a third woman, decided to find an apartment to rent.

The truth is that looking for an apartment was the hard part, even harder than answering our parents' questions [about why they were leaving the dorms]. We saw 12 places. Sometimes, when they knew we were Arabs they refused to rent to us. It's impossible to hide the fact that I am an Arab … After all, in the end there is the stage when you have to sign a rental agreement, and you need an ID card.

She added:

I remember two cases, after we agreed that we would take the apartment, including all the details. When we came to sign the contract and

they saw that we are Arabs, they changed their mind and suddenly remembered. 'Sorry', they told us. 'We wanted to rent … Now we need the place' … After that we decided to introduce ourselves as Arabs from the outset. But after we found an apartment … relations with the neighbours were almost zero! Relations went no farther than 'good morning' at the most.

The experience of Palestinian women looking for apartments to rent is identical to Fanon's description of the local experience of blacks in a racialised society: there is no way to escape or to disavow your identity as an Other. Strategies of both denial and identity are traps in the dominant discourse, which defines the 'Arab' as Other.

Faced with the impossibility of denying the racialised marking, Palestinian students find various solutions. Their accounts of the ways in which they solved their housing problems reveal the different aspects of the discriminatory and exclusionary arrangements, as well as the modes with which they choose to define their identity in the face of this everyday experience.

The prevailing view among the female Palestinian students is that priority in the allocation of dormitory space goes to those who have done army service and to new immigrants — in other words, Jews. 'Army veterans' has long since become a code for preferential treatment to Jews.[8] As one of the interviewees said,

Preference is given in the dorms to new immigrants, who come from far-off places, [whereas] we are considered to come from an area close to Haifa …

After being rejected twice when she applied for dormitory accommodation, this student did not bother trying a third time. 'I spared myself the negative reply', she said, 'and looked for an apartment in an Arab neighbourhood in the city. I find it comfortable and good being among the Arabs in this neighbourhood'.

Another interviewee described the effort by the Arab Students Committee at the university to solve the housing problem. The committee converted a building in the largely Druze town of Isfiyah, near Haifa, into dormitories. One floor was allocated to men and one to women. One of the female students offered this description of her experience there:

Noise, no privacy, everyone with her own noise, opinions and behaviour, a very heterogeneous atmosphere and also very intolerant … We quarrelled over petty matters … There were power and water failures … In short, it was rough.

Even though Isfiyah is a five-minute drive from the university, there is no direct transportation between the two points. 'There are barely three buses a day that enter Isfiyah. We had to use taxi service, which is a big expense'. The majority of the students had limited economic resources, not least because of the difficulty in finding jobs. Social segregation and segregation in the labour market is thus compounded by a discriminatory policy in services such as public transportation.

The existence of a discriminatory structure is taken into account in advance when making decisions about where to reside. An interviewee whose religious piety is clearly symbolised by her style of dress,[9] who holds a B.A. and was completing her studies toward a teacher's certificate in special education, related that after three years — the maximum period allowed — in the dorms at the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, she moved to an Arab neighbourhood in East Jerusalem that is close to the university. Asked why she chose the all-Arab milieu rather than French Hill, a Jewish neighbourhood adjacent to the university which also has an Arab concentration, she explained: 'It's very expensive in French Hill … But even if I were able to find apartment mates … would I be accepted there? Especially given the way I dress?' Her signification as an 'outsider' referred in this case to the class aspect, too, but also to the attitude of both the Jewish and the Palestinian-Arab population.

Another interviewee, who also attended the Hebrew University, expressed an opposite viewpoint: 'I didn't want to live in an Arab neighbourhood. In fact, during the entire period of studies, until I returned to Acre, I lived in Jewish neighbourhoods'. That choice was congruent with her perception of her university years as an opportunity to get to know the 'other' world — the Jewish world. This approach, as can be gleaned from Bhabha's conception, bears the potential for resistance. The Jew who becomes the 'Other' is an object of desire (to be like him) but at the same time an object of knowledge (from whom one learns the norms and the culture). In the hands of the oppressed, such knowledge becomes a resource with which to challenge the dominant society, as is apparent from the remarks of an interviewee who attended a Jewish high school:

> By the time I came to the university I was ready to live with the Jewish people … I knew its language … Personally, I learned a few things from them that became part of my personality. To stand up for my opinions, to think independently, not to take everything for granted. I also got to know their way of thinking. How they think, how they take in things, how they sometimes distort things, or see only what they want to see, only their side. They don't imagine that the other side exists or what is happening to it. What I learned is that the most important thing is to be independent, to think independently …

Along with the detailed description of the class-based, gendered difficulties originating at home and the racialised difficulties on the outside, and without any connection to the type of solutions that were found, what stands out is the common feeling shared by most of the interviewees that the necessity of coping with the difficulties empowered and enriched them, and opened new personal and social horizons. The independence that many of the women emphasised makes it possible for them to move between worlds and to breach the rules of their immediate world, which would situate them in a binary, gendered, or cultural (national/racial) order. Their personal choices make possible new locations that challenge existing, heretofore taken-for-granted arrangements.

*Student Jobs*

Student jobs are usually non-professional in character. Because the main aim is to earn an income by working flexible hours, students are ready to take a wide variety of jobs that are temporary and 'status diminished'. Most of the interviewees held at least part-time jobs during their studies. Some did so because of dire economic necessity, while others sought independence from the family and wanted to test themselves and their capabilities, using the job as 'an opportunity to get to know and rub shoulders with the surrounding society'.

The decision about whether to work and what type of job to look for is not unrelated to the knowledge of the demands and restrictions imposed by the gendered and racialised regime borne by the women. For example, the student who attended Tel-Hai Academic College and resided in Kiryat Shemona was from an indigent family. She had to work in order to pay for her studies. Her testimony about job hunting reveals the range of jobs she thought would be available to her based on her familiarity with and/or imagining of the job market for Arab women: 'It was simply impossible to work in Kiryat Shemona … because there were no [textile] plants there and I didn't see any other opportunity …'. She relates here to structural constraints that defined her job opportunities. These constraints result from the relations between economic and political structure where the need to maintain a pool of cheap labourers prompts the racialisation of population and their placement in subordinate social categories, as Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) indicate. The textile industry in Israel is considered receptive to Arab women, who can also be supervised through 'middlemen' from their village. 'The idea of waitressing, for example, didn't enter my mind or even come close to it', the Tel-Hai student continued.

> It was simply beyond my thinking. Today it's different — places like youth hostels, motels, all the tourist sites and so on … provide employment opportunities and my friends work in them now …

Interviewees who resided in one of the big cities — Haifa, Tel Aviv or Jerusalem — reported a variety of jobs they found: cleaning houses, dishwashing, cashiers in supermarkets. Waitressing, which is the most popular job among female Jewish students, was not part of this array, being ruled out by normative prohibitions that are imposed on Arab-Palestinian women and by reservations about their employment in certain types of Jewish businesses because of their ethnic origins.

Some of the students did not tell their families about their jobs for fear that the type of work would not be accepted as appropriate for a woman and/or for the family's status and/or for national reasons. Thus, for example, Taghreed (not her real name), who is from a well-established family, tried to take as little money from her parents as she could, as a way of expressing her independence and therefore worked in a household. She said nothing about this at home, because, she notes, her father, who is the principal of an elementary school in a Galilee village,

> would not have believed or imagined or accepted … that his daughter would work at cleaning houses in order to get money. That his daughter

should enter homes of Arabs and Jews and be a 'cleaning lady'? … It would be as though he were depriving me of money, not giving me money to make ends meet and to study. He would have gone crazy at the thought.

The women's description of the employment restrictions they encountered is filled with criticism of the Jewish society and in many cases of their society as well. At the same time, their reports about their success in surviving despite the difficulties and on the personal empowerment they experienced through overcoming hardships were more voluminous both in their descriptions of student life and in response to a question about what they gained from their experience at university or college. The student who resided in Kiryat Shemona summed it up in the following words:

The main experience from Kiryat Shemona was in learning how to stand up to the society, including patterns of behaviour with men and in accepting that I lack economic capability, though I do have academic achievements. I received high grades, among the highest of the Arab students … I proved to myself and to my surroundings that I can get along without them … I am independent!

This woman continued her studies in Haifa, where she worked at the probation service

I think I matured there … We were two Arabs there. Myself and another guy and three Jews and there I learned about people, subjects, institutions that I never thought about and never encountered … Institutions such as the courts, the District Attorney's Office, the police. The nature of the work and its content helped me very much and contributed to [my development] … It was a pleasure for me to work and get to know these places and subjects … To stand before a judge, to render an opinion and so on … I received excellent grades … I was very serious … I approached the work with great love and responsibility. The very fact that we were a group of people there, including Jews — and I want you to know that I learned a lot from them … and good things, too, even though there are many things that I am careful not to learn from the Jews. They are very permissive and I am careful to draw the line …

The encounter and the confrontation with the Jewish society are translated into concepts of personal success accompanied by an independent attitude, which is demonstrated as well in their attitude toward their society. At the same time, though, they emphasise the need to preserve by choice the gendered culture of origin. These attitudes give rise to identities and practices that are not always logically consistent and frequently place the women in contradictory, conflict-ridden situations.

*Experiencing a Racialised and Gendered Labour Market*

The labour market in Israel is characterised by gendered and national segregation. Not even education is able to dismantle this structure. Studies show that the majority of Arabs in the academic and professional fields were employed in the Arab sector of the labour market and usually outside their places of residence (Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1993). Palestinian female academics, like their male counterparts, tend to work in the Arab sector, though this tendency is more pronounced among the women. Another characteristic is the low distribution of Arab women across the professional spectrum (Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1993) and in many cases in what are considered women's professions. Essed (1991, p 65) arrived at similar findings with regard to educated black women in the Netherlands and the United States.

Segregation is the principal experience undergone by women. A female teacher and storyteller for the early childhood age group who lives in Nazareth related: 'There are no friendships with Jews in my [personal] life or my [social] ties, not at work and not in my neighbourhood. It's all Arabs …'.

The view from the inside about the meaning of segregation is described by a female teacher at a school in a Druze village where there are 1,500 students and about 90 teachers, five of whom are Jews. The Jewish teachers, all of whom are female, teach sports and fashion, subjects which, according to the interviewee, 'do not require much knowledge of Arabic. And they teach in Hebrew …'. Crossing the geographic borders of work segregation is not accompanied by a crossing of social borders, as the teacher observes: 'The relations [of the Jewish teachers] with the [Palestinian-Arab] teachers are very limited. They keep to themselves'. At the same time, their presence often affirms the control of the dominant group,

> when there are staff meetings, or sometimes the principal has to speak Hebrew so they will understand. But when there are important matters, such as in connection with the Rabin assassination — in that instance the principal conducted the whole meeting in Hebrew and said everything he had to say in Hebrew, so they would understand.

In a divided labour market, educated women find themselves competing with educated men for the limited number of jobs available: 'There are not many options in our village' (see Al-Haj, 1995). The women's experience in the divided labour market is shaped on a national and gender basis alike. A 35-year-old interviewee with a degree in business administration — a field that is 'relatively new and in demand in Arab communities', she noted — said that this did not work to her advantage when she applied for a job at a business owned by Palestinian Arabs:

> The limitation was that I am a woman, that as a woman they didn't want me … The degree [I obtained] was a weapon, a breakthrough, progress in all spheres … But the owner [a Druze] said he very much wanted to employ someone with my specialisation but that it is very difficult for him to take me on because I am a woman …

She turned to the banking sector and works in a mixed Jewish-Arab city:

> I have been working here for 13 years now … In retrospect, I think that at certain junctures I was not promoted because I am an Arab. I have been in the same branch for 13 years without being promoted in any way — I am still a clerk — apart from the automatic promotion of salary level and tenure. I did not achieve any status despite the investment … Jewish women were promoted … There are no Arab men in high positions … There is only one Arab [male] who has a higher position … I can't say for sure what the bank's considerations were, but this is the situation as it exists …

This woman's place was influenced by the simultaneously gendered and racialised structure of the labour market.

In contrast to the bank employee who only in retrospect reflected on the discrimination she suffered in the labour market, Amal [not her real name], an attorney, said:

> When I started to work in a (Jewish) law firm … the first question I was asked by the firm's owner … even before he asked where I had studied, was, 'Are you Christian or Muslim?'! And why?! In my opinion, because the Jews are more open to the [Arab] Christians and trust them more than they do the Muslims … But I didn't let him ask too much and I don't let anyone play too much with this identity thing and put it into my head that I am different. I made it clear to him where the boundary is … Because they try to play on the chords of religious identity, which is actually a policy of divide and rule. I said to him … what does it matter, what's it to you?! The important thing is that I will work … I will work as needed …

However, Amal had to break down barriers within the gendered world as well:

> They take the view that a male attorney is better, that he can do things and accomplish things better, more successfully, more strongly. Actually, it starts differently. Males in this profession don't have to prove themselves with [legal] cases. I do have to prove myself and demonstrate my success. Let me give you an example … I once represented a woman who was separated from her husband and demanded child support for their daughter, who remained with her. The husband took a male attorney and I represented the woman … Afterward I heard that people said the woman's case was lost before it began, because she had taken a female attorney and would undoubtedly lose in court … I felt myself obliged to work intensively, to do a professional legal job, to prepare, do my homework, simply to work at the most professional level possible … And I surprised them all with this case …

Amal's comments also reflect the reproduction of the gendered world by the labour market of female attorneys:

> Many male attorneys rely on the fact that their female attorney/col-

league will in the end marry and will then lower her professional profile … and start dealing with home, children, and work … In practice there are many married couples, both of whom are lawyers. The two of them opened a law firm and at first worked together, but afterward it turned out that he was the successful and prominent one, while she was almost not in the picture, almost not in the picture … I tell you, it's depressing to see that happen and it's not because she is not as talented as he is…

In order to enter the world of the law, women often co-operate with its hierarchic and gendered attitude. 'I remember', Amal continued,

that when I completed my studies and wanted to article I looked around for places. I preferred to article with a male attorney … I was thinking about the reactions of the milieu and the clients, what they would say to me. 'What, you're working for a female attorney?' in a tone of disdain. Afterward I thought to myself how could I do that, because, after all, in a few years I will have a law office of my own, and people will say the same thing to those who are articling … disdainfully … But I was 22 then, now I am aware and I see the subject altogether differently…

In appraising their prospects in the labour market, the women's most frequent comments were: 'As an Arab I will never reach that status …'; 'My possibilities in the profession are so limited, and it's only because I am an Arab woman, not because I am worthless or that I don't deserve better professionally or in terms of seniority or the quality of my work, etc. …'; 'There are no horizons for advancement, there is a ceiling'. Such remarks are shot through with criticism and anger, accompanied by a resigned acceptance of a no-choice situation. At the same time, many women see their ability to cross borders and shatter stereotypes as a highly meaningful achievement. For example, the bank employee described her everyday on-the-job experience as follows:

Look, here and there, you have cases of people who are wide-eyed with surprise … What?? an Arab woman in our private banking department?? Etc. … But for the most part the clients appreciate me as a model worker in terms of knowledge and professionalism. We have both Arab and Jewish clients and I work with all them on a strictly professional basis. Look, at first there were some people who wanted to see my ID card, they didn't believe I was an Arab, not by appearance [she is blonde] and not by my accent. But today it's a lot easier. You can find Arabs in all the institutions. It's a lot more accepted.

In some cases, personal experience is examined *vis à vis* knowledge about racism and against the background of knowledge about the conceptions harboured by the Jewish society, including even their assimilation. Thus, one interviewee said of her experience in the labour market:

The truth is that for the entire period in which I worked I didn't encounter any such 'attacks' by Jews or racism on their part … I always

heard that we [the Arabs] are discriminated against in the coun-
try … Later I also started to read a lot of things and reports about the
state of education, welfare, the services in the Arab sector, and so
on … which actually show 'continuing discrimination' toward our sec-
tor. But I personally cannot say that I was discriminated against … The
only time I didn't get hired was by the Jewish Agency. The Employment
Bureau sent me to the Jewish Agency, and their personnel department
couldn't easily identify me as an Arab. They didn't really know I was an
Arab until near the end, when they asked for my army serial number.
And I tell you that the Jewish Agency was the first time I didn't get a
job I applied for. And you know what … I agree with their reasons.
Because it is a matter that concerns the Jewish sector and they don't
want any outsiders there. That's their right … In many cases and many
places there is a lot of clear, unvarnished discrimination. But personally,
I never tasted it first-hand …

Acceptance of exclusion and of failure to get promotion because of national
origins is seen also in the story of a social worker who described herself as a
'wild horse'. She described a protracted battle with her family for her right to
be independent, but when asked whether she had utilised her education for
professional advancement, she replied, 'I try … But there is a limit by virtue of
my definition as an Arab woman'. She said she has no chance of advancing in
her place of work, even though most of the people they deal with are Arabs.
'There has always been a Jewish woman in charge and not because she is better
than me professionally, but because she is a Jew'. Asked whether she didn't
apply for promotion in the internal tenders for job openings, she said plain-
tively, 'I am passive about that subject'. The interviewer said she was surprised
to hear this:

You, the militant woman who doesn't give in … who is not willing to
take things for granted. You get into fights with your family, your
surroundings, the *hamulas* [clans], the village … you are simply telling
me that you are passive?!

To which the reply was,

Yes, and I have no explanation for it … Apparently, all my craziness
about my rights and so on … was more at the personal level … That is,
more in the direction of my personal inner liberation, from my parents,
from the *hamula* … And I guess I gave up on the second message … and
was passive about being part of the minority … The truth is that my
whole assumption about tenders was that they wouldn't take me any-
way. So who needs the headache of submitting requests, documents,
interviews, etc. etc, expectations, disappointments … What do I need all
that for, if I know in advance that nothing will come of it … Because in
the end they don't want an Arab, they will take the Jew, even if she is
less talented than me …

Later in the interview, when the subject of national identity arose, she observed,

> I can't say that I am Palestinian. It's very hard for me. I'm afraid, I really feel castrated [sic] … In the political thing I feel castrated. I feel suppressed inside, I am suppressed in all this. My nationalism is suppressed.

She explained: 'If I say I am a Palestinian, then at home, in the village everyone is quick to correct me. They tell me we are not Palestinians, we are Arabs…'. The only setting in which she identifies herself as a Palestinian is in the peace organisations and the feminist groups where she is a member. Other women said that even though these organisations accept their definition as Palestinians, they don't always feel that they are treated as equals (Herzog, 1999).

The encounter with the Jewish society in the workplace generates simultaneous closeness and distance with regard to both the Jewish society and the Palestinian-Arab society. A nurse who has worked for many years in a hospital told of her good relations there and the success she enjoyed, which earned her much esteem and affection.

> I feel that it is easier for me even about very personal, intimate subjects, to talk about such matters precisely with my Jewish [female] friends and not with my Arab [female] friends. I feel so comfortable and enjoy myself so much with them … The result of life outside [i.e., in the Jewish workplace] is that I can't find myself either here or there and maybe that is one of the things that recently led me to study education, after many years of working in the hospital. I felt the need to make a contribution to my sector as my sector … And even if I had received all the promotion possible and achieved the greatest possible success professionally, it is definitely possible that at some stage or other, despite all the successes, I would have felt a certain attraction, or a desire to return to my roots, to my village, to my society, despite the alienation I feel [*vis à vis* my society] and the acute criticism I feel deep inside for everything that is happening in our society in fields such as our education, our development and so forth … But not for a moment do I think I would have chosen anything different for myself and even if I go back 60 incarnations, I would still choose the same people, the same village, the same family to belong to, despite the choices I have. This thing — belonging — resides so deep within my soul.

An interviewee who described herself as a feminist evaluated the encounter between Jews and Palestinian-Arabs in the labour market as empowering at both the personal and the national level:

> I think my independence was reinforced in Haifa. My Palestinian aspect was strengthened and sharpened precisely as a result of rubbing shoulders with the Other and with those who are different from me. It was strengthened as a result of my work here with the Association for Civil Rights, the work in women's organisations. I wasn't like that, I wasn't

> like that … Today I work in a totally Zionist institution, an institution of
> [the Movement for] Progressive Judaism and there I feel my Palestinian
> aspect, precisely because of those who are different, the Other.

Co-operation with the dominant society and perhaps even a resemblance to it
generate simultaneously attitudes of distance and closeness toward both the
Jewish society and the Palestinian-Arab society.

## In Praise of Confusion

The occupier, Bhabha (1994) observes, is in need of mimicry in order to
discipline the occupied, who internalise the value system that is necessary for
the civilising mission and for the maintenance of the occupation. At the same
time, however, mimicry is an ironic act that disturbs the unity of the whiteness
and undercuts the uniformity of the occupier. Bhabha reminds us that resist-
ance, all resistance, contains a seed of co-operation and that sometimes the
opposite is also true: every act of co-operation contains a seed of resistance.

Adopting Bhabha's approach, we can say that the manner in which women
function in gendered, racialised places of encounter sometimes reflects resist-
ance in the course of co-operation, though they also submit to the act of
exclusion and may be consenting partners to it. In some cases they even show
understanding for the discrimination that exists in the workplace (such as the
interviewee who justified the Jewish Agency's refusal to hire her, or the
acceptance of 'masculine' models of work by many women). They assimilate
the dominant Jewish culture in their modes of dress, style of speech and
unaccented pronunciation of Hebrew. They accept the 'Western' criteria for
success. Frequently they adopt a style of life that differs from the accepted
patterns in their society and perhaps also emulate dominant feminist be-
havioural models. However, from the ruler's perspective, Bhabha says, every
act performed by the ruled Other will always be similar yet also different. It is
precisely this simultaneous existence that is threatening. The ruler cannot
eliminate the distance between the mimicry and the source, cannot or does not
want to transform the 'Other' — the Arab — into 'one of us'. Nor does the ruler
want to accept the variations that the female 'Others' — the Palestinian-Arab
women — offer, because the Jews have a claim to exclusivity.

The claim to exclusivity and the unwillingness to accept the 'mimicry' was
reiterated in the women's descriptions of how the Jewish society has reacted to
them.

> Jews asked me more than once how my family let me work in this kind
> of thing, how they allow me to leave home and live somewhere
> else … 'You must be a Christian' … After getting to know each other
> and talking and explaining the situation, etc, the image starts to take on
> different 'colours'. Or maybe it only seems that way. I knew Jews who
> said the same things to me again even after I explained matters. They
> ran into my girlfriends and said the same things to them. As if they
> simply don't believe what they are hearing … Or they are just stuck with
> an 'image' and with stereotypes that they don't want to spoil …

An interviewee who graduated from the Technion [the Haifa-based Israel Institute of Technology] described her admission interview to the institution:

> One of the teachers told me explicitly that they were very confused and couldn't come to a decision, because I am both a woman and an Arab … An Arab male can somehow be tolerated … But a woman would be a first-time experience … One has to cope … After you do it, you receive encouragement … But the approach is: Why should it be an Arab woman? As though that's forbidden … As though it would shatter conventions …

By speaking in these terms, the representatives of the dominant male Jewish society — in this case, the Technion faculty — become the guardians of the boundaries of their own society, reproducing a universe of images relating to gender and cultural (racial) differences. The presence of these women in places 'where they don't belong' 'confuses' them and upsets their orderly binary world view.

From the point of view of the dominated Other, mimicry is a form of assimilation and self-abnegation, though never total. It contains a threat to the dominant and hence always bears the potential for subversion or resistance. By making their presence felt in the labour market and in peace organisations, by adopting the criteria for success and by competing on the basis of those criteria, by adopting certain patterns of behaviour, dress and speech and by their sheer assertiveness, the Palestinian-Arab women are carrying out a political act involving the blurring and challenging of the conceptions held by the dominant Jewish male society, even if their actions do not constitute a frontal struggle and/or political declarations. They forge an 'ambivalent third' space, providing in Bhabha's terms 'a place to speak both *of*, and *as,* the minority, the exilic, the marginal and the emergent' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 149).

The Jew's refusal to recognise the resemblance of the Other to him recurred in many interviews. Such resemblance is perceived as a threat. A social worker explained how her education became a tool that made her similar to the Jewish society. This would seem to represent a success of the 'civilising' act, yet it is also a changeover that the dominant society refuses to accept:

> They [the Jews] always have their 'corner' that says: You couldn't possibly be an Arab, or you must be a Christian and not a Muslim … As though if you are Muslim you have to put on the veil and stay in the house … It happens nearly everywhere. The Jew can know or encounter an Arab woman on any sort of occasion and he will always be surprised and raise an eyebrow if she spoils what he has in his head about Arabs …

This comment exposes Israel's policy of stigmatisation, which distinguishes between different religious groups among the Palestinian Arabs, yet at the same time challenges it by alluding to a discourse of egalitarianism that exists among the Palestinians in Israel (Kanaaneh, 2002, pp. 142–44).

A woman who is the chief nurse in a hospital related:

> Once I took a course in intensive care treatment in Tel Aviv. There was
> one really disturbing bit … a reaction like … Oy … you absolutely don't
> look it!! One time I went to a kiosk and the guy asked me about my
> [ethnic] origins. I told him: *Nu* … guess … So he started: Moroccan,
> Iraqi, Yemenite … Finally, he said, *Nu* … so where are you
> from? … Then he said … Wow, you don't look it! You absolutely don't
> look it!! I said … You're right, you can't see it, maybe because I took off
> my horns at home, before I went out and this whole thing of being in
> Tel Aviv … It's exactly those kinds of comments that really make me
> angry … I say to them: You know, you're really living in the Middle
> Ages, the Arab society, our society, is not what it used to be, I think a
> tremendous amount has changed since then and in a lot of ways … I
> don't have this problem in Nahariya, because there is more ongoing
> contact with Arabs there … They see the Arabs and know them better,
> in the Mashbir [department store], on the sidewalk, by the fountain, in
> the grocery store, etc. … in the hospital, the café … It doesn't come as a
> surprise that there are [Arab] nurses who work in the hospital.

In this story the self-abnegation *vis à vis* the dominant society is pronounced
('we have changed a great deal'), yet it is also an ironic presentation of the
Jewish speaker ('I left my horns at home').

The act of resemblance is interpreted also as a gain and contribution to the
collectivity:

> My education is channelled into my society … What I gain from being
> educated is actually also the gain of my society. And I have also
> encountered this in the reaction of the Jews around who generally took
> an interest with their surprised style … Wow … How come you, an Arab
> girl, are wearing shorts, smoking, Wow! Are there a lot of girls like you,
> who want to study? These stereotypes of backwardness and retar-
> dation … The course was with room and board. An [Education Ministry]
> supervisor gave the course. He was so surprised and started asking all
> kinds of questions … How is it that I came to the course alone … [in
> other words, that I left home …] Are you allowed to do that? I said to
> him … What are you talking about? I felt that he had really hurt me, a
> personal hurt … Why was he even asking … That approach really riled
> me… And I answered in kind…

A political activist who lives in Haifa maintains an egalitarian way of life
with her partner and is active in joint Jewish-Arab feminist groups, shed light
on the simultaneous resemblance and distancing when she talked about her
identity as a political act of separatism and border-marking:

> My Palestinian identity works overtime at Palestinising … But today,
> like it or not, I am in the Israeli society and I have no doubt that I took
> and absorbed things from it … My life experience is partly Israeli … We
> went through a stage in which the feeling was that if we wanted to be
> all right we had to imitate and resemble the majority. On the other hand,
> we insisted on emphasising that we are not Israeli … I try very hard to

preserve what is known as Palestinian roots, a Palestinian identity, in the ordinary, everyday things at home, but there is no doubt … perhaps for the [Jewish] Israelis … I am an Israeli … and they often ask me … how I am actually different from them. In the fact that I speak Arabic?! But I make sure … and I say … I am not assimilating … I ate, studied, slept, fraternised with them I work and half my ties are with them, but I make sure … not to lose what I have … And I would very much like to overturn this stereotype that many Israelis have, that we female Palestinian academics are actually the icing on the cake …

This example, like many others, shows that resistance and co-operation are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they can spring from each other and nourish each other (Hever, 1994, p. 143). 'Confusion' is also the lot of the Arab-Palestinian women in talking about themselves. As one of the interviewees said, 'I am always jumping between the worlds'.

## Contradictory Identity Location — Conclusion

Paraphrasing Olin Wright's (1978) famous terms and analysis of contradictory class location, my study analyses the contradictory identity location of Palestinian women citizen of Israel.

Following feminists and post-colonial discourses I used the concept of 'everyday experience' as a tool to trace the social world of educated Palestinian women. The term refers to a complex experiential array these women experienced in their encounter in racialised and gendered social sites, as well as within the class, religious and ethnic contexts in the subordinated group and its relations with the Jewish dominant group. 'Experience' accordingly does not refer solely to the subjective-emotional dimension but to the manner in which the social structure is incorporated into the women's life experience.

The encounter with the Jewish society in the researched, gendered and racialised social sites generated simultaneous closeness and distance, co-operation and confrontation, resemblance and resentment towards both the Jewish society and the Palestinian-Arab society. Educated Palestinian women are located in a 'liminal' or 'interstitial' place, in Bhabha's terms, an in-between 'third place' between cultural, gender, class, national and racial structures that generates a continual ambivalence. Within this space women curve their ways, negotiating their own identity as well as challenging the dominant social definitions.

The encounter and the confrontation with the Jewish society are translated into concepts of personal success accompanied by an independent attitude expressed to both Jewish and Palestinian society. At the same time, though, it gives rise to national identification and even the need to preserve by choice the gendered culture of origin. These attitudes give rise to identities and practices that are not always logically consistent and frequently place the women in contradictory, conflict-ridden situations.

Elsewhere, I noted the multidimensionality of the identities of the peace activists in this sample, which reflect complex identities as Palestinians *vis à vis*

the Palestinian society in the occupied territories, as Palestinian Arabs in their own community, as women in a gendered society, as Israeli citizens, as feminists and so forth (Herzog, 1999). The different identities do not necessarily coalesce into one logical unity. They generate complex discourses, some of which are mutually supportive while others exist in a state of tension and conflict.

The 'confusion', to use the interviewees' words, is a product of crossing boundaries but at the same time reconstructing them. The blurring of the boundaries, like the attempt to preserve them, exists in the sites of encounter between the women and the dominant society. Shedding light on these sites from the women's point of view — the vantage point from which I and they sought to cast light on the dominant order — shows oppression to be omni-present. However, as Bhabha argues, nor can 'coloniser' and 'colonised' be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently. Not only are Palestinian women confused — they also confused their counter-partners as they meet on the borderlines. The ambivalent attitudes that were exposed by the women's experience — even though in many cases there is no declared political act — expose the option that exists to shed categorising markers. The omnipresent existence of the gendered, racialised regime of knowledge makes every place a potential site of subversion and resistance. Including the encounter between the researcher and researched. As one of the women who was interviewed by the Palestinian interviewer challenged us, the researchers, by saying:

> If I as an Arab woman do an MA and succeed in work, etc. … I become the subject of a study … In fact, what[ever] I do becomes a subject for anthropological research …

Do I have the right to study and 'speak for' the Palestinian women subalterns, to use Spivak's (1985) terms? This epistemological question is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I hope that by revealing the heterogeneity of women's experiences and the various modes of interim spaces and multi-dimensional, shifting identities they create for themselves, I at least tried to follow Spivak's demand to avoid an ethnocentric extension of Western logos that totalise and essentialise the Other.

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## Notes

1.  For years, Israel's Palestinian citizens were referred to as 'Israeli Arabs', a term that ignores their national identity and their affinity to the territory on which the Israeli state was established. Indeed, this terminology is still widely used by the public and in academic writings. Any decision about which term to use entails taking a stand in the politics of representation (see Rabinowitz, 1993; Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2002). Since many of the interviewees used the term 'Arabs', I decided to employ the dual terminology: Palestinian Arabs.

2.  Despite its importance, the connection between racism and nationalism is a subject that lies beyond the goal of the present article.

3.  Hierarchical presuppositions of this kind are found also in classifications of modernity-traditionalism, women-men, private-public, secularism-religion, nature-culture, particularism-universalism, and so on.

4.  Even though the subject of identity construction is integral to this theoretical approach, it will not be considered in this article. I have addressed these questions elsewhere (Herzog, 1999).

5.  The relations between the groups that comprise the Palestinian-Arab minority deserve to be considered separately but are beyond the scope of the present study.

6.  In the past few years numerous attempts have been made to construct the Jewish and Palestinian-Arab public discourse in civil terms that include the Palestinian-Arab population. In connection with the women, see Herzog, 1999.

7.  This applies equally to Jewish religious women, who do not serve in the army and therefore can begin their studies immediately after high school and whose norms also place restrictions on free encounters with men. Among Jewish male students, the dorms are perceived mainly as an economic solution, as they are relatively cheap and are usually close to the campus. Because of the limited number of places available in the dorms, the universities' policy is to prefer members of weak population groups and/or students from the periphery. Most of the Jewish students who enter university have done at least two years of military service (in the case of non-religious women) or three years (in the case of men). They have greater experience in living away from home and are older than students elsewhere and also in comparison to Palestinian-Arab students and Jewish religious women who are eligible for exemption from army service. The result is that the majority of the Jewish students do not reside in the dorms.

8.  The interviewees noted that the preferential treatment applied to the Druze community as well, but only to the males, as Druze women do not serve in the army.

9.  She wears a galabia, a long dress that extends to shoe level and has long

sleeves (though she wears trousers under the dress) and her head is covered by a kerchief in the style common among religious Muslim women.

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