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"This is not Europe": Sexuality, ethnicity and the (re)enactment of Israeli authenticity

Erez Levon [a,*], Roey Gafter [b]

[a] Department of Linguistics, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS, UK
[b] Department of Hebrew Language, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

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ABSTRACT

The dominant narrative of Israeli nationalism is based on a foundational tension. On one hand, Zionism was motivated by a desire to create a new category of Jewish personhood that would be distinct from its European counterpart. Yet, on the other hand, normative Israeli identity has never been conceptualised as a fully "Middle Eastern" category. Rather, cultural and historical links to Europe have been strategically deployed to sustain and legitimate pervasive systems of social stratification and marginalisation that exist both within Jewish Israeli communities as well as between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. In this paper, we describe how Arisa, a queer Israeli music group, critiques this dominant Eurocentric imagining of Israeli identity. Drawing on developments in the study of mediatised performance, we examine a promotional music video that Arisa released in 2014. We illustrate how in the video Arisa parodies normative conceptualisations of Israeli authenticity and the gendered, sexual and ethnic stereotypes that undergird them. At the same time, we demonstrate how Arisa's critique functions by reinscribing tropes of (Jewish) Israeli exceptionalism, thus feeding into dominant discourses of Israeli homonationalism. In the paper, we discuss the complex intersections between these two aspects of Arisa's performance as they relate to the politics of mediatised performance more generally.

1. Introduction

It is widely known that nationalism is inextricably linked to the media. As Anderson (2006 [1983]: 36–7) famously puts it,

> the development of print-as-commodity is the key to the generation of wholly new ideas of *simultaneity* . . . which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways' (emphasis added).

For Anderson, the advent of print capitalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had the effect of codifying certain languages (or varieties of language) as a shared medium of communication within a defined social, economic and geographical marketplace. This codification, and the ideologies that sustained it, in turn generated a sense of togetherness and simultaneity among those who consumed print media products. In this way, a merchant in colonial Boston reading a newspaper could imagine a shared sense of belonging and a set of shared social practices and moral values – what Silverstein (2000:115) describes as a "'we"-ness' – with another merchant reading the same newspaper in colonial Trenton. Anderson argues that this belief in a shared set of communal norms is what gave rise to modern nationalist consciousness, or a sense of belonging to a distinct social, political and spatiotemporal unit.

While Anderson's framework has been highly influential in the study of nations and nationalism, it has also been subject to wide-ranging critique, not least from scholars of language. Gal and Irvine (1995), for example, note that Anderson assumes linguistic homogeneity within national communities, thereby ignoring the important patterns of cultural and political differentiation among linguistic varieties that exist in any national polity. While it is certainly the case that the sort of print capitalism Anderson describes tended to make use of a single and homogenous style of language, Gal and Irvine point out that this homogeneity was a material artefact of larger ideological forces, and not a reflection of lived linguistic reality. Similarly, Silverstein (2000:119) describes how, in Anderson's view, the national citizen is one who imagines that he inhabits a position of "objectivity from anywhere within the confines of the group who share [his] chronotope" (our use of masculine pronouns is intentional). What Silverstein is highlighting

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: e.levon@qmul.ac.uk (E. Levon).

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here is the extent to which Anderson's theory assumes that all members of the national "imagined community" have equal access to the meanings commodified in the print media, and equal authority to have their perspectives represented. Both Gal and Irvine (1995) and Silverstein (2000) thus argue that Anderson's framework ignores the intricate workings of ideology and power entailed in the formation of nationalist consciousness – that is, the processes of standardisation and erasure that are inevitably involved in selecting a form of language to represent the nation (see also Wogan, 2001 for a more detailed argument along similar lines). While Anderson acknowledges that modern nationalist consciousness was created in a way that serves the interests of a particular sociopolitical group (i.e., the bourgeoisie), he neglects to engage with the crucial role of language in this process. Instead, Anderson views the language of the media as both neutral and natural, rather than attending to the ideological forces that undergird it.

These critiques should not be taken to indicate that Anderson's theory is without merit. His general framework for conceptualising national consciousness as an imagined sense of simultaneity and belonging within a shared political chronotope has been absolutely central to research on nations and nationalism over the past thirty years, and has enabled an exploration of the different social and historical processes through which different conceptualisations of nations are produced. Yet what is missing from Anderson's theory is a more nuanced understanding of how language – and in particular mediated language – participates in the process. This is an issue that sociolinguists have been addressing for over thirty years, documenting the ways in which ideologies of language are inextricably linked to ideologies of the nation, and how language ideologies work to articulate and legitimise a particular understanding of the nation as a discursive space in which certain actors and values are rendered dominant while others are rendered marginal (e.g., Woolard, 1989; Blommaert and Verschueren, 1992; Irvine and Gal, 2000; Blackledge, 2006, Patrick, 2010, among many others). In this article, we extend previous work in this area by framing our analysis in terms of a more nuanced understanding of dominance and marginalisation. Rather than assuming a binary distinction between the two, we draw on developments in intersectionality theory (e.g., Hutchinson, 2001; Mutua, 2012, 2013; Cho, 2013) that allow us to attend to the ways in which privilege and oppression intersect in the creation of complex, multidimensional social positions that resist easy classification as either "dominant" or "dominated". We demonstrate that when individuals who inhabit these positions challenge prevailing national discourses – and, in so doing, attempt to shift the way that nationalist consciousness is defined – the result can serve to reinscribe certain marginalising nationalist tropes at the same time as it destabilises others. In this way, our analysis contributes an intersectional perspective to the question of whose interests are served by different imaginings of the nation, pinpointing the simultaneous presence of both empowerment and subordination in all discursive reproductions of the nation and its boundaries (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2011).

We illustrate our arguments through a detailed analysis of a music video created by Arisa, a queer Jewish-Israeli music group that organises regular club parties in Israel. Specifically, we analyse the video through the prism of Agha's (2011b:163) theory of *mediatisation*, or the 'institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication with processes of commoditisation'. In the case of nationalism, what is being commoditised is an Andersonian sense of political belonging and participation – a sociopolitical positioning that construes some people as members of the nation and others as not. To talk about the mediatisation of the nation, then, is to talk about those institutional practices that promote the belief that being a member of a national polity is a commodified object, itself linked to particular ways of speaking and behaving (i.e., processes of communication). Drawing further on Agha (2011a:23–24), we can in turn understand commodity formation as a process that 'typifies products as social indexicals of uses and users . . . [such that] commodity diacritics (perceived as things, or performed as activities) are treated as *stereotypical indexicals* of role and relationship by persons linked to each other through them' (emphasis added). In other words, commodity formation describes the process through which certain objects and ways of being come to index larger social formations and divisions, like a national boundary. Putting everything together, viewing the nation-as-commodity via Agha's semiotic framework allows us to trace how specific practices (i.e., "commodity diacritics") come to be construed as stereotypical of national belonging, such that engaging in these practices (or not) defines whether one is part of the imagined national community. In our analysis, we use Agha's theory as a means to investigate how Arisa works to promote a different commodity schema (i.e., a different imagining of the nation) and the attendant relations of dominance and subordination such a process creates.

2. Israeli nationalism

Before turning to our treatment of Arisa, it is necessary to first briefly outline the main contours of Israeli nationalism and the ideologies that have historically sustained it. The history of modern Jewish settlement in Palestine (and, later, the State of Israel) is a long and contentious one, and we do not have the space to go into detail here (for reviews, see Kimmerling, 2001; Shafir and Peled, 2002). Nevertheless, certain key points are crucial for the analysis that follows.

The origin of the modern Jewish settlement project dates to the late-nineteenth century, when a group of Eastern European Jewish intellectuals began to think through ways to deal with what they described as "the Jewish Problem", or the persecution and marginalisation of Jews in Europe. Organised in groups such as the World Zionist Organization, these early Zionist thinkers promoted the idea that Jews in Europe were *luftmenschen* ('people of the air') whose persecution derived, in part, from their separation from an imagined mythical homeland (Biale, 1997). According to these Zionists, deracination is what had caused Jews in Europe to become "weak" and "degenerate", and ultimately complicit in their own subjugation. To overcome this, theorists like Max Nordau (1892 [1993]) argued for the need to develop what he called a "Judaism with muscles" – a New Jew that would embody the traits of youth, independence and physical prowess that Zionism sought to create (Biale, 1997; Almog, 2000). A powerful ideological opposition was therefore established between Jews in Palestine (and later Israel) and Jewish life in the Diaspora, which came to be seen as characterised by physical and moral degeneration. This opposition gave rise to one of the central pillars of Israeli nationalism upon the establishment of the state: *kibbutz galuyot* ('ingathering of exiles') through which Israel was imagined as the only true home for Jews and the end of the Diaspora was proclaimed (Peled, 1992; Shafir and Peled, 2002).

Yet at the same time, there was an equally powerful desire among early Zionists to distinguish the "new Jews" from the Palestinians they displaced and their other Arab neighbours (Almog, 2000; Ben-Rafael, 2013). In this sense, the category of Israeli was never conceived of a fully Middle Eastern one, and connections to Europe and the wider world were often strategically deployed in order to set Israelis apart from their surroundings. For example, many advertisements from the period depict the land of Palestine as barren and uncultivated prior to the arrival of European Jews. These types of advertisements served to promote the message that the Jewish population of Israel/Palestine – by virtue of its

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connections to Europe – possessed a worldly sophistication and skill that the region's Arab inhabitants lacked (Said, 1985). There thus existed a foundational tension in early Zionism between a desire to not be seen as European and be implanted in the Middle East, while at the same time not being seen as Middle Eastern and being connected to Europe.

This tension became heightened with the massive waves of Jewish immigration from neighbouring Arab countries that began in the 1950s. The initial waves of Zionist immigration from the 1890s–1940s were comprised virtually exclusively of Jews from Eastern Europe, known in Israel as *Ashkenazi* Jews. The newer immigrants who began arriving in the 1950s, however, were *Mizrahi* Jews, a term that literally translates as 'Eastern' or 'Oriental' and is used in Israel to denote Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent. By 1961, 44% of the Israeli population was Mizrahi (Goldscheider, 2001) and within twenty years their numbers grew to be larger than that of the Ashkenazi population (Yaeger-Dror, 1988). While the arrival of large Mizrahi populations certainly changed the overall demographic character of the Jewish Israeli state, the political, cultural and economic elite remained thoroughly Ashkenazi. Upon their arrival in Israel, Mizrahi migrants were initially hired for mostly low-income jobs, and over the next few decades inequality in earnings and education between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi communities quickly became a fact (Swirski, 1989, 1990). Mizrahi communities were also spatially marginalised, with arriving migrants settled in "development towns" in the periphery of major urban areas, thus reducing their easy access to various forms of employment, education and, hence, social mobility (Yiftachel, 1998; Tzfadia and Yacobi, 2011), and encouraging the development of a distinct sense of Israeli identity. As these examples show, Mizrahi Jewish migrants to Israel were "systematically discriminated against by a Zionism which deployed its energies and material resources, differentially, to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent detriment of Oriental Jews" (Shohat, 1988:1).

Though they manifest themselves in different ways, these same issues and tensions animate the ideological landscape of Israeli nationalism today. The Israeli government is heavily invested in distinguishing itself from the Jewish "diaspora" by promoting the belief that Israel is the "authentic" home of the world's Jews. This is evident in the government's support of programmes such as Taglit-Birthright, an experiential education programme that provides North American Jews with free 10-day educational trips to Israel (Sasson et al., 2011, 2014). It is also evident in comments such as those made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who, following reports of a rise in anti-Semitic activity in Europe in 2015, sent an open message to European Jews that 'Israel is your home and that of every Jew. Israel is waiting for you with open arms' (Beaumont, 2015). At the same time, Israel continues to resist viewing itself as anchored in the Middle East, preferring instead a vision of Israel as 'a Western European island in the midst of Oriental geography and demography' (Shohat, 1989). Israel's self-perception as a European exclave of sorts is reinforced not only by ideology, but also by Israel's inclusion in "Europe" by some international organisations – for example, Israel competes in the European football league and in the Eurovision song contest, patterns of inclusion that were originally motivated by seemingly practical concerns but that have since been folded into the broader discourse of the nation. Thus, while there is obviously no confusion about where Israel is located geographically, the question of whether Israel is more European or Middle Eastern is still a salient issue in Israeli society.

This ideological differentiation from the Middle East helps to sustain the ongoing repression of Palestinians and the dominant trope that "there is no partner for peace", effectively claiming a moral superiority for Israel and Israelis (Ben-Eliezer, 2012). It also underlies discourses of Israeli homonationalism (Puar, 2007, 2011; Milani and Levon, 2016), which work by recruiting the image of Israel as tolerant and inclusive of lesbians and gays into dominant conceptualisations of the nation such that the "discourse of tolerance" becomes a new technology of exclusion for other groups or populations (e.g., Palestinians) who are purportedly less "tolerant" of sexual diversity than Israel is. Finally, despite the persistence of severe structural inequalities between Israel's Ashkenazi and Mizrahi populations (Dahan et al., 2003; Smooha, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007), the figure of the Mizrahi in the past ten to twenty years has become somewhat "hip" and "trendy", with certain Mizrahi cultural products like food and music taken to index "Israeliness" more generally. This has led some scholars to argue that Mizrahi is no longer a marked position in the Israeli national imaginary, and that many young Israelis see the unmarked Israeli as an amalgamation of both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi identity (Almog, 2004).

While Israel's relative acceptance of gays and lesbians is recruited in Israel's self-distancing from Middle Easternness, the power imbalance between Ashkenazis and Mizrahis is reproduced within Israel's LGBT community. As gay rights are often seen as a Western ideal, Mizrahi voices within the community are often erased (Gross et al., 2016). It is within this ideological context that Arisa creates their music videos, and the political messages we argue are contained therein. Arisa is as a group that organises specifically Mizrahi-themed gay parties. As such, it is a rare voice that distinguishes itself from most "mainstream" LGBT venues in its warm embrace of Mizrahi music and culture, and is thus known for its more subversive positioning. We turn in the next section to an analysis of Arisa's political subversion as it appears in one of their most popular music videos.

3. "This is not Europe

The Arisa video we analyse is for a song entitled *Po Ze Lo Eropa* (Heb. 'This is Not Europe'), and was released in April 2014 to promote a party at a Tel Aviv nightclub in celebration of Arisa's fourth anniversary. Arisa regularly produces video to advertise upcoming parties and performances. These videos are released on YouTube and other online venues, where they reach a viewing public that often numbers in the dozens of thousands (as of April 2018, the official YouTube post for "This is Not Europe" has been viewed over 1.4 million times). Like for all their videos, the soundtrack for *Po Ze Lo Eropa* is sung by a famous Mizrahi singer – in this case, Margalit Tzanani – with the words lip synched in the video by the then Arisa "front man" Uriel Yekutiel. Structurally, the video is divided into a brief (instrumental) prologue, following by a verse, a chorus, a musical interlude, a bridge and a coda. We provide a close semiotic analysis of each of these sections of the video in turn.

3.1. Prologue

Though brief, the video's prologue does a great deal of indexical positioning of different relevant places and social contrasts. The video begins with Uriel riding an old-fashioned carousel in the affluent "old port" area in northern Tel Aviv (see Fig. 1a). The carousel that is pictured dates from 1932, and is known as the "first Hebrew carousel". When it was built, the carousel was the first in the world to play music in Hebrew, and served as a symbol of the establishment of a new "Hebrew" homeland (cf., e.g., Kuzar, 2001). Today, the carousel is fitted with vintage advertisements from Israel/Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s and plays Hebrew-

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Fig. 1. Photo stills from the prologue, including (a) the "first Hebrew carousel"; (b-c) Uriel and others in southern Tel Aviv, and (d) the "studio space".

language music from that period. For an Israeli audience, the inclusion of the carousel at the start of Arisa's video acts a direct reference to Zionism and the ideology of "homecoming" that underpinned it. From the carousel, the video immediately cuts to images of Uriel in southern Tel Aviv – the city's more impoverished and racially and ethnically diverse area. We first see Uriel walking down a non-descript, though visibly "working-class", street wearing a long green velvet gown with white lace sleeves and matching ruff (see Fig. 1b–c). That we are in southern Tel Aviv is saliently cued by the relatively poor state of repair of the sidewalk and the façade of the building on the left, as well as by the group of men of African origin that can be seen coming in and out of the building. For the past 10 years, southern Tel Aviv has been the site of major racial tension between the long-standing (predominantly Mizrahi) population in the neighbourhood and refugees from central and east Africa who also currently reside in the area. In juxtaposing the wealthy northern port area where the carousel is located with the "gritty" diversity of southern Tel Aviv, Arisa draw a powerful symbolic distinction between the utopic comity of the Zionist imaginary and the real structural inequities that permeate Israeli society.

After a number of quick cuts between this northern "utopia" and southern "reality", the prologue ends with a close-up of a well-built, shirtless man wearing a white wig in what resembles a professional photography studio (see Fig. 1d). This "studio space" reappears throughout the video, functioning as a heterotopic "space apart" (Foucault, 1984 [1967]) where different fantasies of belonging are enacted and disrupted. The man in the wig is one such fantasy, bringing together a visibly Mizrahi and overtly sexualised male body with a stylised icon of European civilisation (the wig) to create a pastiche of the contradictions inherent in contemporary Israeli notions of identity. Ending with this ambivalent image, the prologue presents a range of notable social contrasts that are crucial for understanding the rest of the video: differences of social class, of race/ethnicity and of the real versus the imagined, all of them spatially linked to the geography of Tel Aviv.

3.2. Verse

The social contrasts alluded to by the images in the prologue are made more explicit by the verse that immediately follows, reproduced in (1). In the verse, which lasts approximately 30 s, three salient characterological figures (Agha, 2007) are introduced. The first is *Geveret Rothschild* ('Madame Rothschild'; lines 1–4). The name of this figure is an explicit reference to Rothschild Boulevard, a leafy thoroughfare in central Tel Aviv filled with expensive cafes and restaurants that are frequented by the kind of people who (stereotypically, at least) would complain about Tel Aviv being over-crowded and provincial and who travel to Paris on holiday. Interestingly, while the term used to address this figure (*geveret*, Heb. 'Madame' or 'Misses') and the verbal morphology used to refer to her (e.g., *nasaʕ-t,* Heb. 'travelled$_f$') are all feminine, the lyrics also mention *Geveret Rothschild*'s displeasure at the state of Hilton Beach, which is the well-known gay male beach in Tel Aviv. It therefore seems likely that the lyrics are actually addressed to a gay man, using a parodic stylisation of grammatical gender reversal in Hebrew (cf. Levon, 2012). The lyrics themselves ridicule the image of a person who flies off to Paris to "escape" the crowds of Tel Aviv, warning them not to get lost when they return (*Ben Yehuda* is a large avenue that runs parallel to the beachfront in Tel Aviv, and is decidedly less affluent than Rothschild Boulevard). The figure of *Geveret Rothschild* is juxtaposed (in lines 5–8) with that of *Geveret Hipster* ('Madame Hipster'), or the person who is fed up with the never-ending vagaries of Israeli politics (*you don't want to hear any more about left or right*) and so "flees" to Berlin. The emigration of young Israelis to Berlin is a salient and highly mediatised phenomenon in Israel (Amit, 2018) that draws its discursive force from both a strong moralising discourse that frowns upon Jewish outward migration from Israel (Milani et al., 2019) and an ever-present association in the Israeli national consciousness between Germany and the Holocaust. Like *Geveret Rothschild*, *Geveret Hipster* is thus a recognised social "type" for Israeli viewers – one who puts individual self-interest above loyalty to the "homeland" (and who has the material resources to do so).

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(1) Verse of *Po Ze Lo Eropa*

1	geveret rotšild nim'as mi-tel aviv
	Madame Rothschild, you're tired of Tel Aviv
2	tsafuf be-hilton (.) nasaʕt ʕad le-pariz
	Hilton Beach is too crowded (.) you flew off to Paris
3	ħazart habayta ʕim reaħ šel šanel
	You came home smelling of Chanel
4	le-ben yehuda lo lehitbalbel
	On Ben Yehuda, don't get confused
5	geveret hipster nu ex be-berlin
	Madame hipster, so how are things in Berlin?
6	at mištalevet yafe ʕim germanim
	Are you getting along well with Germans?
7	at lo rotsa yoter lišmoaʕ smol yemin
	You don't want to hear any more about left or right
8	az gute nacht (.) auf wiedersehen
	So "gute nacht" (.) "auf wiedersehen"

The final figure materialised in the verse portion is not referenced in the lyrics, but emerges solely in the accompanying video. This figure is not a specific character *per se*, but rather the figure of a stylised "European" (or, more precisely, an Israeli trying to be European). The figure is materialised by a series of shirtless muscle-bound men in white wigs seated in the "studio space", echoing the man we first saw in the prologue (see Fig. 2). With their overtly sexualised posture and gaze, the men are an embodiment of contiguous dissonance (Bakhtin, 1965), an intentional juxtaposition of incongruent elements used to deauthenticate (Coupland, 2007) the figure being portrayed. They parallel Uriel himself in this regard, whose Renaissance-style dress coupled with facial hair and a tiara constructs a parodic representation of a comic and inauthentic "European". The fact that images of these men and Uriel in the studio space provide the background visuals for the lyrics in (1) serves to subtly communicate to the viewer that *Geveret Rothschild* and *Geveret Hipster* are themselves "inauthentic" – individuals who, despite their pretensions, will never be "real" Europeans.

3.3. Chorus and interlude

The subtler commentary in the verse gives way to a much more explicit commentary about belonging and legitimacy in the chorus, transcribed in (2):

(2) Chorus of *Po Ze Lo Eropa*

1	po ro po po pa
	po ro po po pa ((nonsense syllables))
2	po ze lo eropa
	This is not Europe
3	po ze Israel
	This is Israel
4	tatħil lehitragel
	Get used to it
5	kapara hopa
	Honey hopa
6	po ze lo eropa
	This is not Europe
7	po ze balagan
	Here everything's a mess
8	mizraħ tixon yašan
	The old Middle East

While the verse gently mocks Israeli cosmopolitans and hipsters, the chorus sets out a stark contrast between them and us, where the "us" of Israel is described as a *mess* that you (we) need to *get used to*. The verbal morphology here in the chorus shifts to masculine, which gives the chorus more of a directed speech/"real talk" feel than the more gently mocking feminine morphology of the verse. The "us" referred to in the chorus is, moreover, deictically anchored to Israel. The word *po* (Heb. 'here') in the title of the song (*po ze lo eropa*, literally 'here this [is] not Europe') and repeated throughout the chorus serves as a continual reminder to the addressee that they are not in Europe, creating what Dixon and Durrheim (2000) term a place-identity, linking the viewer to the physical space of Israel. The discursive emplacement materialised in the lyrics is further clarified by the visuals that accompany this portion of the song. In the roughly 15 s of the chorus, there are a series of quick cuts between various sites in southern Tel Aviv, including one of Uriel sitting with the shirtless men in wigs in the back up a pickup truck and another of Uriel seated next to whom we presume is an African migrant (see Fig. 3). From these images, we are led to understand that the "here" that is Israel is not the affluent neighbourhoods in which *Geveret Rothschild* may wish to live. It is instead the more impoverished and "diverse" neighbourhood depicted in the video, thus adding an element of class and race/ethnicity to the definition of Israel that is being constructed. This definition is also given an explicitly Mizrahi flavour via the use of the word *kapara* (line 5), a term of endearment in Hebrew that is a salient diacritic (Agha, 2011a) of Mizrahi identity. In a few short lines and images, the chorus thus succeeds in inscribing a salient boundary between the national *self* and the foreign *other*. Yet unlike traditional self/other dichotomies based on citizenship-as-status (e.g., whether one is a citizen of Israel or not; Isin, 2008, see also Yuval-Davis, 2010), the chorus promotes a national self/other dichotomy based on what Isin (2008) calls *citizenship-as-habitus*, or the specific nation-linked practices in which one engages. This is summarised succinctly by the lyric equating Israel with the "old Middle East" (*mizrax tixon yašan*), a direct and oppositional reference to the "new Middle East" discourse that was a centrepiece of the Oslo peace agreement with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the early 1990s.

Fig. 2. Uriel and "Europeans" in the studio space.

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Fig. 3. The "place" of Israel in the chorus.

We get an illustration of this positioning of Israeli – as Mizrahi and part of the old Middle East – in the musical interlude that immediately follow the chorus. The soundtrack abruptly changes to be decidedly more Mizrahi, with an underlying vocal (*tarimu ta yadaim yadaim ba-avir*, Heb. 'Lift your hands up, up in the air') that mimics the kinds of lyrics one finds in dance music at a nightclub (such as at the parties that Arisa is famous for hosting). Where before, Uriel and the other characters in the video play their roles "seriously", during the interlude we see Uriel dancing along to the music and interacting with people in the streets of southern Tel Aviv (particularly African migrants in the area; see Fig. 4). We also see Uriel opening and eating a "Milky", an Israeli chocolate pudding topped with whipped cream, and offering some to one of the men in the street (see Fig. 5). Milky is an incredibly popular dessert treat in Israel that is in many ways iconic of an Israeli childhood. It is for this reason that a Facebook post in 2014 about Milky caused a social media frenzy. The post was from an Israeli living in Berlin, and showed that a Milky cost one-fifth the price in Germany than it does in Tel Aviv. This became a touchstone for a prolonged discussion about the elevated cost of living in Israel, and incited a tense media debate about the pros and cons of Israeli emigration to Europe.

The vision of Israel that Arisa is promoting in the interlude is thus one that is fun, diverse, and welcoming. People are dancing with each other in the street, and there are explicit references to the club culture for which Tel Aviv is famous. By parodying the "Milky scandal", Arisa playfully reintroduces a debate about emigration, clearly positioning itself on the side of those who remain in Israel and enjoy their Milky there, even if it is more expensive. The reference to Milky also serves as a commentary on those who, like many of the residents of southern Tel Aviv, may not have the financial means to move to Europe, thus imbuing Arisa's conceptualisation of Israeliness not only with an ethnic/racial dimension, but a class-linked one as well.

3.4. Bridge

Arisa's commentary on what constitute an Israeli comes to full fruition in the climatic bridge that follows on from the musical interlude. Until this point, the song materialised an us/them contrast, othering figures like *Geveret Rothschild* and *Geveret Hipster* as those who do not embrace the real Israel. In the lyrics of the bridge, in contrast, Arisa voices an explicitly ethno-nationalist discourse that defines once and for all who "counts" as Israeli:

(3)	Final bridge of *Po Ze Lo Eropa*	
	1	ani mzaha otax mi merħakim
		I recognise you from miles away
	2	ʕamok ba-lev at ʕod yalda šel elokim
		Deep in your heart you're still a daughter of God
	3	at lo mi london (.) o me Amsterdam
		You're not from London (.) or from Amsterdam
	4	ha wedž šelax motek (.)
		Sweetie your face (.)
	5	hu (.) mi (.) bat yam
		Is (.) from (.) Bat Yam

The bridge begins by claiming that an Israeli can be *recognised from miles away*. This lyric gives lie to the idea that Israelis could ever become European, and, in so doing, renders meaningful the symbolism of the shirtless men in the studio space. Essentially, Arisa is saying that no matter what trappings you put on (such as a white wig), you will always be identifiable as Israeli. The reason for this, as described in the lyrics, is because ultimately you are a *daughter of God*, i.e., Jewish. Whereas previously Arisa appeared to be promoting a notion of Israeliness based on habitus, here the song reverts to a belief in Israeliness as an issue of essence, of being born into the nation. Importantly, the way in which the word for God (*Elohim*)

Fig. 4. Having fun in the interlude.

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Fig. 5. Uriel enjoying a Milky.

is pronounced in the song (as *elokim* in line 2 of the bridge) is a common avoidance pronunciation used by observant Jews as a way of not uttering God's name other than in prayer. The use of this pronunciation thus serves to subtly cue a more traditional, and in Israel, largely Mizrahi, approach to religion (Henshke, 2017). The idea of being "born Israeli" is finally given a racialised basis in the last three lines of the bridge. Here, we are told that you cannot be from London or from Amsterdam because your face looks like it is from Bat Yam, a working-class suburb south of Tel Aviv that is strongly associated with Mizrahis and with notions of "realness" and "authenticity" in the Israeli popular imagination. It is, moreover, no accident that the word used here for "face" is not the usual Hebrew term, but rather an Arabic borrowing associated with Mizrahi speakers. By the end of the bridge, we are thus made to understand that no matter what you do, you cannot escape being Israeli (and being recognised as such). The clear implication of this message is that there is therefore no use in trying.

3.5. Coda

Immediately after this strongly ethno-national/racialised statement, we move outside of the story world of the video. The music abruptly changes to what in Israel is colloquially referred to as "ay yay yay" music, and is associated with charismatic Orthodox Judaism and the idea that religious revelation brings one joy and ecstasy (the musical style is referred to in the way because people often chant "ay yay yay" while dancing around to this type of music). In the video, we see Uriel and Margalit Tzanani (the woman actually singing the song) in a sound booth dancing to the music in a way that is reminiscent of Hasidic Jewish dancing (see Fig. 6). Superimposed on this image of Uriel and Tzanani dancing is information about the upcoming club party that Arisa is hosting, and that this video ultimately serves as an advertisement for. In this way, the coda serves to link the story world of the video with the real world of Arisa parties. Coming immediately after the statement in the previous sequence that it is impossible to escape one's natural-born Israeliness, we can understand the coda of the video as depicting the joy and ecstasy that accompanies accepting one's self as a local, "authentic" Israeli. And it is not anodyne that this ecstatic experience is multimodally linked to Arisa and the party they are promoting. The message clearly seems to be that through Arisa – by embracing their values and their vision of Israel – you too can come to accept yourself and feel this same ecstasy. The centrality of Arisa to this understanding of Israeliness is further emphasised by the penultimate image of the video, seen in Fig. 7. There, we see the Israeli flag with Arisa's logo, instead of the Star of David, at the centre. In essence, everything that Arisa represents, i.e., being authentic, working-class, and Mizrahi, is positioned as what it means to be Israeli.

Following the image of the flag, the video for *Po Ze Lo Eropa* closes with a kind of "outtake" sequence, in which Tzanani, Uriel and two unidentified men are pictured in what appears to be the control room of a sound studio (see Fig. 8). We are given to understand that this scene takes place immediately after the shooting of the video we have just watched. Tzanani is pictured recalling some particularly amusing elements of the song to the two men, while Uriel hovers behind in the doorway. So while this final sequence is similar to one with Uriel and Tzanani dancing previously, here all pretence of being within the story world has disappeared. Instead, the performative frame is fully broken, and the transition from the story world to the real world is complete. Coupland (2011), among others, has described how drawing explicit attention to the fictive nature of a performance can serve as a strategy

Fig. 7. Arisa as Israel.

Fig. 6. Uriel and Tzanani during the coda.

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Fig. 8. Fully departing the story world of the video.

for focussing viewers' attention on the forms of practice on display as well as on the social meanings and attitudes those forms are intended to communicate (see also Coupland, 2007). In other words, making explicit the staging of characterological figures and the performative distance between actor and character encourages viewers to pay closer attention to the larger moral message of the performance they are watching (Bauman, 2004; Jaffe et al., 2015) by asking themselves "why are they doing that and why in that way?". We turn in the next section to a brief discussion of both of these questions.

4. Laughter, discipline and the nation

In the previous section, we argue that through the video for *Po Ze Lo Eropa* Arisa aims to construct a particular understanding of Israeli authenticity, which it defines as the embracing of local Mizrahi and working-class culture and not "putting on airs" or trying to be something that you are not. In this section, we consider why Arisa is promoting this message. What, ultimately, is the political function of the video, and how does the form that the video takes contribute to achieving that function? Asking this question allows us to move from an examination of Arisa's attempt to define a new nationalist discourse to a consideration of what new relations of power this discourse entails.

We begin with the issue of form, and specifically with the parodic frame that the video for *Po Ze Lo Eropa* adopts. It is useful when considering the role of parody in the video to draw on Billig's (2005) framework for understanding the social function of laughter. In that work, Billig builds on earlier ideas by Bergson (1911), who argues that laughter never exists on its own. Instead, laughter is always co-existent with ridicule, such that jocular amusement inevitably results from the derision of some other person or event. As Bergson (1911: 4–5) describes somewhat poetically, "[when we laugh] we must, for the moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence upon our pity … [the comic] demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart". The reason, moreover, we are willing to anesthetise our hearts in this way is because laughter/ridicule serves an important social function. For Bergson, laughter/ridicule is a crucial component of the way in which intergroup relations are organised and maintained, such that laughter is never (or never only) a personal experience of joy or amusement, but rather a deeply social phenomenon that aids in the production and maintenance of salient social divisions.

Using Bergson's ideas as a springboard, Billig (2005) elaborates a theory for understanding laughter/ridicule as fulfilling two distinct social functions. The first of these is what Billig (2005:202) describes as *disciplinary humour*, which he defines as humour that "mocks those who break social rules, and thus can be seen to aid the maintenance of those rules". For Billig, disciplinary humour is ultimately a conservative force, singling out those individuals and practices that deviate from an expected norm in order to shame them into normative compliance. Billig (2005:202) contrasts this conservative type of humour with what he calls *rebellious humour*, which he defines as humour that "mocks the social rules, and, in its turn, can be seen to challenge, or rebel against, the rules". As his name for it implies, rebellious humour is "on the side of radicalism" – unlike disciplinary humour, it is a form of laughter/ridicule whose ultimate aim is to disrupt existing norms and conventions, not reproduce them. Importantly, however, Billig (2005:212) cautions that these two types of humour cannot easily be disentangled. While conceptually they are polar opposites in terms of the functions they are meant to fulfil,

> At times, rebellious humour – or humour that is claimed and experienced as rebellious – can have conservative and disciplinary functions. Far from subverting the serious world of power, the humour can strengthen it … The more we laugh and the more we imagine ourselves to be daringly free in the moments of our laughter … the more we reveal ourselves captive to the demand that we possess a naughty sense of humour.

Though expressed somewhat indirectly, Billig here is reiterating a point initially made by Foucault (1978 [1976], 2003 [1997]) and later developed by Butler (1993) that the very processes that enable individual agency are also those that bind the subject to the normative regulatory frame, such that acts of apparent resistance may unwittingly derive their power (and hence reproduce) existing systems of social division and hierarchy. Billig's theory of humour thus provides a useful complement to Agha's theory of commoditisation that we have been using thus far. While Agha gives us a framework for understanding how semiotic practice creates links to various cultural formations and systems of value, Billig's insights allow us to focus on relations of power and the hierarchies of indexicality that emerge.

The "double bind" logic that Billig describes applies directly to the case of Arisa. In *Po Ze Lo Eropa*, Arisa clearly aim to critique the elitism and ethnic/racial hegemony that characterised early Zionism and continues to animate salient social divisions in Israeli society today. The image of Israel developed in *Po Ze Lo Eropa* is one where the values, cultural practices and even bodies of working-class, Mizrahi Jews are held up as the ultimate symbols of the nation. This ethnic/racial critique is a form of rebellious humour: it is a challenge to the unspoken rules of being and behaving that exclude Mizrahi communities from a central position in the Israeli national imaginary and that structure dominant beliefs about belonging and citizenship in Israel. Yet in order to make this critique, the video draws on a highly conservative trope of Israeli exceptionalism. As discussed in the introductory sections above, a belief in the exceptional character of Israeli society has long been at the heart of Israeli conceptualisations of the nation, from the earliest days of Zionist theorising. On one hand, the discourse of exceptionalism celebrates an anti-Diaspora stance, where Israel is imagined as a different place: grounded in the Middle East and home to the "new Jew" (Almog, 2000) that is culturally and spatially distinct from the Jews in Europe. On the other hand, the discourse of Israeli exceptionalism also positions Israel as in contrast to the rest of the (geographic) Middle East, a place where, for example, queer life is possible and where European modernity has taken root.

In *Po Ze Lo Eropa*, Arisa not only embraces both of these assertions; it relies on them for its critique of Ashkenazi hegemony. Israel is described as the "old Middle East", a "mess" in contrast to what we assume is a more orderly Europe. It is also depicted

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as a place to go out and have fun, to eat Milky with strangers on the street, and to live an open, diverse, "queer" life. In centring Mizrahi cultural practices and Mizrahi bodies in these depictions, Arisa aims to destabilise the implicit centring of Ashkenazi experience in Israeli society, and replace it with a more "authentic" Mizrahi alternative. To do so effectively, it makes use of the widely shared belief in Israel's exceptional status, and simply reassigns that exceptionalism to the figure of a Mizrahi (*with a face from Bat Yam*). In other words, the power of Arisa's rebellious critique relies on its resignification of a deeply conservative trope of Israel nationalism. While effective for Arisa's immediate purposes of valorising Mizrahi culture, the use of this trope has the effect of reproducing popular discourses of Israeli homonationalism (cf. Milani and Levon, 2016) and of excluding various categories of people from what it means to be "authentically" Israeli. In this sense, Arisa's parodic intervention is also a highly disciplinary one, a form of laughter that remains captive to the demands of Zionist imaginings of the nation.

5. Conclusion

Our goal in this article has been to demonstrate how Arisa creates and promotes a new understanding of Israeli identity, one that attempts to disrupt dominant ethnic/racial structures in Israeli society. We have argued that Arisa accomplishes this goal through the use of rebellious laughter to parody normative Ashkenazi practices, replacing them with a more "fun" and subversive Mizrahi cultural frame. We also note, however, that this type of rebellion serves an additional disciplinary function, one that relies on and re-instantiates conservative tropes of Israeli exceptionalism and Zionist nationalism. It is this duality – this 'bi-directionality' (Carbado, 2011) – of Arisa's critique that we argue ultimately renders it *non-intersectional* in nature. In effect, the members of Arisa make strategic use of their positioning as Jewish Israelis to access a discourse of privilege (Zionism) in order to overcome the subordination they experience as (gay) Mizrahis. In doing so, Arisa reinforces essentialist narratives of belonging of Israel and, we suggest, misses an opportunity for a more fundamental critique of the structures of marginalisation and exclusion that organise Israeli society. As Crenshaw (1991: 1282) notes about the dangers of not engaging with intersectionality in popular resistance movements, "when one discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the other, the power relations that each attempt to challenge are strengthened."

We suggest, moreover, that it is not incidental that Arisa does this kind of political work via a mediatised product. Rather, we would argue that a video posted online to YouTube, where it is seen by millions and commented on by thousands, provides certain affordances that Arisa takes strategic advantage of to promote its political message. As Androutsopoulos (2014) reminds us, the posting of something online, and the kinds of comments and interactions that accompany it, is itself a process of *entextualisation* – the establishment of a commodity chain that in the case of Arisa also includes the offline parties that the video promotes, as well as the various prior and future videos suggested to viewers on the site. Given Arisa's goal to change the commodity diacritics that normatively cue "Israeliness" – from a set defined by Ashkenazi norms to one defined by Mizrahi ones – the public interactivity of YouTube provides an indispensable tool (see also Gal and Woolard, 2001). The medium Arisa uses is thus much more than just a convenient channel – it is a crucial component of the broader political project in which the group is engaged.

Through this paper, we hope to have demonstrated that the nation is always in the process of becoming – that interventions like Arisa's are not the exception but the norm, and that the struggles over who does (and does not) belong to the nation are never complete. We also hope to have shown that mediatisation is not incidental to this process – that the media is not simply a channel that Arisa uses to communicate an institutionalised and already-formed conceptualisation of the nation and national belonging. Rather, it is through mediatisation that Arisa's political project of belonging – in all of its problematic ambivalence – is brought into being. In short, we hope to have demonstrated that the nation itself is a mediatised phenomenon.

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