

Sociology in the Garden

• • • *Beyond the Liberal Grammar of Contemporary Sociology*

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ABSTRACT: This article poses a simple question: why do marginalized Mizrahim, a group most likely to benefit from liberal justice and human rights, so vehemently and repeatedly reject the liberal message? To address this question, we shift the direction of inquiry from problems in the message's transmission or reception to the message itself. By doing so, we seek to go beyond the 'liberal grammar' shared by most social activists and critical sociologists. The insight emerging from this theoretical turn is that the politics of universalism, rooted in the liberal grammar of human rights and viewed from the liberal standpoint as a key to social emancipation, is experienced by the target population as a heartless betrayal and a grave identity threat. This article offers the initial outline for a new interpretive space and seeks to surpass both the limits of the Israeli case and those of the liberal grammar of contemporary critical sociology.

KEYWORDS: critical sociology, dignity, honor, human rights, identity, liberalism, particularism, universalism

In "For Public Sociology," the article based on his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Michael Burawoy (2005) describes two interrelated trends in contemporary American sociology. First, he notes, sociology and the world it studies have traveled in polar directions since the second half of the twentieth century, with sociology moving 'left' in taking a critical stance toward the political order, the market economy, and state authority, while "the world it studies has moved in the opposite direction" (ibid.: 6), with the global market economy expanding, neo-liberalism on the rise, and civil rights violations becoming commonplace. Second, the



affinity between sociology and social activism is tightening. This bond has given rise to what Burawoy terms an “organic public sociology” (ibid.: 7), meaning the collaboration of sociologists with labor movements, human rights organizations, and immigrant groups, among others. Burawoy’s observation of the growing collaboration between the two fields does not remain on the descriptive level; it is also prescriptive. And yet, Burawoy does not suggest that sociology has an *intrinsic* commitment to liberal values. As he points out: “If sociology actually supports more liberal or critical public sociologies, that is a consequence of the evolving ethos of the sociological community” (ibid.: 8). Nonetheless, its *de facto* commitment to liberal justice and human rights has become contemporary American sociology’s *zeitgeist*.¹ In this spirit, Burawoy concludes that “sociology—and in particular its public face—defends the interests of humanity” (ibid.: 24).

In the current article, I enlarge on Burawoy’s observation and widely accepted diagnosis of contemporary sociology. The insight emerging from my analysis is that, contrary to Burawoy, the ‘liberal grammar’ shared *de facto* by contemporary sociology and civil society NGOs, as indicated by sociology’s growing kinship with civil society, narrows the discipline’s interpretive space and consequently limits its added value and potential public impact. As I will show, the interpretive repertoire available to sociologists and human rights activists hampers their attempts to decipher a widely recognized yet puzzling local phenomenon—the ‘refusal’ of working-class Mizrahi Jews, one of Israel’s disadvantaged groups, to embrace the liberal message of social justice, equality, and human rights. Moreover, this group of Mizrahim, frequently regarded by critical sociologists as victims of state discrimination, positions itself on the side of the state, actively protecting the state from any inroads sought by the liberal message and its messengers. Thus, one of the very groups expected to benefit most from the values of liberal justice and human rights vehemently rejects the liberal message. Viewed from the interpretive space available to sociologists and human rights activists, the resistance of marginalized Mizrahim to the liberal message remains an ‘anomaly’, a problem awaiting a solution. In a different vein, the proposed analysis resonates with the broader literature on the failure of human rights to penetrate non-liberal societies (Bauer 1999).²

Ever since the UN ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, but especially since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, human rights have gained increasing legitimacy in international politics and jurisprudence (Simmons 2009; Sjoberg et al. 2001). However, despite effectively positioning itself as a global moral order transcending international borders, encounters between the liberal human rights discourse and

local worlds of meaning have often been conflictual. Israel's local Mizrahi anomaly therefore echoes a worldwide social phenomenon.

The article progresses as follows. In the next section I present three snapshots of confrontations between liberal demonstrators and Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern or North African origin) of low socio-economic status. This is followed by an analysis of focus group sessions in which activists from two major civil society NGOs attempt to grapple with the Mizrahi anomaly together with declining public support for their message. The section also presents selected findings from comprehensive research examining how different groups in Israel perceive social justice, human rights, and equality.³ I then move to a discussion of the liberal grammar guiding the NGOs' thinking and acting. The available repertoire of explanations found in contemporary Israeli critical sociology is then reviewed. In the closing section I turn the sociological gaze upon itself to offer an initial outline of an alternative interpretive space outside the liberal grammar of critical sociology.

Zooming in on the Israeli Case

A left-wing demonstration against the Second Lebanon War, at the corner of Chen and Ben-Zion Boulevards, Tel Aviv, 16 July 2006. Dozens of demonstrators are marching with signs displaying anti-war slogans: "We do not have children for unnecessary wars," "Stop the killing in Haifa, Beirut, and Gaza," and the like. The demonstrators chant: "In Beirut and in Haifa, others want to live like brothers." A middle-aged woman defiantly claps her hands in front of a cameraman while twisting her upper torso as if performing a Middle Eastern dance. She points to him and shouts: "Only war, only war. Film me for the TV. The Arabs understand only war and nothing else. Only power, power [you hear]. The people of Israel have survived thanks to force" (Mizrahi 2011: 51).

A demonstration against the deportation of children of foreign workers, Meir Park, in central Tel Aviv, 4 March 2011. A 12-year-old girl representing these children reads a speech, written in Hebrew, that stresses her Israeli-ness and integration into local life. In the background, a few dozen residents of poor, south Tel Aviv neighborhoods jeer at the demonstrators, shouting: "Israel isn't up for grabs," "South Tel Aviv for the Jews." Several slogans, printed on the placards they hold, proclaim: "Children from slums aren't worth less than the children of illegal workers" and "The next generation is in danger" (Yassur Beit-Or 2011).

A silent protest march against the lack of social justice, held during the fifth week of tent city protests in Charles Clore Park, Tel Aviv, 20 August 2011.

The march takes place under the pall of recent missile firings from Gaza directed at Israel's southern towns. At the march's conclusion, a moment of silence is held in recognition of the events in the south. Thereafter, during delivery of the muted speeches, heckling is heard from the perimeter. A group of about five men with distinctively Mizrahi accents demand that the speakers denounce the missile barrage.

Their heckling increases when an Arab speaker approaches the podium. The audience loudly applauds his words about the shared fate of Jews and Arabs in times of economic stress. In contrast, the hecklers' leader shouts: "It's become a leftist protest." A demonstrating activist replies: "If you don't like it, leave." In response, the heckler yells: "Shut up, you queer!" which is answered by: "That's right, I like screwing ass." The atmosphere becomes increasingly charged. At one point, a demonstrator shouts: "Go back to the zoo." The hecklers' leader responds in kind: "You son of a bitch. Hitler didn't kill enough of you."⁴ The verbal violence is dangerously close to becoming physical as dozens if not hundreds of the demonstration's participants turn toward the hecklers and shout: "Arabs and Jews refuse to be enemies" (Mizrahi 2011: 52).

Dissent against war, protest against the expulsion of foreign workers and their children, demands for social justice and Jewish-Arab solidarity: the issues raised at these events initially appear unconnected. The contexts also vary: armed conflict, social protest, and the struggle to reform government policy. Yet common to all of them is the clear and stable social profile of the two opposing camps. The demonstrators clearly belong to Israel's educated elite, the Ashkenazim or Jews of European origin. They include academics and professionals, the offspring of the country's founding fathers, or those having a clear demographic link to those elites (Hermann 2009). Absent among them are immigrants from the former Soviet Union, religious nationalists, and ultra-Orthodox Jews, as well as Mizrahim.

The presence of working-class Mizrahi hecklers at each of the cited events is particularly interesting precisely because the Mizrahi world of meaning reflects neither orderly right-wing ideology nor strict religious Orthodoxy. Mizrahi unclassifiability according to the religious-secular dichotomy has led to their characterization as 'traditionalist', a world of meaning that combines substantial observance of Orthodox Jewish religious traditions with secular practices, for example, praying in the synagogue on Sabbath mornings and then driving to a soccer (European football) match (see Buzaglo 2009; Fischer, this issue; Yadgar and Leibman 2009).⁵ However, the Mizrahim's malleable stance regarding religious practice is not transferred to the political sphere. Although perhaps incongruous to non-Israeli readers, the reluctance of working-class Mizrahim to support the liberal left, as demonstrated by Mizrahim voting for right-wing and religious parties,⁶ is common knowledge for Israelis.

When speaking of the Mizrahi Jewish population as a whole, we should note that they currently represent about half of the total Jewish population in Israel (Cohen 2015) and are firmly woven into selected patches of Israeli society and culture. As Yinon Cohen (2015) reports, between 1995 and 2008, the Ashkenazi population decreased from 33.4 percent to 25.8 percent, the Mizrahi population decreased from 44.1 percent to 38.4 percent, third-generation and mixed-origin Jews increased from 7.3 percent to 14.6 percent, while the proportion of new immigrants (primarily Jews from the former Soviet Union) increased from 15.2 percent to 21.2 percent. The strong correlation between Mizrahi origin and low social status remains solid, even though there is a substantial and considerable growth in the Mizrahi middle class (see Adva Center 2013; Dahan 2013). Following the 2015 elections, the electronic maps of the votes clearly identified the disadvantaged neighborhoods and towns, populated primarily by Mizrahim, which voted for right-wing/religious parties as opposed to more upscale areas, populated primarily by Ashkenazim, which voted for leftist-liberal parties.⁷

Regarding participation in the events described above, we should mention a third group, the state's official representatives—the police and security forces. Its members, like those dissenting from the demonstrations, often belong to one or another of Israel's social minorities, primarily Mizrahim but also Russians, Ethiopians, and Druze.

At first sight, these social groups seem to have fixed membership and also appear to play rather consistent roles in these events. The flow of the events is also fairly predictable. Yet we can observe a revealing reversal of social positions on these occasions, with those formerly at the margins now in the center, and those formerly in the center now at the margins. Within a few hours, the police—a minority in uniform—'becomes' the state. Those dissenting from the events, who also overtly belong to the ethno-class margin, are repositioned in the center as defenders of the state. As for the demonstrators, the children of Israel's socio-economic and cultural elite, they become 'traitors' whose protests are perceived as veritable threats to the state's very existence. At such meetings between 'defenders' and 'rebels', the verbal violence reaches a boiling point. It is highly unlikely that the demonstrators would ever use such brutal or vulgar language at any other social encounter.

A quick look at the Mizrahi dissidents' body language—their vibrant energy and loss of control—indicates that the demonstrators are inflicting deep emotional injuries or even posing an existential threat to them. Those protesting against the demonstration's message fiercely wave their arms and verbally lash out at the demonstrators as if defending their very lives. The demonstrators often respond in kind. The outbursts between the two

camps provide the police with an opportunity to dramatically demonstrate their power. The demonstration ends, and order is restored: the 'rebels' return to managing the state, the police return to their normal patrol duties, and the hecklers return to their jobs as laborers and service workers.

This scene captures a state of dual dissatisfaction that invites further inquiry. First, how can we explain the gap between the universalism of human rights, equality, and social justice advocated by the demonstrators and the social particularism of the liberal message's opponents and representatives? Second, how is it possible that those comprising the 'target population', who have been driven to the margins of the state's opportunity structure and are most likely to benefit from the seemingly liberating message of equality, social justice, and freedom, reject that message and instead defend the state?

The Mizrahi Enigma: Activists' Views of the Narrowing Social Legitimacy of Human Rights

In the course of the focus group sessions held during my empirical study, participants were asked to respond to a question regarding their organization's ability to recruit new followers from several segments of Israeli society. The following are typical of the responses received from activists working in a human rights organization operating in the Occupied Territories.⁸

Tamar: Recruitment [of supporters]? If that's what you call it, then nothing works ... because large portions of the Israeli population wouldn't dream of supporting our issues ... it makes no sense trying. However, if you ... talk to people who might belong to the persistently declining liberal minority ... we're talking about Jews, of course, [who are located] at some sort of secular junction ... a type of leftist Zionism ... you can still find a few such types in Israel.

Moderator One: We're not dealing as much with the same Ashkenazi-leftist-secular group at the moment ... [we're asking] if and how is it possible to reach other populations ... Mizrahim, Russians, groups that usually don't participate, populations that aren't part of the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem bubble.

Tamar: Well, I've already said, there aren't any—none.

Moderator One: None?

Tamar: I'm honestly saying that after a very long process, after many years and a great deal of thinking about the subject, I really believe, *on the deepest level, that there is no way to recruit the support of broad segments of the Israeli population to our cause* [emphasis added].

Another activist sketched the social boundaries of Israel's human rights and peace movements. Her answer began as a response to the moderator's question on which of the organization's current practices 'worked' in recruiting new groups to their cause:

Naomi: We're not sure about what 'works'. We assume that [our practices] work. If our supporters today number about 15 percent of the population, that number could grow to 20 percent ... or even 25 percent, but no more.

These responses poignantly demonstrate the general state of mind prevailing among the two NGOs with respect to the social boundaries of their human rights message. The activists admit their failure to gain support among broad segments of Israel's Jewish population. They perceive their organizations' narrow basis of legitimacy as an unalterable given.

In the second human rights organization, activists discussed the effectiveness of a viable strategy for recruiting target populations. When participants raised the possibility that recognition of the benefits of human rights in their daily lives could convince new groups to embrace the human rights message, two senior staff members responded as follows:

Noa: Well, I think that basing [our strategy] merely according to practical needs doesn't work ... [We thought that] if we deal with issues relevant to the different groups ... they would realize ... that their problem was one of human rights; they'd connect to the human rights perspective and understand ... that other people's problems are also [human rights problems]. It's as if they would connect ... with the universal value through its usefulness ... [In other words] utility wasn't sufficient to forge something, at least the way I see things, to create a deeper identification with ... [human rights values]. Sooner or later you have to reach people at the emotional level.

Khaled: [E]very group would ... adopt a human rights perspective if it served its interests. But it's very hard—impossible, even—to break through the barriers and believe that other groups also have human rights.

Noa's and Khaled's comments reveal that a utilitarian use of the human rights discourse to promote specific interests does little to encourage adoption of the politics of universalism. Hence, the successful recruitment of Palestinians from East Jerusalem to the struggle for their political rights does not ensure the Palestinians' willingness to extend the rights discourse to other areas, such as gender relations, the family, or the community. In a similar but reverse fashion, the participation of lower-class Mizrahim in the struggle to protect their rights as factory workers will not necessarily leverage that support to the broader political context of Jewish-Arab relations.

The NGOs are therefore quite aware of and uneasy about the narrow basis of their activities' legitimacy. Yet the question of why their message arouses such intense opposition remains missing from their agendas. During the discussion with members of the first NGO, this contradiction came to light.

Moderator Two: You're all very aware that attempts to convince the Jewish population of the importance of recognizing and respecting as well as considering the rights of the Palestinian Other doesn't work.

Naomi: Absolutely correct ... But this isn't our organization's aim. You've initiated a conversation about the possibilities of recruiting the public [to our cause]. It's somewhat peripheral to our main goal ... Our aim is to exert influence in the field; [in order to do so] I have the big stick of petitioning the High Court of Justice, the big stick of Washington [DC] and other weapons. I want soldiers to stop beating [Palestinians], and if they don't, [I want to see] that they are brought to justice, and that the house demolition policy is stopped.

Moderator Two: I'm asking myself whether you've turned a constraint into an ideology. At the least, I'm wondering whether you're aware of the danger of how the lack of public support can affect the judicial system.

Dalia: That's obvious.

Rotem: Of course, we're aware [of this possibility].

The preceding excerpts indicate that, despite recognition of the apparently fixed social boundaries of the human rights message, expansion of support among other groups is not on that particular NGO's list of immediate objectives or ultimate goals. However, the activists do rather precisely perceive the dangers inherent in the restricted (and narrowing) social basis of their legitimacy. How is it possible that such an acute and critical issue remains ignored by these two leading human rights organizations?

Before discussing this matter, we turn to the way in which activists contended with our opening question: why do some segments of Israeli society reject the human rights message? When confronted with this question, activists singled out several of what they considered to be inexplicable rejections of their message. In the following I cite several examples mentioned by members of the first NGO that demonstrate the well-known but baffling contradiction between the Mizrahi Jews' familiarity with Arabs, on the one hand, and their support of right-wing groups, on the other.

Naomi: I'm trying to understand why Moroccan Jews might be so anti-Arab ... This shouldn't be taken for granted.

Naomi then wonders aloud as to whether the source of Mizrahi hatred toward Arabs is due to the lack of personal acquaintanceship and daily

contact. She ponders the issue on the basis of experience, which has taught her that personal contact inspires empathy and identification with the Other. As the discussion progresses, the issue reappears. This time, however, Naomi raises doubts about her previous suggestion:

Naomi: But what I'm saying is that all the [Mizrahi Jewish] contractors employing Palestinian workers are usually thought of as rightists, correct?

Dalia: That true, but [personal contact] really does make a difference. The minute a person gets to know someone else, something about his or her life and so forth, it has an impact, even if not directly.

Tamar: And then they go and vote for a party that wants to bomb [the Arabs] ... I had a very, very interesting experience a few days ago in the elevator at the building's entrance ... It was just after a worker from the West Bank was killed while trying to sneak into Israel. I couldn't believe what the people around me said ... they said that guys from the same town and from almost the entire West Bank didn't come to work because of the mess. They were really empathetic when they mentioned them, saying "someone was killed," "yes, but he did something stupid, because they're really desperate" ... Everyone in Jerusalem knows how Palestinians get to work; everyone works with Palestinians who sneak in. "But what do you want them to do? He's got five children and is unemployed. What do you expect them to do?" It's totally clear to everyone that there was no reason to kill him, that he's just like us; he's just trying to feed his children. Yet these people, when voting on the political-national level, cast ballots for the party that denies [the Palestinians] their human rights.

Naomi describes a familiar phenomenon within the Israeli reality of encounters and cooperation between 'labor contractors', a term often used as a synonym for Jews of Mizrahi origin, and Palestinian workers. She views this phenomenon as evidence contradicting her previous hypothesis regarding the absence of personal contact as the source of hostility. As Naomi and Tamar both admit, personal acquaintanceship does not prevent Israelis from voting for right-wing parties or from denying—in the eyes of liberals—human rights to Palestinian workers. The scene Tamar describes intensifies the paradox. This episode indicates that even when Jewish Israelis recognize the oppressive situations in which Palestinians find themselves and express empathy with the latter's choices and suffering, they do not alter their political positions. The activists seem unable to resolve the dissonance produced by those office workers who accept the concept of universal humanity but refuse to apply that understanding to the political sphere. For these activists, that gulf between the personal and the political remains inexplicable.

As the last section of dialogue illustrates, reality does not conform to the universalistic logic that guides the activists. Yet during all the discussions

conducted in the focus groups, not once was it suggested that the opposition to the human rights message could be interpreted as evidence of a problem inherent in the message itself. Stated differently, despite reality's slap in their faces, the activists never looked inward. They invested no energy in examining the basic assumptions behind their beliefs and the human rights credo.

We now summarize our findings. First, activists in the selected NGOs do recognize the particularistic boundaries of the message of universalism. They likewise identify the dangers inherent in the narrow foundations of their legitimacy, yet they expend little effort to broaden those foundations. Second, activists identify their target population's opposition to the human rights message but have difficulty explaining it. Third, despite their ability to identify such opposition, the activists' critical gaze remains directed outward rather than inward, at the recipient rather than at the message they transmit. Given their inability to interpret that opposition, it is not surprising to learn that the activists' have formulated no concrete 'plan B' to expand their circles of support. Two questions thus remain: Why do the activists find it so difficult to interpret these events? And why has this difficulty not led them to look inward?

Margaret Canovan's metaphor 'the garden in the jungle', which is cited by Talal Asad (2003), may shed some light on the liberal logic underlying the activists' mindset. Canovan compares the liberal camp to a garden, an illuminated space that is constantly struggling against the encroaching darkness of 'the jungle'—the non-liberal and ostensibly sinister area that surrounds the garden and threatens its integrity. In its struggle for survival, the garden attempts to spread its light throughout the jungle and thereby ensure its own salvation. But what is the garden's justification for wanting to transform the jungle into a garden? In other words, how do liberals justify their mission?

According to Asad, following Canovan, the garden blooms from its deep belief in universal justice, a value it feels should prevail throughout the world; hence, the garden's task is to nurture that value. However, Asad (2003: 57–59) continues, this normative perspective rests on the ontological assumption that universal justice is more than a worthy state of being: it is a 'natural' state. As the philosopher Charles Taylor (1999) notes, belief in the 'naturalness' of universal justice, or of human rights, is imbedded in the Western belief that a person's rights are fundamental and pre-date her entry into society. The notion that all human beings have basic human rights is therefore rooted in the idea of the 'person' as a universal entity existing prior to the particular society in which she lives. It thus follows that no society can 'endow' any person with rights. Instead, society carries a dual obligation: to ensure the realization of those rights and to prevent

their violation. The belief in human rights as 'natural', that is, as fundamental and given, creates what Asad (2003: 59) calls "the politics of certainty," an unshakable confidence regarding the 'rightness' of liberal justice and the accompanying human rights message. This confidence is what guides the garden in its campaign against the jungle.

This portrait of a war that pits light against darkness may initially appear too sweeping or perhaps simplistic. A liberal philosopher would surely offer a more nuanced and complex set of justifications for liberalism's validity. Numerous liberal philosophers view liberalism as a normative stance that does not draw its validity from any type of natural necessity (see, e.g., Dembour 2006). Nonetheless, the image of the conflict between the garden and the jungle does not stray far from the liberal mindset as practiced by many politicians, media professionals, activists, and jurists.

For example, the use of the image of the 'enlightened public' in Israeli judicial discourse echoes that of the 'enlightened garden' in its conflict with the shadowy jungle. For these reasons, the phrase 'enlightened public', identified predominantly with Justice Aharon Barak, former president of Israel's High Court of Justice, became the target of incisive legal and public critiques (Mautner 1994; Shamir 1994). Critics argued that Barak was referring exclusively to the educated, secular segment of society that upholds liberal Western values, thus implying the existence of an 'unenlightened public' whose core beliefs do not include liberal values. This unenlightened public is made up primarily of those in the religious sector and people who identify with their Middle Eastern heritage (Mautner 1994).

We can now return to the NGOs participating in the research. As the focus group excerpts show, objections to the human rights message have not motivated activists to practice self-examination or introspection. Most glaringly, the dissonance engendered by the personal empathy for the state of Palestinian laborers expressed by right-wing supporters did not instigate any scrutiny into the activists' assumptions regarding the necessary linkage between personal empathy and the politics of universalism. Canovan's 'garden in the jungle' and Asad's 'politics of certainty', as well as Barak's discussion of the 'enlightened public', shed light on the activists' lack of doubt. Only an attitude that is blind to its theoretical relativism and its overtly social-demographic context can stand firm in the face of opposition without succumbing to reflexivity. In most cases, liberal certainty frames non-liberal behavior as a problem that is inherently anomalous, as a form of moral disorder that can be explained with terms such as 'racism' (or 'sexism' and 'homophobia'), 'error', 'misunderstanding', 'false consciousness', or even 'ignorance'. For liberals, Mizrahi empathy toward Arabs, when coupled with right-wing politics (see Bronstein 2015), tends to remain a puzzling incongruity.

The Liberal Grammar of Critical Sociology

The issue of Mizrahi right-wing proclivities represents a stable pillar in the history of Israeli sociology that has been examined by researchers belonging to quite diverse sociological traditions. Due to space limitations, I will focus here solely on several contemporary critical approaches dealing directly with the issue at stake.

Contemporary critical Israeli sociology differentiates itself from the previous tradition of Israeli sociology, which Uri Ram (2006) has called 'establishment' sociology. In line with Burawoy's (2005) views on American sociology, Ram depicts critical Israeli sociology as socially involved, self-aware, and deeply committed to the values of human freedom and equality. The analysis proposed here accepts critical sociology's aspiration to increase its self-awareness regarding the political implications of sociological theory. Nevertheless, it argues that critical sociology's declared fidelity to the values of freedom and equality confines its self-awareness and critical stance within the boundaries of the 'enlightened garden'. Stated differently, this article suggests that critical sociology's dual stance—its simultaneous reflexivity and faithfulness—is derived from its internal liberal grammar, which presumes the garden's view of the world as concurrently desirable and natural. From inside the garden, non-liberal behavior is inevitably viewed as anomalous—as an ill awaiting a remedy.

Thus, critical sociology in Israel emerged as a response to establishment sociology, which it viewed as suffering from cultural essentialism in its interpretation of Mizrahi behavior as pre- or semi-modern behavior. When viewed through the lens of establishment sociology, Mizrahi culture appeared inferior, destined to disappear quickly with the full integration of these new immigrants into veteran, Western, and modern Israeli society (Smooha 1986). Critical approaches likewise revealed establishment sociology's paradigmatic assumptions and its loyalty to what its opponents regarded as the oppressive power structure—in its cultural, economic, and political dimensions—together with its ideological ties to the Zionist melting pot project. These linkages were, moreover, perceived as expressing a sociology that viewed itself as scientific and neutral but lacked self-awareness regarding its political loyalty to the state. In response to establishment sociology's embeddedness in the statist order, critical sociology ostensibly placed itself in a position external to the state's ideology and its political and economic order.

The critical discourse thus continues to interpret the 'blindness' to liberal justice exhibited by the Mizrahim, like other marginalized groups, as an anomaly. However, in contrast to the approaches associated with

establishment sociology, critical sociology does not locate the source of the problem in the actors themselves, their culture, or their 'objective' positions within the modernization process. Instead, it attributes that blindness to oppressive social forces that, while molding behavior, remain hidden from the actor's sight. Hence, critical sociology always interprets opposition to liberal values as a more or less rational reaction to conditions of injustice, oppression, and inequality. And yet, despite its rationality, this reaction is often regarded as a variation of false consciousness, originating in the internalization of the hegemonic group's values (those of the Ashkenazi elite) by means of cultural and ethno-class oppression, economic-political manipulation, and so forth.

As a rule, then, critical sociology continues to interpret the anti-liberal behavior exhibited by subordinated groups as a sign of something else, as a surface phenomenon that is always symptomatic of a deeper and more essential reality, which is apparent to researchers but hidden to their subjects. Thus, in view of critical sociology's limited interpretive space, every interpretation of minority group opposition to liberal justice that locates the source of opposition in the actors themselves rather than in the external reality tends to be suspect as essentialist, politically conservative, and often oppressive in itself.

I now turn to a short summary of the logic guiding those critical approaches as applied by Israeli sociologists that do confront the phenomenon of Mizrahi opposition to liberal discourse. This review will carry us to the next stage of my presentation, an initial attempt to open an interpretive space beyond the liberal garden.

The Class-Structural Approach

The key idea behind the structural approach is that ethnicity and ethnic behavior in Israel are derived from the specific group's socio-economic position within the Israeli class structure (Swirski 1981). Hence, Ashkenazi political behavior, like that of the Mizrahim, is to be understood by means of the link established between ethnic origin and socio-economic status. In a similar vein, Yoav Peled (1990), in his early work, explains the extremist positions taken by Mizrahim toward Arabs in terms of the two groups' positions in the Israeli labor market. He views Mizrahi hawkishness as a rational response to the competition for jobs they wage with Arabs. Because both groups are located at the bottom of the labor market's structure of opportunities, they compete over the same available, although limited, resources. Shlomo Swirski (1988) and Daniel Gutwein (2000) also describe the right-wing positions taken by the Mizrahim as a rational response to social exclusion on the basis of class.⁹

Irrespective of their differences, these scholars view the right-wing tendencies of Mizrahim against the background of the Israeli left's 'betrayal' of the weaker classes. They argue that although the Israeli left identifies with dovish positions within the political context, the same left is motivated by sectorial upper-middle-class interests in the social sphere and has thus forsaken the lower classes. The explanations provided by Peled, Swirski, and Gutwein indicate that in consideration of Mizrahi membership in Israel's working class, their 'true' interests should have directed them to support left-wing parties. Mizrahi opposition to those parties therefore appears understandable only as a response, even if a rational one, to class oppression and discrimination.

The Post-colonial Approach

During the late 1990s, the post-colonial approach gained a foothold in Israeli sociology. Its explanations for Mizrahi as well as Ashkenazi political behavior focused attention on the constituent role of identity and cultural representation in the formation of the Zionist-colonial power structure. Mizrahi political behavior within the post-colonial context is explained as a product of the group's historical consignment to the margins of the Zionist-Ashkenazi project, an outcome of their classification as non-Western (i.e., Eastern or Oriental) and non-modern (i.e., backward) (Khazzoom 2003). Their cultural identity is viewed as caught between the Jew and the Arab (Shenhav 2006).

Anat Rimon-Or (2002), for example, proposes a post-colonial interpretation for the jeers ("Death to Arabs") shouted at Arab soccer players by Jewish fans of Beitar Jerusalem (a competing Jewish team). These catcalls, she suggests, allow Beitar fans to defiantly yet rationally signal their 'Mizrahiness' and their overt 'non-rationality', which the dominant Zionist-Ashkenazi discourse requires them to suppress. This explanation identifies these fans' true target as the 'proper' Ashkenazi elite, which seeks to maintain the social marginalization of the Mizrahim in the name of Western propriety.

Ella Shohat (1988) interprets Mizrahi loyalty to the right and hostility to Peace Now, a left-wing liberal Israeli NGO that promotes a two-state solution, in a similar fashion. According to Shohat, these attitudes did not result from Sephardi animosity toward the Arabs, but as part of the Mizrahi revolt against the Ashkenazi elite in response to decades of oppression against the background of Orientalism.

Stated differently, Shohat and Rimon-Or explain Mizrahi hostility toward the Arabs as a response to their own marginalization. Sami Shalom Chetrit (2010) likewise stresses the protests and the search for a political

alternative that led to the ‘upheaval’ of 1977, when Mizrahi voters ousted Mapai, the hegemonic Zionist party identified with the Ashkenazi left, in favor of the right-wing Likud. Chetrit further argues that the Mizrahi rejection of radical left-wing parties manifests another facet of the “Mizrahi identity complex” (ibid.: 128)—the desire for integration and recognition.

The tendency of Mizrahim to identify with the right can be more deeply understood within the context of what Yehouda Shenhav (2006), in his book *The Arab Jews*, refers to as the genealogy of the category ‘Mizrahim’. Shenhav claims that this category was born of the encounter between ‘Arab Jews’ (i.e., Jews from Arab countries) and Ashkenazi Zionists. He argues that attempts to recruit Mizrahi Jews to the Zionist-Jewish project involved, from the very beginning, differentiation of the Mizrahim from their Arab neighbors. This process was closely accompanied by Judaization and intensifying piety, together with expectations regarding the construction of an Israeli identity cleansed of all signs of Arab culture. The Ashkenazi elite’s denigration of all Arab dimensions within Mizrahi identity and its tendency to base Mizrahi entry into the Zionist collectivity based on their Jewishness shed light on Mizrahi hostility toward Arabs by explaining why any demonstration of Mizrahi-Arab kinship might jeopardize Mizrahi membership in the national project. The unqualified Mizrahi loyalty to the State of Israel and to the Zionist narrative therefore becomes comprehensible. Shenhav’s approach introduces historical substance into Mizrahi enmity toward Arabs. Yet this hostility continues to be perceived by critical sociologists as reactive behavior, a by-product of oppression and thus, again, anomalous. Hence, it does not represent a valid worldview.

The Multiple Citizenship Approach: Three Civil Discourses

Referencing T. H. Marshall, Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled (2002: 9) identify three civil discourses—the liberal, the republican, and the ethno-national—that have constructed, in tandem, the boundaries of Israel’s civil society during different periods. The liberal discourse nullifies the meaning of group identification while stressing personal freedom, private property, and individual rights. Alternatively, the republican discourse conditions civil status on participation in the political community, identification with state goals, and readiness to contribute to the fulfillment of common national goals. In contrast, the Jewish ethno-national discourse demands the distribution of equal rights to all Jews—and only to Jews—as Jews. Shafir and Peled show that the Mizrahim lost out in their efforts to assimilate into the liberal as well as the republican discourse.

As explained by Shafir and Peled (2002), the liberal universal discourse adopted by the Labor Movement, which was expected to award Mizrahim

with equal membership in Israel's socio-political spheres, revealed itself to be illusory and exclusionary. The republican discourse stressed the marginal role in state-building played by the Mizrahim and thus prevented their full and equal membership in the national collectivity. Exclusion from the two dominant discourses thus accounts for Mizrahi allegiance to the third one—the ethno-national discourse—which awards them equal status on the basis of their religion. We can therefore deduce from the analysis suggested that the political reality of a 'true' liberal democracy, free of constraints and oppression, might release the Mizrahim from the need to cling to their ethno-national position. In other words, Mizrahi hawkishness, as interpreted by Shafir and Peled, is a rational response to external constraints, but never a disposition derived from a discrete and valid world of meaning, an alternative to the liberal worldview.

Summarization

To summarize, irrespective of their paradigmatic distinctions, all three critical approaches taken by Israeli sociologists depict Mizrahi right-wing behavior as the product of economic, social, and cultural exclusion or as the outcome of political oppression, but never as a unique, independent phenomenon. I do not mean to imply that these same approaches shed no light on our subject. Nevertheless, it appears that within the interpretive space of the garden, Mizrahi loyalty to the right is always considered an offshoot, never a wellspring.

Hence, despite their critical stance, these approaches stay locked within the liberal garden's interpretive space and consequently offer little assistance to Israel's human rights NGOs in their attempts to transcend its boundaries. Moreover, a review of the various streams of critical thinking indicates that had the Mizrahim, like other groups rejecting the liberal discourse, been fully and fairly accepted as equal members within the liberal camp, they would have readily joined its ranks and identified with its messages. Herein lies the core contention distinguishing these critical approaches from that proposed here. As I contend, the liberal message—even in its most inviting and progressive form—is incapable of offering deliverance to its intended recipients, who perceive that message as a serious threat to their core identity.

“Israel Isn't Up for Grabs”: Identity under Siege

We begin the proposed analysis of the Mizrahi world of meaning by turning to Charles Taylor's distinction between honor and dignity. In his well-known

essay, “The Politics of Recognition,” Taylor (1994: 27) argues that modern identity was formed during the transition from ‘honor’ to ‘dignity’. In line with Orit Kamir (2002),¹⁰ who has written extensively on the subject, I consider these concepts as two organizing principles for social acknowledgment and assessment of individual worth. Dignity, according to Kamir, is the modern liberal form of human value; it is minimalistic and ‘thin’, yet universalistic and absolute. Dignity thus relates to the core of a person’s worth, inherent in every human being. Furthermore, because dignity is perceived as an “axiomatic human quality” (ibid.: 241), no action need be taken to acquire it. As a universal form of human worth, dignity is common to all, irrespective of religion, gender, race, age, class, or group affiliation.

As mentioned, honor preceded dignity as the organizing principle for assessing individual worth. Honor, according to Taylor (1994), is not a given. It rests on group membership and is derived from one’s position within that group. Honor can therefore be ‘estimated’, with some having more and others having less. Thus, while it is derived from social hierarchies, honor simultaneously constitutes those hierarchies. As a result, honor is inherently linked to the local worlds of meaning within which a person’s identity and social worth are formed. Given this symbiotic relationship, any harm done to one’s honor likewise threatens the integrity of the community’s collective sentiments and moral life.

Taylor (1994: 37) further argues that the transition from honor to dignity was accompanied by a “politics of universalism” that, in stressing the equal value of all citizens, waves the banner of equal rights and privileges. This form of politics—born within the framework of the modern state and its distinctive constituent, the ‘citizen’—gained a foothold in modern history as the formative logic behind the human rights discourse (see also Soysal 1994). The UN’s adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 provided the politics of universalism with its contemporary institutional and legal expression.

By seeking to establish equality among all people, the politics of universalism transcends national boundaries and levels local hierarchies. The growth of this trend is striking in view of the short history of the program, which entered the West’s moral lexicon during the 1970s (Moyn 2010). The historiography of human rights has since flowered, and the salience and geographical scale of the human rights discourse has equally expanded (Moyn 2012). Built on these foundations, the idea of dignity aspires to extend the boundaries of human empathy beyond the confines of local morality and national laws. In other words, dignity has become the organizing principle of a universal social space where moral responsibility touches socially and geographically distant Others. Hence, dignity, unlike honor, draws its validity not from the local or the particular but from the universal.

In a work co-authored with Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, the sociologist Peter Berger discusses the implications of the transition from honor to dignity for individual identity. According to Berger et al. (1973: 90), honor intrinsically (or at least significantly) links identity to “institutional roles.” In contrast, dignity frees identity from its deep connection with such roles. We can conclude that the politics of universalism, based as it is on the principle of dignity, transforms identity from a structured ‘given’ into an ongoing project, open to negotiation. As Taylor (1994: 38) explains, with the transition from honor to dignity, identity was also transformed, from an entity based on a fixed position and hierarchical order to one formed through introspection and dialogue.

What may initially appear to be an essentialist view of honor and dignity¹¹ or a simplistic historical account of a sweeping transition from one social state to another will be employed here as a platform from which to offer a preliminary outline of an infinitely complex reality.¹² The essentialist designation of honor and dignity as two fixed ‘cultures’, in addition to their hierarchical order as implied by modernization theories, is reconsidered here in line with the resurrection of ‘culture’ by contemporary cultural sociologists (cf. Small et al. 2010). This outline suggests that we should view honor and dignity as elements co-existing within the prevailing modernist cultural repertoire (see, e.g., Eisenstadt 2002), an approach that is compatible with trends identified with cultural sociology.

If we consider honor and dignity to be two distinctive cultural logics simultaneously present in the modern individual’s cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986, 2003), we soon become aware of the ever-imminent potential for tension and confrontation (Mizrachi et al. 2007). This line of investigation follows ‘the practice turn’ in contemporary sociology (Boltanski 2011; Schatzki et al. 2001; Silber 2003). It shifts the direction of inquiry from top-down to bottom-up while inviting a nuanced reading of the ways in which ordinary people make sense of what really matters in the world in which they live (Kleinman 2006).

As we have seen, dignity seeks to break through the local collectivity’s boundaries, which separate genders, ethnicities, and national identities, and reach out toward the universal collectivity. In doing so, dignity challenges the divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ as well as the hierarchies emerging from these distinctions—the very hierarchies that provide the foundations and the expression of honor. At the same time, any attempt to deepen local distinctions by reinforcing honor-based social hierarchies threatens dignity’s universalistic logic. Hence, the tension between honor and dignity is, to a considerable degree, a struggle over collective boundaries, social solidarity, and mutual responsibility. That same tension is intimately involved in the making of moral decisions. Recalling Emile Durkheim (1997), we note that

human morality does not exist in isolation from the social fabric in which it is embedded. Moral confrontations involving the tension between honor and dignity would be misread if we failed to recognize the connection between the people who employ them and the social networks in which they live.

It therefore follows that the use people make of one rather than another cultural logic is neither fortuitous nor random. That use generally conforms to the other logics comprising their worlds of meaning. It is nonetheless important to understand that worlds of meaning are not abstract; they are always embedded in the distinctive social networks out of which identity and 'moral experience' emerge (Kleinman 2006), as do feelings of belongingness and individual self-worth.¹³ In other words, people's worldviews are never divorced from the plethora of social relations that constitute the normative mantle surrounding their lives.¹⁴ The linkage between worlds of meaning and social networks is so strong that choosing to deviate from a network's accepted cultural repertoire can be quite traumatic. Consider the choice made by the hero of the film *Billy Elliot*, an English coal miner's son, to become a ballet dancer. The same can be said about the choice made by Tony Soprano, the Italian-American head of a crime organization and hero of the television series *The Sopranos*, to turn to psychotherapy, during which he is forced to talk about his feelings—behavior that is considered deviant within his world.

The cultural logics of dignity and honor are thus embedded in worlds of meaning and in social networks. It is only from this embeddedness that concrete realizations of honor and dignity emerge at particular times and in particular places. We can therefore state that the worlds of meaning of some groups in Israeli society are closer to the ideal type of dignity, while others are closer to the ideal type of honor. As will be demonstrated shortly, the cultural logic of honor can shed light on the world of meaning of working-class Mizrahim. Alternatively, interpretive use of the cultural logic of dignity enables us to clarify the world of meaning of secular Ashkenazim belonging to the upper-middle class and to transnational social elites.¹⁵ This allocation is, however, far from defining the 'essence' or the 'nature' of Mizrahim or Ashkenazim.

At this point, we return to the three snapshots presented earlier in the article and discuss each in terms of the conceptual framework just proposed. As it will soon become evident, the head-on collision between the activists and their opponents can be read as a frontal conflict stemming from contradictory views of the relationship between the individual and the collectivity, between honor and dignity.

In the first snapshot, a middle-aged woman makes a scene during a left-wing demonstration against the Second Lebanon War by dancing defiantly in a Middle Eastern style before a cameraman. She loudly encourages

continuation of the war while arguing that force is the only way to confront the Arab enemy and to ensure Israel's survival. Observation of the scene invites various interpretations of the woman's behavior: ignorance and racism, for example, but also overt rejection of the Ashkenazi sense of propriety (see Rimón-Or 2002).

However, careful attention to the woman's words against the background of the messages implicit in the signs' texts and the slogans shouted by the demonstrators indicates another layer of meaning. In contrast to the boundary-crossing message that equates 'us' with 'them', that deplores the killing of children in Haifa, Beirut, and Gaza equally, the woman shouts: "The people of Israel have survived thanks to force." Her reference to the people of Israel reveals a social world of meaning that is substantively different from the world of the left-wing demonstrators, for whom the principle of universal humanism determines the boundaries of the collectivity and reinforces the notion of moral responsibility. The meaning of the woman's outburst lies in her preference for local solidarity and her opposition to the sweeping—and thus threatening—disruption of the boundaries of the Jewish collectivity in favor of universalistic solidarity with those perceived as the enemy. In this increasingly transparent scene, we see the political realization of the clash of alternative cultural logics.

The second snapshot concerns the opposition expressed by poor residents of south Tel Aviv to the resettlement of foreign workers and their children in their neighborhoods. Here as well we can view the residents' actions as overt racism, or, alternatively, we can apply a critical sociological explanation. The protests of the residents, who are located at the lowest rungs of the social structure, can be understood as a response to the struggle waged between themselves and foreign workers over the same meager educational and economic resources (see Peled 1990). However, against the background of their cries of "South Tel Aviv for the Jews" and "Israel isn't up for grabs," the residents' opposition can also be interpreted as a conflict between the rights of the individual and the best interests of the collectivity.

In the third snapshot, the liberal left's opposition to the deportation of foreign workers' children, together with its demand to grant these children legal status as permanent residents, can be read as an attempt to weaken the threshold of membership in the collectivity. Viewed in terms of the conceptual framework presented here, neither racism nor competition over resources can adequately account for the opposition of the residents. In this instance as well, we must consider the threatened rupture of the collectivity's boundaries to be a more effective explanation for the intense opposition observed. As the next example will show, south Tel Aviv's residents are not lacking in personal empathy for foreign workers, nor can we accuse them of outright racism. Furthermore, opposition to

foreign workers is not solely the province of the lower classes; it is common to all groups, including the middle and upper classes.

The refusal of south Tel Aviv's residents to translate their personal empathy for foreign workers and their children into the politics of universalism is illustrated in an interchange that took place during a demonstration organized by residents of the poverty-stricken and predominantly Mizrahi Hatikva neighborhood, who were calling for the return of illegal foreign workers to their home countries (Mizrahi 2011). In response to a reporter's question, a local woman stated: "Why do they bother me? They're good people. I'm not saying otherwise. They bother me because I don't want that kind of assimilation. We are the Jewish people ... What, am I [living in the] land of Jews or in Russia, Africa, or the Sudan?" The woman's recognition of the immigrants' humanity—even of their personal qualities—next to her refusal to accept them as equal members in the Israeli collectivity mirrors the duality caught in the activists' remarks discussed earlier. As one activist stated with astonishment, empathy for Palestinian workers was accompanied by unflinching support for right-wing parties. Hence, what may appear as an inexplicable incompatibility between personal empathy and political hawkishness by members of human rights NGOs is viewed as a recurring and, most importantly, coherent phenomenon by those outside the liberal garden.

This last event concerns the Mizrahi opposition to the tent city protests of 2011, described in the third snapshot above. At first glance, one might have anticipated that support for the protests against the high cost of living and the inadequate availability of social rights for all citizens would have spread like wildfire among Israel's disenfranchised groups, including the Mizrahi working class. This support did not materialize. We can therefore look on this outcome as a prime illustration of the paradoxical situation in which a disadvantaged group acts contrarily to its 'true interests'. The activists' cutting remarks addressed to the hecklers ("This isn't a soccer game" and "Go back to the zoo") can be regarded as somewhat typical expressions of the Ashkenazi left's rejection of the Mizrahim and thus the reason for the latter's refusal to act in their own best interests (Swirski 1988).

My proposed interpretation of the event is not meant to invalidate the critical sociological explanations previously referred to. It is difficult to counter the contention that the Ashkenazi left's rejection of the Mizrahim affected the latter's opposition to the tent protests. Yet it might also be worth viewing this opposition as an autonomous stance, rooted in a world of meaning that gives precedence to identity, solidarity, and a sense of belonging in the face of liberal values such as social justice and equal opportunities. Our return to the moment in which the opposition exploded lays bare once more the threat that the politics of universalism poses to particularistic Jewish identity.

The crucial moment at which the confrontation exploded in full force occurred when an Arab speaker reached the podium. The attempt to cross the boundary of national identity by establishing Jewish-Arab solidarity (“Arabs and Jews refuse to be enemies”) ignited the fire. Until then, the 2011 tent city protests had managed to stay within the national-particularistic boundaries of Israeli-Jewish society, indicated by its leaders’ characterization of their campaign as a ‘non-political’ event. Infringement of the Jewish boundary during the incident in question instigated the response depicted, one that closely resembles heckling at left-wing demonstrations. The extremely offensive and defiant insult shouted by the hecklers’ leader (“Hitler didn’t kill enough of you”) indicates, by its intensity, the depth of the threat posed by the protest’s infringement of collective boundaries. His words can be interpreted as enraged moralizing, directed at the Ashkenazim. Paradoxically, the Ashkenazim—the group most clearly identified with the state, its symbols, and its formative message, “From Holocaust to Rebirth”—are perceived as endangering the Jewish collectivity’s boundaries. And so, it is the Mizrahi heckler, whose personal and familial biography lacks any memory of the Holocaust, who vociferously defends the state against the ‘destruction’ instigated by its founders’ children and grandchildren.

As stated, the 2011 tent city protests that so powerfully directed public attention to the issues of social justice and inequality stayed, for the most part, within the agreed-upon boundaries of the Jewish collectivity. Similarly, the demographic boundaries of the left-wing camp, like the coalitional structure of power, have also remained intact. This case, therefore, exposes us to an additional aspect of the paradox opening this article—the fact that inequality appears to be of less importance to working-class Mizrahim, irrespective of any overt threat of the politics of universalism, than activists and critical sociology may presume. The Mizrahim’s opposition to equality, like their opposition to human rights, deserves an in-depth critical inquiry that goes beyond the liberal garden. But that must be delayed for the moment.

Conclusion

We began this article with Burawoy’s diagnosis of contemporary American sociology. His depiction of the gap between sociologists and the world they study, as well as the tightening bond between contemporary sociology and civil society, aptly captures the sociological spirit of our time. It thus comes as no surprise that his analysis so powerfully resonates among the sociological community worldwide. The leftward movement

of sociology and its alliance with civil society are not simply described—they are celebrated. Analytically, these trends are critical in nature and promise to broaden sociology's interpretive space. Politically, they commit sociology to remedying society's ills.

But why is this leftward shift considered so commendable? To answer this question, we turned the sociological gaze inward to uncover sociology's own epistemological standpoint and moral stance. By exposing contemporary critical sociology's liberal grammar, the article has pointed to the hidden dangers of the leftward movement. The case of the Mizrahi anomaly has enabled us to delineate the limited interpretive space characterizing critical sociology, a condition that prevents sociology from pursuing new avenues of thinking and acting that are sought by civil society NGOs. Moreover, it has cast new light on a misrecognized phenomenon: the liberal message poses an existential threat to the core identity of non-liberal groups, making it a problem rather than a solution for its target population. What appears to be a liberating message from the perspective of activists and critical sociologists thus provokes a frontal confrontation with other worlds of meaning.

The portrait emerging from this analysis does not comply with the description of a just sociology that struggles against a dangerous world. Rather, the article points to a dangerous sociology that is moving away from the world it studies. As Max Weber ([1919] 1946: 148) reminds us when referring to Nietzsche, in the world studied “we realize that something can be beautiful, not only in spite of the aspect in which it is not good, but rather in that very aspect.” In paraphrasing Weber's insight, I would say that if your findings always suit your moral stance, doubt your sociology.

In a similar vein, in the field of cultural anthropology, Clifford Geertz (1984), in his article “Anti Anti-Relativism,” reminded us over three decades ago that anxiety over nihilism had led anthropologists to stray from their mission. Instead of looking at difference and unsettling conventions, anti-relativist anthropologists, he argued, turned to concepts such as ‘human nature’ and ‘the human mind’ to seek universality and to anchor moral certainty. In doing so, they undermined what anthropology does when at its best: “[t]he repositioning of horizons and decentering of perspectives” (ibid.: 276). Geertz further claimed that responding to the uncertainty this creates by “placing morality beyond culture” is a regressive turn that is no longer possible (ibid.).¹⁶

Going beyond the liberal grammar, my attempt to provide an initial theoretical direction has benefited from ideas taken from the philosophical and communitarian literature that emerged in response to the works of the political philosopher John Rawls (Avineri and de-Shalit 1992).

The insights of Charles Taylor provided the preliminary analytic tools for studying the sociology of Israel's political reality. Surprisingly, the communitarian stream, identified as it is with political philosophy, was found to be almost totally outside the boundaries of critical sociology.¹⁷ As much as communitarian insights may be thought-provoking, they cannot be applied as a ready-made toolkit for social analysis. Such philosophical insights would benefit from a sociological contextualization, conceptualization, and theoretical reframing. Hence, stepping outside the liberal grammar of critical sociology invites us to further the conversation between sociology and political philosophy.

In line with this direction of inquiry, I have sought to situate the concepts of honor and dignity as two organizing principles operating in a particular social and political space. The theoretical outline proposed here, if applied to sociology's interventionist stance, thus invites a dialogic approach to social change, grounded in the understanding that the worlds of meaning of individuals and of groups are always embedded in social networks. It thus requires a careful and nuanced sociological reading of the conditions in which interventions can be introduced.

This line of inquiry involves a close examination of links between networks, local attempts to weave new networks, and the identification of intermediaries who might act as bridges between social networks. These intermediaries could participate in what I have termed elsewhere 'modular translation', meaning the adaptation and transformation of elements from one world of meaning to another (Mizrachi 2014). They could also promote what Taylor (1999) describes as 'narrow agreements' between groups regarding norms of behavior and policies that do not necessitate agreement regarding their justification, but only their outcomes. It may be superfluous to note that these suggestions are only preliminary guidelines that exhaust neither theoretical possibilities nor concrete plans of actions. Viewed from this perspective, this article represents a starting point rather than a finish line.

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Stigmatization in Comparative Perspective (2013), about how ordinary people among minority groups in seven countries cope with stigma and exclusion. He is currently completing a book on ordinary people's perceptions of distributive justice and the politics of recognition.

NOTES

1. These two trends are not unique to American sociology; they also characterize American anthropology. Consider the changes made by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in its official position toward human rights. In 1947, the AAA, headed by Melville Herskovitz, refused to sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, arguing that the values of scientific neutrality and cultural relativism precluded such an act. Half a century later, in 1999, the same organization publicly declared its commitment to human rights (Engle 2001; Goodale 2006). Many anthropologists supported this shift, based on their belief in anthropology's role in translating the language of human rights into local parlance and explicating socio-economic and cultural rights and, more importantly, its role "in preventing, rather than just reporting human rights abuses, particularly in circumstances of interethnic conflict" (Messer 1993: 242).
2. For discussions on human rights and Asian values, see Bauer and Bell (1999b), Jacobsen and Bruun (2000), Tatsuo (1999), and Yasuaki (1999).
3. A comprehensive analysis of the research findings will be presented in a forthcoming book.
4. The heckler is referring to the European Ashkenazi Jews murdered in the Holocaust.
5. To be sure, a chasm divides Reform Judaism as practiced in the US and Mizrahi Jewish traditionalism as practiced in Israel. The latter embodies what Fischer (2010: 340) terms "vicarious religion," referring to the Mizrahim's strong faith in the power of rabbis and Orthodox members of the community to observe Jewish rituals on their behalf, thus freeing them from such observance.
6. For details, see *Israel National Election Studies*, <http://www.politicalcommunication.org/ines.pdf>.
7. See <http://jewishschool.com/2015/03/36491/israel-votes-2015-an-interactive-map-of-election-results/#prettyPhoto/0/>.
8. The names of all the activists have been fictionalized to ensure anonymity.
9. Dani Filc (2010: 15) suggests an alternative structural explanation, one that involves "concentric circles of belonging."
10. Kamir (2002) was the first to apply the concepts of honor, dignity, respect, and glory, but primarily the honor-dignity distinction, in the analysis of Israeli society.
11. See Michael Herzfeld's (1989) critique of references to honor in anthropology. Herzfeld's admonition regarding anthropology's use of honor relates

to a simplistic view of honor culture as a monolithic entity. Such reification, according to Herzfeld, is fueled by a presumption of cultural backwardness and Orientalism.

12. Space and context prevent me from a deep exploration of the phenomenological meanings of the terms 'honor' and 'dignity'. Note that in Hebrew the word *kavod* means both 'honor' and 'dignity', with roots in the word *kaved* (heavy), which may be phenomenologically related to the experience of being honored. For a discussion of the term *kavod* in the context of Jewish theology and its implications in the political sphere, see Seeman (2005, 2014).
13. It is only by relating to the social networks in which individual worlds of meaning are embedded that we can understand what the anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (2006) has termed 'moral experience'.
14. Social networks are never formed in isolation from specific social conditions, such as education, religiosity, ethnic origin, geographic location, and so forth, nor can they be reduced to any one of these structures.
15. For a broader discussion of the trap of cultural reification and essentialism in the study of human rights, see some recent anthropological studies, for example, Benhabib (2002), Cowan (2006), Dembour (2006), Merry (2003), and Riles (2006). To be sure, in the Israeli context, liberal ideology is not the provenance of Ashkenazim alone. A number of Mizrahi NGOs, such as the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, a movement of liberal intellectuals, activists, and academics that emerged in the 1990s, embraced a liberal, universalistic form of identity politics, an event I have defined as 'liberal isomorphism' (see Mizrahi 2012, 2014) in the context of social movements in liberal democracies that promote a specific form of identity politics. Liberal isomorphism thus refers to mimetic behavior. It alludes to the link between a group's mirroring of forms and practices and its acquisition of social legitimacy. Liberal isomorphism entails "(1) demands for group recognition based on a previously stigmatized or discredited identity (e.g., women, gays, people of color, people with disabilities, and so forth); (2) use of previously stigmatized identity as the cornerstone for authentic group and individual identity; (3) stress on the right to equal participation as different, in contrast to inclusion despite difference; (4) debunking of hegemonic society's presumed neutrality by exposing its parochial roots (as privileging the white, male, straight, able-bodied and so forth) as the spearhead for social change; and (5) acceptance of the universal right to recognition and equality for all minority groups" (Mizrahi 2014: 139). The educated, liberal members of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow thus follow this particular form of Western identity politics, applied to minority groups around the world.
16. The AAA's 1999 commitment to the UN human rights covenant attests to Geertz's foresight (see note 1).
17. Amitai Etzioni's work is exemplary in its sociological use of the communitarian approach, although it does not directly refer to the issues discussed here. See, for example, Etzioni (1993).

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