

Who Can Publish Decolonized Ethnography and Cultural Theory with the Anger it Deserves? Unclassified Lloronas and the Academic Text¹

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Abstract. Gloria Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoria presents subaltern theorization and autoethnography as testimony. Nevertheless, subaltern women anthropologists from the Global South are not part of the North American 'woman of color' classification of Latinas, African-Americans, and Asians. They are therefore expected to use the U.S.-U.K. formula of dispassionate (post)colonial scholarship. The underlying assumption for the unclassified woman ethnographer from the Global South is that she comes from her country's cosmopolitan elite. She is therefore required to deploy the detached Northern social science language. This paper calls academic publishers to remove the elite label from the unclassified Women-of-Color authorship, and publish them in the decolonized, emotive Anzaldúa auto-ethnography of bearing witness.

Keywords: Gloria Anzaldua, Mizrahi studies, auto-ethnography, World anthropology, ethnographic methodology, Palestine-Israel, transnational feminism of color, racialized classification.

On 16 October 2009, while teaching at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville's Women's Studies Department, I attended a lecture by Brinda Bose, then an associate professor of English at the Hindu College of Delhi University. The lecture was titled "The Transnational Trials of Taslima Nasrin." Trained as a physician, Nasrin is a Bangladeshi feminist who has written an impressive opus on women's oppression under South Asian Islam. She was forced into exile in Sweden due to multiple *fatwas*² calling for her death. Bose delivered her postcolonial lecture in Oxbridge English in a sari. As I listened to Nasrin's globe-trotting, my mind

- 1 This essay was originally published in *El Mundo Zurdo 8: Selected Works from the 2019 Meeting of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldua*, edited by Adrianna M. Santos, Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz and Norma E. Cantu (Aunt Lute Press, San Francisco 2022). The author wishes to thank the editors and publisher of the collection for their permission to publish it in this edited volume.
- 2 A *Fatwā* (Arabic) is a nonbinding legal opinion on a point of Islamic law (*sharia*) given by a qualified jurist in response to a question posed by a private individual, judge, or government.

wandered to the logistics of it all. Is Bose a product of India's elite British schools? Who paid for her Oxbridge education? Nasrin and Bose seemed to be on the Global South-to-North traveling star circuit. Who's financing all of this? Even refugees need to pay a hefty fee to be smuggled across borders. Are they middle class? Who can afford to be mobile these days? Yet these kinds of speakers and their topics are in high demand in Northern universities because they speak the language of academe, not the transnational language of Gloria Anzaldúa.

The Faculty Club: North to South³

Many professors in major universities in the Global South were born into the upper-class, cosmopolitan, national elite. They are either well-versed in English or have the funds to translate their scholarship to English—the tyrannical language of academic quotation and promotion. These professors are eager, or perhaps obligated, to apply the United States-United Kingdom (US-UK) formula for academic publication. The formula requires substantiating the anthropological argument's authenticity through the deployment of field snippets. Such snippets emanate from the vagaries of daily life—ethnographic examples, devoid of their organic context—to decorate theories authored in US-European elite universities. As a result, these scholars are perceived by their North American colleagues as the preferred women of color scholars from the Global South. They are the favored alternatives to the in-house American scholars of color from the *ghetto* or *barrio*. But what about grassroots indigenous or migrant nonacademic, organic *teoría*?

The Global South faculty often conceives of this *teoría* as an unruly frontier of thought to be tamed or contained in first-tier English journals or university press monographs. Such publications are necessary for their career advancement. Annual international association meetings at five-star hotels present an opportunity to network with editorial board members as well. US-European faculty perceives the Global South faculty as brave interlocutors between the Ivy League and the subalterns of 'the field'. The Global South faculty (unless they have achieved celebrity status in the North) are often seen as emancipatory 'informants' to be theorized by Northern faculty. In turn, these cosmopolitan Southern scholars conceive of nonacademic, grassroots theoreticians as their

3 These issues stem from the discussion of ethnographic authorship in my recent book *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel* (2018).

‘informants,’ and their texts as data to theorize from. This domino effect of appropriation is laid out in Norma Alarcón’s formative 1990 text “The Theoretical Subjects of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism.”

Alarcón points at the feminist of color theoretical richness underlying the essays, poems, testimonials, and tales in *This Bridge Called My Back* (Short title, *Bridge*) (“Theoretical Subjects”). She writes, “On the [one] hand, Anglo feminist readers of *Bridge* tend to appropriate it, cite it as an instance of difference by subsuming women of color into the unitary category of woman/women” (Alarcón 1990, 358). On the other hand, Anglo feminist humanities faculty treated *Bridge* as a mine to theorize from for their merit and promotion publications. They treated the feminist theory of color as atavistic repository and ignored its radical, alternative modes of writing up theory as they conjured up the “universal woman,” whose class and race were not as significant as her XX chromosomes. Yet, for women of color, *Bridge* was a cornerstone of identification (Ibid. 358–60).

John Gledhill (2004) has argued that the US-UK anthropological journal and book formula and its “northern conventions of research, writing, and thinking about the world” has low tolerance for an ethnographer doubling as an indigenous “key informant” who theorizes rather than just tells stories. The anthropologist should not have near-complete overlap between her ethnographic experience and personal and communal biography. Feminist and Cultural Studies scholarship follows and instructs the scholar to avoid the victim narratives. The subaltern subject writing the US-UK formula is expected to produce dispassionate scholarship. No wailing, no anger.

The black anthropologist Faye Harrison offers a way out: “The transformed anthropology [...] would recognize that although the profession’s institutional centers have been dominated by British, American, and French axes of authority, the intellectual life of the discipline has extended well beyond the North’s major metropolitan centers to a variety of sites, typically devalued as peripheral zones of theory around the world” (Harrison 2008, 11). Yet, her solution does not address the multilayered appropriation operation spelled out by Alarcón. Alarcón’s focus is the racial and class hierarchies of US academe. Hers is a made-in-America pyramid whose foundation is the somatic experience of the displaced woman, uprooted from the South and planted in the North to suffer and mimize her pain into stories for the Anglo US-UK Women’s Studies scholars to theorize. Alarcón conceives of such colored articulations as theory, however. Harrison focuses on decentering anthropology beyond its elite-Ivy-League, US-UK stranglehold, often overlooking the privileged background of Global South faculty such as Brinda Bose. Yet scholars, such as Bose, while data-

mined for Northern anthropologists, are still the North's client in the patronage system of the academy. Nevertheless, both Northern anthropologists and their Global South constituents, who depend on them for references and tenure letters, created a body of scholarship—one that superimposes itself upon the subaltern woman of the South rather than horizontally dialoguing with her.

In recent years, US-UK anthropology has diversified in forms of theoretical argumentation and in various genres of ethnographic writing. But this diversity, let alone an ethnographer having a near-complete overlap between her ethnographic experience and personal and communal biography, rarely appears in the top tier US-UK journals or scholarly presses. Take, for example, Ruth Behar. Despite her class privilege, she used herself as a 'key informant' through creative writing about disenfranchised Latinas (Behar 1993). She was an anthropologist coming from Princeton and Ann Arbor, so she did not threaten her upper-middle-class colleagues. Even then, her more creative writings rarely appear in top tier anthropology journals. Autoethnographer Zora Neale Hurston never published her story of being an independent scholar living in dire poverty in top journals or academic presses. She died virtually abandoned and destitute at age 69. How ironic and tragic that she only achieved acclaim years after her death for works such as 1937's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Anzaldúa died at age 62 from lack of adequate medical care. Her monumental autoethnography, *Borderlands/La Frontera* was published by Aunt Lute Books, a small, underfunded feminist press, because larger university presses deemed it incomprehensible. Overnight, *Borderlands* became an academic and activist bestseller to the dismay of the academic establishment. Mainstream anthropologists opined in 2003 that the book was "an industry" and that Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* was a "celebration" and "a leisure issue" (Friedman et al. 2004, 567).⁴ I vividly recall anthropologists offering unsparing critiques of Anzaldúa in various panels at the *American Anthropological Association's* annual meetings in the early-to-mid-1990s. Perhaps, given the prominence of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/Frontera*, these conference presentations were not published as refereed journal articles or book chapters. The quotes from 2003 are the closest example of these critiques I could find in print.

Regrettably, the University of California bestowed upon Anzaldúa a long-deserved PhD—posthumously. In fact, the US-Euro-centered decolonization of anthropology has actually led to further colonization of the discipline as it was

4 These quotes are taken from a conversation between three notable European anthropologists, who, back in the early 2000s, began to explore issues around the ethnography of the right wing. Right Wing studies did not become a point of interest in the US academic mainstream until the 2016 election, despite ultranationalism's ever-presence in the Euro-American social fabric.

mainly unidirectional. Theory continues to be formulated and articulated in US-European metropolitan universities, and the data, now decolonized, continues to come from the Third World or “Third Worlded” Western metropolises (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

The *Conocimiento* model and the stuff of life

Gloria Anzaldúa followed the path of Audre Lorde, who, thirty-five years ago, wrote *The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism*, where she advocates for the articulation of raw anger in academic texts: “the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal and cooptation.” Lorde argues that anger in academic language should retain emotional power because it is “a liberating and strengthening act of clarification.” She discusses the multivocal orchestration of anger as text: “Women of color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness [...]. And I say symphony rather than cacophony because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies” (Lorde 1984, 124–133).

In the early 1980s, Lorde and Anzaldúa continued the groundwork for the Post-structuralist analysis of culture from an intersectional-subject position first laid out in 1977 by the *Combahee River Collective* (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; see also Moya 2002, 66–99; Alarcón). Shortly thereafter, the US-UK academic world adopted Post-structuralism as it continued to trend in France from the previous decade. Yet Lorde and Anzaldúa’s contribution to the made-in-America deconstructionist theory went, at best, unacknowledged, or ignored altogether. Their theories were dismissed as biographical ruminations, as each wrote from the margins of academia and the mainstream feminist movement of the time.

A key instrument in Anzaldúa’s theoretical and methodological toolkit is her use of the word *conocimiento*, or ‘knowledge’. *Conocimiento* is not simply ‘knowledge’, but rather a model that arranges the innate, underlying, raw emotions from the lived experience of the subaltern, racialized woman. This experience becomes a conscientious, flowing system of insights that derive meanings and modes of being or acting in the world. The model implores the racialized woman to articulate her raw emotion through seven stages: aftershock, the in-between, despair, call for action, putting the pieces together and testing them, rebirth, and spiritual activism (Anzaldúa 2015, 117–159). This model captures the life

cycle of subaltern, racialized women and lends itself to contextual cross-cultural comparisons.

Anzaldúa theorizes about the very specific path of the individual woman of color. Her data-set stems from the *autohistoria* of her own self. She does not, however, follow the self-fashioning formula designated for the construction and deconstruction of the US-UK analytical subject. Rather, her life and words are planted in multiple communities as she contemporaneously crosses borders between and among them all. This is her journey on the *conocimiento* path.

Written from a marginalized space, Anzaldúa's pathbreaking *autohistoria-teoría* framework was trivialized for years as only testimony. This Anzaldúan framework received only marginal reference in the transnational feminist arenas of scholarship and activism. But, as Anzaldúa writes, we have shifted. *Frontera* was published by Aunt Lute. *Light in the Dark* was published by Duke University Press, the Ivy League academic publisher.

Conocimiento "requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid [...] confront[ing], the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades" (Anzaldúa 2015, 118). Anzaldúa's *facultades*, or agency, cannot be separated from the shadow beast, as the enactment of the shadow beast-*facultad* involves not only courage but fear. Describing the interplay between the enactment of agency and the very fear of the woman of color from enacting her agency, Anzaldúa writes, "The knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them. Seeing through these cracks makes you uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of yourself (shadow beasts) that you don't want to own" (Ibid. 132).

The rigid US-UK formula standardizes the explication of the stuff of life. But Anzaldúa allows for a range of non-standardized arguments illuminated and interconnected from within, what anthropologist, Michael Taussig termed their "epistemic murk" (Taussig 1986, 121–135)—the state of being so immersed in violence to the point that it is difficult to identify any particular source for it. The state of constantly journeying into "the heart of darkness" as a subaltern subject, until one experiences both madness and passion. Always moving, yet stuck in the confinement of race, gender, nation, and religion (Lavie 2011). Anzaldúa's refusal of Cartesian orderliness is imperative to the decolonization of the social theory. The very narration of these intrinsic, disorderly interconnections from within the murk has led to the stymieing of Anzaldúan genres from scholarship. This is not permitted by the gatekeepers, ever dutiful, who oversee the anonymous review process of major US-UK journals and scholarly presses.

Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* model calls for a reconceptualization of the relationships among communities of subaltern scholarly knowledge. She calls for the replacement of monological and unidirectional anthropology with the multivocal polyphony of *autohistoria* and *auto-ethnografía*, thus paving the way for a more creative and egalitarian environment that is embedded in inchoate communities. Her analytical categories engage the local. For her, the local is not data to be ethnographed by English-language metropolitans, but theory that refuses to adhere to the US-UK pretense of analytical coherence. Anzaldúa refuses to re-appropriate informant vignettes as she generalizes her model: "*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (Anzaldúa 1987, 79).

***La Llorona's Teoría* travels to Palestine-Israel**

While Lordé's focus is anger, one of Anzaldúa's main figures is *La Llorona*: "a woman who wails [...] a sight of intersection, connection, and cultural transgression" (in Keating 2015, xiv). "Betrayed for generations, traumatized by racial denigration and exclusion, we are almost buried by grief's heavy pall. We never forget our wounds. *La Llorona*, our dark mother, with her perpetual, mournful song [...]. Our symbol of unresolved grief, an ever-present specter in our psyches [...]" (Anzaldúa 2015, 88). "*La Llorona's* wailing in the night for her lost children has an echoing note in the wailing or mourning rights performed by women. As they bid their sons, brothers, and husbands goodbye, [...] wailing is [...] a Chicana woman's feeble protest when she has no other recourse. This collective wailing rights [...] [are/is] a sign of resistance in a society which glorified the warrior and war and for whom the women were booty" (Ibid. 33). Anzaldúa employs *La Llorona*, a historical-mythical figure from Latin American folklore,⁵ as part of her theoretical and methodological toolkit. *La Llorona*, the

5 *La Llorona* is a prominent oral legend in Latin America, specifically, Mexican folklore. The colonialist lore states that a woman was unloved by her husband who loved their two sons instead. After catching her husband with another woman, she drowned her sons before drowning herself in a river out of grief and anger. Upon arriving at heaven's gates, she was refused entry until she could find the souls of her two sons. As a result, she cries and wails, taking children and drowning them in that same river. Chicana feminism rescues *La Llorona* as a hero who drowned her children so that the Spaniards would not enslave them.

wailing woman, represents the unanswered and unacknowledged cries of pain that she, and other subaltern women of color, endure.

After an impressive genealogy of struggle, North American women faculty of color are finally gaining the ability to express emotions in their academic publications and write in mixed genre—as long as they have tenure.⁶ But, this feat remains impossible for middle-to-lower class women scholars from the Global South, such as Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Mizrahim. It is beyond the scope of this essay to address Palestinian feminist scholarship coming from Israel or the non-Western Palestinian diaspora. Nevertheless, stepping into the Anzaldúan tracks, I write here about *mi gente*.⁷

Mizrahim (Easterners) are Jews from the Arab and Muslim World and margins of the Ottoman Empire and are Israel's demographic majority at 50 percent. Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are about 20 percent of Israel's citizenry. Ashkenazim, Jews originating from Yiddish-speaking countries, are only 30 percent, but they control the division of power and privilege in the State. Mizrahi women do not fall under the North American classification of the “woman of color.” We are expected to use the US-UK formula of dispassionate scholarship because the underlying assumption is that we are elite—our parents paid for our expensive Ivy League PhDs. My parents drilled me, and I drilled my son to ace his courses, because our only way to receive education abroad (and in English) was by OPM—Other People's Money or performance-based scholarships. No affirmative action for Mizrahim in the United States. No affirmative action for Mizrahim in Israel. Even though we are racialized and minoritized, we are the demographic majority. The State of Israel will never admit to its own intra-Jewish racial formations as it is the designated post-Holocaust Jewish homeland on the lands of British Mandatory Palestine. No rectification. In the Jewish state, all Jews are supposed to be equal, or so Zionist rhetoric would claim.

Zionism is a European ideology of Jewish nationalism whose main goal was to colonize Palestine in order to establish a Jewish State. It can be described as an ethnic by-product of the rise of modernist nationalism in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. The Jewish State in Palestine was to redeem the persecuted Eastern European Jews through importing the European cultural technology to Palestine. Concurrently, it planned to reinforce its conception of European

6 An excellent, recent example of one such courageous, emotive authorship is Laura Pérez's essay collection, *Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial*. Published by Duke University Press, the book challenges the US-UK model of writing culture through a variety of evocative, poetic styles set aside from its academic language.

7 Unfortunately, aside from the Anzaldúan vocabulary, I know no Spanish.

superiority through primitivization of the native Palestinians. Unsubscribing from Zionism is a White, Ashkenazi privilege. It comes with trust funds, inheritances, home ownership, and the ability to pull strings, benefits unavailable to Mizrahim. The best way to silence Mizrahi feminist resistance is through financial deprivation.

Furthermore, Mizrahi feminist author-activists who opt out of Zionism (with or without experiencing the ‘aftershock’ stage in Anzaldúa’s model) are not only caught in the US-UK formula. They must fight to carve out a third space between the binarisms available for international public consumption: One is the Jewish State versus its Arab-enemy neighboring states. The other is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are prevented from articulating the in-between, be it W. E. B. Dubois’s 1903 *Between Me and the World* (in *The Souls*) or Chela Sandoval’s delineation of the space between Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* in his 1967 autoethnography (Sandoval 2000, 83–86). We are not allowed Lorde’s anger or Anzaldúa’s wailing. Abroad, we are Israeli Jews. In Israel, we are troublemakers—a demographic ‘in-between’ majority, devoid of majoritarian rights, who disturbs the simplistic Palestine-Israel or Arab-Jew binary known to the world. If we sell out, we might fit into the well-funded disciplines of Israeli and Jewish Studies. If not, we still cannot benefit from the welcome boom of critical publications on the Israel-Palestine binary. We are not ‘Arab Jews’ either. That is a historical concept that ceased to exist with the foundation of the Israeli State in 1948, and, at any rate, our own communities loathe the term.

We fall into silence when we refuse the containment enforced on our critique of Zionism in the name of Israeli ethnic diversity—diversity that masks itself in the illusion of free speech that lifts once we understand how and how far our criticisms of Zionism are permitted to reach. For us, after the Anzaldúan ‘aftershock’ stage, when we are on the *conocimiento* tracks and can understand the reality of Israel and the Arab World, Zionism is racism. We fall into silence when we upset the Palestinian national narrative whose secular, academic intelligentsia dialogues with the upper-class post- or anti-Zionist Ashkenazi elites we debunk. Progressive North American feminists of color and Anglo-feminists alike, stuck on the Israel-Palestine binary, label our wailing ‘polemics’ due to our dismantling of the comfortable progressive binarism of the Israel-Palestine narrative. Our grassroots works are omitted from the global circulation of feminists of color texts. What remains for us then? Wailing. So, we wail.

We, Mizrahi feminists, encompass both the shadow beast and *facultad*. Mainstream Mizrahi leaders, who align themselves with the Ashkenazi hegemony, and thus deny any intra-Jewish racial conflict, are referred to in Mizrahi-

activist slang as ‘kapos’ suffering from “Mizrahi kapo syndrome.” ‘Kapos’ were concentration camp prisoners employed by Nazis as low-level management in exchange for subsistence level privileges. In turn, Ashkenazi mainstream and its Mizrahi ‘kapos’ judge anyone who speaks out about intra-Jewish race relations as guilty of *le-hitbakhyen*. In Hebrew, this means whining and being a crybaby. The term *le-hitbakhyen* is usually deployed by those Ashkenazim who, by default, articulate what they advertise as “the Israeli discourse of pluralist enlightenment.” Their pluralism is rooted in meritocracy—equal opportunities based only on the skills, talents, and efforts of individuals devoid of their communal background. To them, entering the academic elite is a result of one working hard, and has nothing to do with money, the color of our skins, or our genders. So when we cannot use the advancement road they delineated for us, they conceive of our failure as personal, not communal. We are simply not enlightened enough to enter the sphere of their US-European renaissance humanism. We are atavistic because we do our best to rescue our traditions they violently attempted to eliminate since they brought us to Palestine as their Jewish blue-collar labor. They are the (post)modernists. We try to rebuild the communities they destroyed, and this makes us backward losers. Therefore, our plights are the wailings of cry-babies who had the bad luck of being born poor in the wrong neighborhoods. This allows them to control the discourse of advocating genuine social justice, as their White privilege permits them to discursively decolonize Zionism. We, as the majority, however, must adhere to Zionism—not the discourse but the practice—if we want to make it into their elite time-space. As we enter it, we can enjoy the liberation they envision for us, but only as individuals. Concurrently, our majoritarian communities’ adherence to Zionism is the springboard that allows the enlightened Ashkenazim to criticize it while maintaining their privileges harking back to their European colonization of Palestine. And when we wail, they pull out of their sleeve the success of our Mizrahi ‘kapos’.

The mindset of the Mizrahi ‘kapo’ is part of the structural-functional Parsonian analytical paradigm (Parsons) so prevalent in universalism vs. particularism’s vulgar analysis of Israeli society offered by Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt. From the early 1940s on, Eisenstadt was not only a luminary sociologist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He also designed policies that stripped Mizrahim of their culture, language, and family structure, and oversaw their execution so that Mizrahim degenerated into low-income laborers for the Zionist machine. He and his students remain crucial actors in the revolving door between Israel’s academe and regime. To this day, their influence over Israeli social sciences is vigilant, as they continue to edit out scholarship and policy that deviates from this model.

Eisenstadt's ideological paradigm impacted Zionist policymakers as they shaped Israel's white-on-white public sphere. Within this sphere, the Ashkenazim are the true, progressive Israelis, and therefore, universalists. Their privilege, transparent. We are left with divisive, primitivist, ethnic particularism. So, we wail.

The most notable examples given for the evocation of *le-hitbakhuyen* are the *Yemenite Children Affair* and the *Ringworm Affair*. These epitomize the Ashkenazi Zionist's perpetual denial of racially motivated atrocities and trivialization of Mizrahi feminists' legitimate outcries. Those who speak out are deemed as wailing without cause.

The Yemenite Children Affair was the systematic kidnapping of roughly 5,000 light-skinned Mizrahi, Balkan, and Yemeni babies from the 1930s through the 1970s. Health officials alleged that these infants were ill and subsequently died, falsifying documents for their families without providing a body. Ashkenazi Zionist politicians and bureaucrats sold or gave away these children in unconsented adoptions to childless Ashkenazi families in Israel and abroad. While the State of Israel is notorious for its rigorous archival practices, the archives intended to research and educate on this affair remain closed until 2066, with many hospital and court documents having conspicuously disappeared (Madmoni-Gerber 2009). Alternative archives on the affair, established by longtime Mizrahi activists, caught fire during unexplained electrical shortages.⁸

Repeated suggestions by activists to file in the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, were refused by the families. Mizrahim paradoxically love the State that continuously tortures them. As a group, they tend to vote for ultranationalist parties (Lavie 2018). From the 1880s on, the Zionist socialist parties designed and upheld policies of intra-Jewish apartheid. As Mizrahim became Israel's demographic majority, they refused to endorse the parties that originated their subjugation. Until 1977, the right was the underdog of Israeli politics while Ashkenazi Zionist Socialist parties dominated. Then, the system was overturned by the Mizrahi vote. Post-Holocaust, Israeli and diaspora Jews conceive of the Jewish State as the last line of Jewish defense. No dirty laundry revealing; otherwise, it may be washed out in The Hague, before the *goyim* public. *Goyim* are non-Jews, and, in colloquial Hebrew, 'the enemy'.⁹

8 It is interesting to differentiate between the official testimonies and figures provided by the Israeli regime (1053 cases), more updated data (about 2,000 cases) documented by scholar Nathan Shifris (2019), and estimates by activists (5,000 cases).

9 Due to public pressure, partial segments of State archival documents for the *Yemeni Children Affair* became available in 2018, but much of the material on these documents has been redacted. The majority of these documents are sealed off indefinitely.

The *Ringworm Children Affair* was when roughly 150,000 Mizrahi children were irradiated with high dose X-rays in the 1950s without their parents' consent or knowledge. The monumental documentary film *The Ringworm Children* by David Belhassen and Asher Hemias argues that about 75,000 Mizrahi children were radiated against 'ringworm'.¹⁰ Current estimates find that this number reflects roughly a half of those irradiated. In Mizrahi history, this is a key example of the State-sanctioned violence against non-European immigrants. According to Belhassen and Hemias, the experiment was possibly funded by the CIA. These children grew up to develop ailments such as cancer, thyroid problems, and tumors without access to their own medical files from the experiment as they were deemed 'classified'. They continue to suffer from lifelong disabilities, if not already having succumbed to an early death.

Their ailments, and the resulting lack of income or sufficient compensatory funds, made suing the responsible physicians and policy makers impossible. They could not afford to purchase justice in the attorney marketplace, whereas suing a Jewish state for collective crimes against its own people is impossible. The development of these children was documented, well into adulthood, by the Israeli physicians responsible. Their souls rest between the pages of the most prestigious, English-language medical journals. Like the *Yemenite Children Affair* activism, the *Ringworm* activism was initiated by right-wing Mizrahim. Mizrahim refer to the *Ringworm Affair* and the *Yemenite Children Affair* as "our holocaust." I have written elsewhere that, in Israel, the 'right' is 'left', and the 'left' is the right wing (Lavie 2011, 2018). No dirty laundry washed out in front of the *goyim*. Needless to say that studying this affair from the families' or activists' perspective is taboo in Israeli universities, unless supervised by an Ashkenazi professor patron.

Israel, founded on Mandatory Palestine, conceives of itself as the national home of all world Jewry. Are not all Jews assumed equal in the homeland of the Jews? But members of Israel's Mizrahi majority find it next to impossible to present any case for racial discrimination in court. Their cases are almost always disarmed and stripped of legitimacy by accusations of *le-hitbakhyen*. Yet, this wailing rarely travels, nor does it ever transcend the boundaries of the Israeli State where the tyranny of the Hebrew language is one of Zionism's most successful miracles. The author and translation professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Anton Shamma is known mainly for his writings in Hebrew and translations of

10 For further information about *The Ringworm Affair*, please see, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ringworm_affair.

Palestinian literature from Arabic to Hebrew. He told me, “Zionism gave the Jews a territory in the form of language. Hebrew is the only real victory of Zionism. The Hebrew that was resurrected was not the Mizrahi Hebrew. And that was the tragedy” (Shammas in Lavie 1992, 103). Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has had no internationally recognized border. No Oxbridge English in Mizrahi *ghetto* and *barrio* schools. No funds for translation, unless provided by the Israeli Ministry of Education that can bear the brunt of the bill. So the Israel-Palestine binary endures. The Mizrahi in-between is not a ‘legitimate tragedy’.

How long can the regime depend on Mizrahi docile loyalty to the Jewish state? It is first blood — a fin-de-siècle racial wound inflicted by the Ashkenazi Zionist Left. So deep, yet invisible. An apartheid system where everyone knows their place, all entranced by the drumbeat of the miraculous ingathering of the diasporas. Like all Israelis, Mizrahim benefited from the occupation of Palestine. For the Israeli Left, protesting the occupation produces international funding for their NGOs. As elites abroad, they enjoy the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the global activist circuits, while at home, like all Israelis, they enjoy the constant economic boom the occupation generates for Israel’s financial elites. For the Mizrahim, the occupation provides housing solutions in the West Bank settlements—close to Israel’s employment sites in its center, yet outside Israel’s center’s unaffordable real estate bubble.

Creating a third space for Mizrahi *lloronas* is an ongoing fight for justice. The Israeli regime continues to appropriate Mizrahi identity politics as its veneer of civility to mask from view its racial atrocities. Opting out of Zionism, we remain unclassified. Staying in is tempting. The regime will fund our tours for the North American-European diasporas, perform our songs, poetry, plays, and art as tokens of diversity. The strings are attached: not a word on Palestine. *Sin frontera*. Walls, checkpoints, barbed wire, and minefields. The Israeli Ashkenazi hegemonic center keeps usurping, as its own frontier, the borderzones between European and Arab, Israeli and Palestinian, and Ashkenazi and Mizrahi. Not only is it difficult to distinguish the Israeli nation from its imperialism, but this overlap of *nation* and *empire* is imprecise and constantly in flux. Some vestiges of one or the other are always left over. The inner borders where these vestiges meet the larger central area, where nation and empire are fused, might be the only zones remaining for us to create, and in Hebrew. Because we are unclassified, racialized subjects, our creations rarely travel abroad or get translated to English, the tyrannical language of quotation. There is no “crossover” (Anzaldúa 1987, 49). Our wails are in modern Hebrew, a language resurrected by Europeans, that has become our native tongue.

A wail

On 20 March 2005, the *Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow* NGO held a book launch to celebrate Aharon Yitzhaki's book *The Mask: Introduction to Ethnic Strategy in the State of Israel—Comparative Research*. This self-published tome discusses, among other topics, the compliance of Israeli leftist academia with the regime and its apartheid toward Mizrahim. The book refers to Israeli universities' social science and humanities professors as "mercenaries of the pen." Likewise, the book dwells on the docility and lackluster thinking required of Mizrahi intellectuals, male by default, to get a foot in Israeli academe's door. If they are well-behaved, they will gain entry. During the discussion, a fierce young Mizrahi feminist stood out :

Their racism toward us has gotten so sophisticated in the university. They used to totally shut me up, labeling me as *mitbakhyenet miktzo`it* (one who made wailing about racial issues into an expertise), but I've had it with their kissing ass to the Palestinians, as if our resistance needed a kosher stamp from them (the Palestinians) to be valid. [...] Now they pretend they're listening to our wails. Unlike the Palestinians, we are not a category for teaching about social justice or human rights in the law school curriculum. We belong in their anthropology and folklore departments. As Jews, under the law we have equal rights. But when I insist [that] I am a legal category of racinated discrimination, they just mumble around, so we can move on. I'm the only loudmouth Mizrahi in the classroom, and they're just waiting to see how long it will take me to get worn out and sell out. Enough with this tying everything to the Palestinians! Let them cling to their Ashkenazim, whose racism toward us is now all but undetectable. In my parents' time, it was plain as day. Now we need X-ray vision to see it. That's how we're losing the younger generation. They see racism as just over, because if you see it, it hurts like hell. It's so subtle and so cruel, like cuts in live flesh [where] you can't see the blood.

* * *

It is my hope that the unclassified, grassroots Anzaldúan scholar from the Global South can shift. That she is no longer given the default elite status. That she is able to publish academically through the *conocimiento* model of bearing witness to herself and society. This might horizontalize the power dynamics between and among feminists of color in US-European elite academe, feminist faculty in the Global South, and grassroots feminist intellectuals from the Global South. To lend myself to Harrison's vision, we need to listen to, read, and quote feminist

theory from ex-centric sites and break away from the Anglophone dominance of scholarship. Given that we cannot undo the tyranny of English, now let us shift to translation. Let us shift to the transnational language of Gloria Anzaldúa.

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