

# Beyond Hummus and Falafel

*Social and Political Aspects  
of Palestinian Food in Israel*

Liora Gvion

*Translated by David Wesley and Elana Wesley*



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*In memory of my parents:  
Margalit Gvion (born as Paula Heitner) and  
Raphael Gvion (born as Felix Grynbaum)*

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## Preface to the American Edition

A couple of months after my book came out in Israel, I received a phone call from a Palestinian journalist who works for a major local television station. “We need to talk,” he said in a tone I could not interpret with certainty. Having done many interviews as part of my research, I tried to get a sense of what the conversation was going to be about. He was, after all, the first and only Palestinian journalist who had expressed interest in my book.

More than being concerned about the nature of our talk, I was curious. A number of blog comments written by Palestinians in reference to reviews of my book were quite critical, to say the least, about the fact that a Jewish woman “dared writing about our food,” as they put it. “We are tired of being folklorized and looked down on,” said others. It made me feel uncomfortable. I had not intended to folklorize Palestinian food culture nor to look down on it while also capitalizing on it. If there was one thing I was proud of, it was my success in detaching Palestinian culinary knowledge from its folklorized version and constructing its narrative in a way that included all its complexities and hidden political dimensions.

“Why did you want to talk to me?” was my first question to the Palestinian journalist when we finally met. He looked a little uncomfortable as he told me that, upon receiving my book from a Jewish friend, he, too, had bristled at the idea of his culinary narrative being written by a Jewish scholar. He was tired of being an object of scientific investigation, of being observed by outsiders, especially those who claimed entitlement to the land he felt was his. The friend, I was told, promised he would buy the journalist dinner at a good restaurant in Tel Aviv should he still think, after reading the book, that the author had offended either the Palestinian people or their food culture. “I was looking forward to having this dinner,” the journalist explained, “but about halfway through the book,” he continued with a smile, “I had to admit that I, too, had fallen into ethnocentric pitfalls.” When I asked what made him change his mind, he said, “Your interviewees told you things we never tell Jews, and you did not hide it from your readers. You just brought the reality straight to their faces.” I do not think I have ever been moved by a reader’s comment as much as I was moved by this

observation. This particular compliment made me aware of the various attributes that, I believe, make this book important for both Israeli and American readers.

When I first started researching the Palestinian kitchen in Israel, I encountered a lot of resentment—mostly from political activists, but also from some colleagues, both Jews and Palestinians, who questioned the legitimacy of my study. Many of them felt it was not proper for a Jewish Israeli woman to penetrate the Palestinian kitchen. “Their cuisine is for them to study” was a sentence I heard throughout my fieldwork. No answers were given to my questions: Why is it okay for Jews in general, and Jewish men in particular, to study Palestinians’ political views, voting patterns, incomes, or educational achievements—but not their culinary culture? Why would my study encourage the appropriation of Palestinian dishes, while studies on marriage or family patterns were not seen as an obstacle to women’s mobility or a questioning of their virtues?

To this day, I am not sure what caused these reactions. Was it my determination to touch on the topic of food—a topic many scholars see as frivolous and unworthy of sociological investigation? It was only recently that I realized the reaction was something more than the general disrespect food scholars often encountered. In fact, for many Palestinians food was far from frivolous. Palestinian food and eating habits were one of the few topics Jewish scholars had not touched on, and thus food represented one dimension of life over which Palestinians had total control. As I proceeded with my study, I came to understand that social, political, financial, and gender issues lay behind daily food practices, and that food revealed social relations, tradition, pride, and resistance, all put in a pot and cooked—not necessarily to everyone’s liking—into a multilayered repast. I was not a natural guest at these meals. I was an intruder who worked her way through pots, pans, pantries, and spices, a guest who asked questions, helped children with their homework, accompanied women in their shopping and to their social gatherings, and always accepted an invitation to join a meal.

I believe that my reading of Palestinian cuisine and the social practices involved in food production, as acknowledged by the Palestinian journalist, reveals how limited the contacts and interactions between Jews and Palestinians in Israel are. The astonishment expressed by the Palestinian journalist at my understanding of Palestinian attitudes toward food also emphasizes the political dimension that underlies all interactions between the two peoples. The two groups accept each other as individuals; sometimes friendships are even formed and sustained. At the same time, Jews have difficulty accepting Palestinians as a group that is entitled to social recognition even as they preserve their distinctive features. I met Palestinians who accused my people of showing disrespect to and a lack of interest in their food culture, and who feared that the lack of mutual respect between us would hinder the chances of Palestinian citizens realizing their full civil and political rights.

My intention was not only to bring forward the Palestinian narrative on food. I also wanted to interweave the story of food with stories of the daily lives of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, relating food practices with the politics of identity and the economic reality in which Palestinians live. I wanted to explore such questions as: How do political conditions shape the Palestinian culinary repertoire? How has the cessation of domestic agriculture affected the Palestinian rural family? And to what extent do daily

or occasional encounters with Jews—as fellow workers, neighbors, professionals, or soldiers—influence and change the Palestinian diet?

My contribution, I hope, is not only in pointing out the distinctive features of Palestinian cuisine and its modes of food consumption. I intend to show how food positions the Palestinian citizens of Israel as a distinct social group with particular concerns and interests. Their social, economic, and political interests are different both from those of Jewish Israelis and from those of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The ongoing support of Palestinians in Israel for an independent Palestinian state has led to a general neglect by the Jewish public, the Israeli government, and the Western world, all of whom fail to realize the unique needs and interests of Palestinians in Israel. It has also contributed to a widespread assumption that the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state will solve problems for the Palestinian citizens of Israel as well. I hope that my book conveys the particular position of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, who struggle to have their own interests recognized within Israeli society, on the one hand, and to support the Palestinian struggle, on the other hand.

Let me take you on a journey to a foreign culture of the people who live in geographic proximity to me. Some of them are my next-door neighbors; others are my students, colleagues, physicians, or plumbers. And yet before I embarked on this study, I knew little about their food, and they know not much about mine. This book is a journey to kitchens that are often better equipped than my own, and for one major reason: new kitchen technologies enable the preparation of traditional dishes in less time and with less effort and thus make possible the preservation of those dishes.

Together we will look at the domestic knowledge involved in food production and learn about the ways in which Palestinian women use food as a means of negotiating positions both in the home and in the broader community. I argue that despite the large amount of culinary knowledge at their disposal by virtue of their being responsible for feeding their families, Palestinian women only moderately and informally negotiate the extent of their dissent from the existing social order. Although they experience a dual subjugation—both at the hands of the patriarchal system of Palestinian society and as female citizens in Israeli society—they go no further than asserting the informal power that their role in the family and the community grants them.

My study of Palestinian kitchens and their modernization exposed me to the ways in which food becomes a major component of identity. By studying food I could detect the process through which a Palestinian Arab identity has emerged in Israel in the shadow of a dominant Jewish culture and show how, in light of the above, Palestinian cuisine combines tradition and modernity. Interestingly, the home and its women are the agents of modernity, while restaurants preserve traditional foods and portray traditional social relationships.

I am often asked what I am left with, now that the work is finished. I have learned that I need not fear the study of the unknown. I have realized over and over again how welcoming my informants were when I asked questions about what for them was “common sense.” The contradictions I encountered, the critics of Israeli society, the dissatisfaction of my informants from their position in Israel are all brought forward for you to read, so that you may evaluate and draw your own conclusions. I was lucky to have interviewed women and men who were grateful and proud to deliver their

truth, and I feel fortunate that I had the chance to listen.

## Preface to the Original Edition

### *As If We Were Eskimos—A Most Personal Opening*

I was sitting in the living room of Samira's spacious home in Galilee when I felt, for the first time during my fieldwork, like an oppressor.<sup>1</sup> The feeling inched up from my stomach past my chest, causing discomfort, if not embarrassment. "Eat, why aren't you eating my cake?" she pressed. She was about to serve me a second piece, although I had hardly finished the first one. "Beirut Nights," she called it, a delicious cake I could not bring myself to enjoy. Had I not known that Samira defines herself as a Palestinian citizen of the state of Israel, I would have thought of her as a typical Jewish mother. We were talking about food. The conversation was technical and strained—I hadn't managed to break through the wall separating researcher from informant; I could not get through to her. We sounded like distant acquaintances exchanging recipes. Yet here and there, interwoven in the conversation, were threads not typical of women's conversations. The longer Samira tried to accommodate me, the more strongly I felt I was not reaching her. She weighed every word as though she were speaking from her head and not her stomach. And it was her stomach I wanted to hear. She kept asking whether the information she was conveying to me was relevant, whether I was learning new things from her, and especially whether the information she was providing would enable me to write an authentic and accurate cookbook. "Because I don't cook according to an exact number of cups and tablespoons, as you do," she said.

Suddenly I understood, and with the understanding came the colonialist feeling: Samira thought I was writing a cookbook. She thought that I was going to write in my own name a book about her culinary culture—a book that perhaps would have been written by one of her own people, had they been a group with equal rights whose culture was accepted and sought out. I could understand her reservations, which were evident despite her courtesy and amiable readiness to assist me. I was just one more person who came and took notes, tasting a bit of her culture in order to present it as my own. "I'm not writing a cookbook," I said, trying to keep the uneasiness out of my voice. "The amounts aren't important. I'm trying to understand what has happened to you, to your culture, and especially to your food since you and I have been living here together." Incredulous, she responded: "You're not writing a cookbook? Then what are you writing?" At that moment she remembered: "Yes, you did tell me that you're a sociologist and want to know us through food and to understand how our kitchens have changed since we have been living side by side. I forgot. For a moment I thought

you were just another female journalist coming to ask, take notes, and write about our food in the paper as if we were Eskimos.” She let out a brief giggle, adding: “Sometimes they write as if it were the food of their own mothers, without even mentioning us.”

One phrase of Samira’s kept echoing in my head, more than any other I had heard in the course of the hundred interviews I had conducted: “Since we have been living side by side.” Ostensibly just a slight nuance apart from “living here together,” as I had presented the matter, but the expression revealed a different perspective. Whereas I had presented a Zionist view, Samira had presented a delicate version of her reality; she did not say “since we have been living alongside *you*,” which would have emphasized the inequality in our relations. Rather, she gave expression to the distance between us without saying openly that the situation, in which “Israeliness” carries more weight than does “Arabness,” discriminates against her.

Because of this inequality, for a female Jewish author of Ashkenazi origin to write a book about Arab food was a challenging mission. As objective as I might be, as neutral and attentive to the information flowing in my direction, would I succeed in shedding the cultural burdens, stereotypes, and perceptions of the Arab minority that had been implanted inside me during my many years in Israel? Would it be Jewish eyes that did the observing, and an Ashkenazi palate that did the tasting? On the other hand, I was fascinated by the possibility of penetrating a world that was not mine, a world nearby geographically—sometimes no farther than ten minutes from my home—but, at the same time, very far from me, closed to me, the gap between us difficult to bridge. This world’s geography was not a part of mine; it was a world of towns and cities that were nothing more than blurred names on signs at turns in the road that I had never explored. And its culture—with its odors wafting out of the houses, its habits of dress and etiquette, its rules for receiving guests, and its norms of everyday behavior—was completely foreign to me.

Finally, curiosity won out over apprehension. Filled with the desire to meet those with whom I share a disputed land, and aware that I would need to learn alien codes and assign other meanings to familiar words in order to understand things properly, I set out on a compelling journey to other kitchens and eating customs. I entered a world in which traditional odors and new fragrances blended in one pot, in which wild plants, homemade cheeses, and sun-dried wheat watched over by a scarecrow came together with the technology of the microwave oven and home freezer, and in which a group that is a minority in its own land struggles between the need to define a distinct national identity and the constraints and desires involved in being part of the whole and its culture.

The journey was fascinating. People opened up their pantries, kitchen cupboards, and refrigerators for me and invited me to join them for meals. They let me in—not always consciously—to the secrets of their culture, their economic situation, the family hierarchy, and their feelings toward Jews and toward building their own national identities. I accompanied women on their shopping trips to markets or to local shops. I scooped out vegetables to be stuffed and helped pinch pastry dough before it was placed in the oven. Only after I understood that “the odor of Jewish cooking” is an expression meaning food that doesn’t whet the appetite did I realize that the opportunity accorded me to help with the cooking was a great compliment—as if the

odors of Jewish food had not stuck to me and wouldn't adhere to their food.

During our encounters, my interviewees—who were mostly women—attempted to map me cognitively according to the categories with which they were familiar. I quickly understood that my way to their culinary knowledge led through this mapping. I was asked questions that became stepping stones toward defining myself for them and mitigating the sense of strangeness between us, such as: How many children do I have? Who takes care of my children while I'm here with them? Did I study before or after I was married? Am I also a teacher? What do I cook? But there was one question that caused me discomfort and was hard for me to answer because it signified gaps that were difficult to bridge: “Does your husband let you move about this way and meet people?” Educated women asked this question out of curiosity; less-educated women did not always grasp my ability to act as an independent woman who is not subject to the permission of her husband. This question caused me to wonder about the differences between a Jewish woman, educated and working in Israel in the twenty-first century, and an Arab woman in a comparable situation. How do Palestinian women perceive women's liberation?

There were also moments in my fieldwork that caused me to reexamine my attitude toward my own culture and to ask myself questions about my Jewish identity. For example, one time I asked to interview an intellectual couple living in Haifa on the Jewish New Year. There was a pregnant silence on the other end of the line, after which the man said: “All right, you can come if you wish. I didn't think you would want to come to interview us on Rosh Hashanah.” I quickly explained that I don't observe Jewish traditions. When I arrived for the interview, my hosts received me with the greeting “Happy New Year,” and they served me honey cake “so it would be a sweet year.” I am certain that they had no intention of embarrassing me; on the contrary, this was a desire on their part to honor my holiday. After this interview, I decided that I would not conduct any further interviews on Jewish holidays: if I gave the impression that I didn't even honor my own traditions, then what might be surmised about my honoring anyone else's?

When I embarked on this journey, I had no idea what Palestinian food in Israel was, and even now that my journey is over, I'm not sure how to define it. I set out equipped with the common Israeli knowledge that Palestinian food meant hummus, tahini, *mjadara* (made of rice), *seniyeh*, *labaneh*, *ful*, *kubeh*, baklava, and small cups of sweet, strong black coffee. Those proved to be the tip of the iceberg of a rich cuisine that makes use, in season, of all that grows nearby—a cuisine of those who do not have cash on hand at all times but who are familiar with the fruit of their land and know how to make good use of it. I wondered why we Jews learned to love hummus and *ful* to the point of making them our own, while we remain completely unfamiliar with such dishes as *melukhiye*, *hubeizeh*, *frike*, *shishbarak*, *m'khamar*, *mansaf*, *maklubeh*, or *matfune*.<sup>2</sup> Are we like the Americans who rejected Mexican cuisine both because of the hostility between the two countries during the nineteenth century and because Mexicans were among the poorest ethnic groups in American society? Do we reject foods harvested from the garden or the field near the house because they are eaten by those identified in the public consciousness as our enemies, and whom we associate with poverty, privation, and perhaps even a lack of culture?

At the same time many more questions arose, and I was confronted with numerous

surprises. For example, alongside the seasonal wild plants in Israel, the local Palestinian kitchen had also embraced dishes and ingredients from elsewhere. Macaroni, lasagna, Chinese specialties, dairy treats, cornflakes, cakes, schnitzel, pizza, and quiche were all found on the shelves of refrigerators and pantries after having been adapted to the Palestinian palate. Should foreign foods be regarded as part of the Palestinian kitchen? Does their appearance on the Palestinian menu mean that this cuisine has lost its traditional national character? Does their presence indicate that Palestinian society in Israel is in the process of searching for its own identity, in an attempt to define its place between “Israeliness” and a distinct Palestinian existence? Or does it perhaps reflect exposure to global trends in a world whose culture is growing increasingly homogeneous? Finally, what can be learned from the Palestinian kitchen about Jews and their culture, about the identity being shaped inside Israel’s borders?

These questions, which began to engage me on a personal level and not only as a sociologist, made it more difficult for me to write, sometimes to the point of literary paralysis. On the one hand, Arab culture felt alien to me, and more than once it seemed presumptuous on my part to write a book about the Palestinian kitchen in Israel. On the other hand, I felt too much involvement, too close and too fond of the people I had met. Along with these mixed feelings I also felt confusion and embarrassment: more than once, upon returning home from an interview in the villages, I felt shame because people were living so close to me in conditions resembling those of the third world—without good roads, proper infrastructure, or a decent educational system. My distress was described well by a friend who commented, whenever I sounded overwhelmed, “So you’ve been ‘abroad’ again, have you?” Unlike the journalists Samira would host in her home, I didn’t want to write about Eskimos and about the rest of the world, and I didn’t want to appropriate food that was not mine and treat it as if it were. Wrestling with these questions eventually led to some insight about my own activity and its context: through learning about the Palestinian kitchen, I was seeking a way to understand and present an existing culture that was constantly renewing and redefining itself in relation to the Jewish and Palestinian reality in the region.

I have shared with you the distress, uncertainty, and hesitation that accompanied me as I wrote this book, if only so that you will read it with the understanding that food is more than an array of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, and calories. Rather, food is a rich package of cultural and social relations, and a means of creating personal, gender, or national identity. If I succeed in conveying this sense of what food is, I will have achieved my objective.

I wish to thank the hundred men and women who agreed to be interviewed and who hosted me in their homes or offices and enabled me to discuss my concerns and interests with them. My thanks to the Institute for Israeli Arab Studies, which first sparked my curiosity about the Palestinian kitchen in Israel. Special thanks to Professor Shaul Mishal, for the wonderful name he gave to the Hebrew version of the book and for his generous help in finding a warm home for the manuscript, and to Professor Emanuel Marx, for his unstinting support. Without them, this book could not have come into being.

# Introduction

## *Food, Ethnicity, and Identity*

Food is one of the means through which distinct national and ethnic identities are formed and practiced. This chapter illuminates the social processes through which food contributes to the national and ethnic identities of groups that share a single territory but perceive themselves as distant and different from one another politically, culturally, and economically. I also look at the circumstances under which food serves as a bridge between two such groups: Palestinians and Jews who are citizens of the state of Israel. An examination of the processes that shape national and ethnic cuisines and enable continuity, along with incorporation of changes into the daily diet, reveals the connection between the politics of identity and the daily culinary practices held in both the private and public spheres. Although food is an integral part of Palestinian daily life, its symbolic, social, and political aspects have only recently been acknowledged as a means by which Palestinians distinguish themselves from Jewish Israelis.<sup>1</sup> Decisions relating to food are not merely gastronomic choices; they also reflect individual tastes, along with social identity; class, national or ethnic membership; and the way we choose to present ourselves to others.<sup>2</sup> This book, then, contributes to the theoretical dimensions of the discourse on food by analyzing the political and social processes that shape Palestinian cuisine in Israel and by examining the kitchen as a political and cultural text that emerges and changes in the context of the formation of a national identity.

Food is a prism through which it is possible to present, write, and reconstruct history, and it thereby reveals relationships of control, exploitation, and denial of or derogation of rights accorded to the culture of the other. As we shall see, scholars have largely discussed the theoretical elements having to do with the formation of nations, ethnic group consciousness, and colonialism. They have also addressed the relevance of these sorts of political processes to the formation of national cuisines and the institutionalization of culinary knowledge. Written history becomes a reservoir of common and assumed knowledge that links individuals and serves as the basis for agreement about a shared heritage.<sup>3</sup> Such a history constructs tradition, transforms it into a medium that embodies the unique culture of a national group, and defines the means of sharing this culture with other groups. But history, Frances Fitzgerald argues, is written by the dominant group: the agent that constructs its own history as well as that of minority and ethnic groups that reside in the same territory.<sup>4</sup>

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said sees the colonialist discourse as an example of the production of knowledge about non-Western regions.<sup>5</sup> This constitution of knowledge reproduces ideologies, power relations, and existing institutions and practices, as well as the image of the other as “primitive.” Deconstruction of the colonialist discourse reveals the centrality of the themes of race and eroticization of the primitive, and poses questions about the existence of an alternative to the European historical knowledge of the other.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Stam and Ella Shohat identify colonialism with Eurocentrism—the ideology upon which Europeans base their economic, political, and cultural hegemony in third-world countries.<sup>7</sup> This hegemony is built more upon a cognitive process than upon a concrete institutional one. Eurocentrism attributes to the West constant progress from autocratic regimes to democratic ones. It emphasizes the undemocratic traditions prevalent in non-European countries and blurs the limitations of European democracy. This justifies the appropriation of non-Western cultures and leads to paternalism, glorification of the West, and deprecation of everything not European. The alternative to appropriation, according to Stam and Shohat, is for third-world writers, poets, and filmmakers to create texts of their own history. Such texts counter the Eurocentric perception and allow third-world artists to institutionalize control over their image, identity, and history. Writing their own past is a way to rewrite the present and change the pattern of existing power relations.

The awakening of national culture often plays a role in the process of political liberation. Frantz Fanon emphasizes the importance of delving into the original culture in order to mobilize sources for action and for new political content.<sup>8</sup> Colonialism, for Fanon, is not only territorial control of a country but also a process that empties the minds of the native population of content and revises their past and their history. Conquerors present themselves as having come to light up the dark world of the natives, to rescue the natives from themselves. The local culture, mobilized by national liberation fighters, represents daily life, celebrates the actions of individuals for their own nation, presents the face of resistance, and produces new content. In other words, culture becomes a tool in the national struggle and provides a basis for creation of a national identity with the establishment of a nation-state.

The establishment of nation-states involves the development of a national consciousness, culture, and identity.<sup>9</sup> As part of that process, reservoirs of culinary knowledge become an integral part of the national culture. Still, they do not turn into a means of developing a national or political consciousness of resistance. National kitchens developed in nation-states, leading to unique dishes that sharpened the distinction between one nation-state and its neighbor.<sup>10</sup> Until the rise of nationalism, culinary borders were defined on the basis of class and lifestyle—in other words, as “beyond” ethnic or regional differences. For example, aristocrats throughout Europe ate similar foods with no connection to where they lived, so that the kitchens of wealthy Italians more closely resembled those of wealthy French people than those of poor Italians. Printing technology contributed to the culinary expression of nationalism by enabling recipes to be published, giving them a material permanence and transforming them into a stock of cultural knowledge unique to a particular nation-state and accessible to all readers.<sup>11</sup>

Crystallization of the national cuisine created a link between the nation-state and the food products, eating habits, and main dishes that became its symbols. In the eighteenth century, for example, the Prussian political elite consumed potatoes as a status symbol. With the passing of the years and changing economic and political circumstances, in northern Germany, the potato became a basic food consumed by all.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the kitchens of immigrants were forced to adapt to their new surroundings. For example, the new settlers who came to America wanted to recreate the English kitchen, but they discovered that the climatic conditions differed, and the absence of essential basic ingredients compelled them to establish a new kitchen dependent upon local meat and agricultural products. In this way, corn and turkey became staples in the American diet.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the combination of steak, chips, and salad became identified with the French kitchen, and pasta was associated with the Italian kitchen.<sup>14</sup>

#### DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES

The rise of the nation-state also gave birth to local ethnic groups: historically and symbolically small communities whose national identities differ from those of the nation-state in which they are located. In some cases, amid problems of economic, social, and political mobility, these ethnic communities experienced geographical and cultural exile. Such ethnic diasporas, in which many individuals develop a sense of belonging to a symbolic community that is not necessarily geographically coterminous with the country in which they live, are a familiar characteristic of the modern world.<sup>15</sup> William Safran defines a *diaspora* as a community geographically separated from the center, located in the periphery.<sup>16</sup> Such a community preserves a memory or myth of its country of origin along with a desire to be accepted as an equal in its new country. It sees in the land of its forefathers a place to which it aspires to return if and when a suitable time arises; thus, it sustains a commitment to national liberation and independence. André Levi and Alex Weingrod add that among contemporary diasporas there are minorities whose cultures and rights have been repressed.<sup>17</sup>

Geographically, émigrés and diasporic ethnic communities dwell inside the absorbing society, but economically, socially, culturally, and symbolically, they live outside it.<sup>18</sup> They assume the role of foreigners, enabling them to experience a certain degree of freedom and to develop a politics based upon the imputed past as the source of their self-definition. In this way, the past becomes the basis for the unique content of their ethnicity, the ground out of which its strategies for action arise, and the repository of the symbols that nourish its empowerment.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes, a diasporic culture acquires a private, even secret, dimension, but that does not prevent it from contributing to a multicultural and democratic climate.<sup>20</sup>

Diasporic communities may also grow out of national or cultural feelings, without the trauma of territorial exile that is usually accompanied by the dream of a return to the homeland. Such diasporic communities are likely to develop and form their collective identities through religious practices, written traditions, and culture without a longing for territory.<sup>21</sup> These include groups of voluntary émigrés, refugees, foreign workers, and ethnic communities whose stores of knowledge include historical

perceptions, cultural meanings, and alternative geographical maps. Some wish to belong to the absorbing society and to preserve the myth of returning home at the same time, distinguishing themselves both from the community in their land of origin and from that of the land in which they presently live.<sup>22</sup>

By living a diasporic existence accompanied by the development and preservation of a myth of returning home—even if only symbolically—migrants are in certain political circumstances transformed from a minority group into an ethnic group. While a minority group experiences only the relationship of inequality fostered by the dominant group, an ethnic group builds a collective that shares common beliefs, culture, identity, and behavior. Its members identify themselves and are identified by others as being distinct from the surrounding society.<sup>23</sup> To what extent is ethnic identity a matter of personal or group choice and to what extent is it defined by the dominant group? The answer depends on the access of the ethnic group to the system of rewards and benefits controlled by the dominant group.<sup>24</sup> Many ethnic groups, like the Palestinian citizens of Israel, do not succeed in breaking through the barriers set by the labor market, which is divided on an ethnic basis, and they find themselves on the lower rungs of the occupational ladder.<sup>25</sup> The stigmatization of the minority group also makes it more difficult to become mobile through acquisition of education or to realize the potential of that education—if it has been acquired—in the occupational hierarchy. Thus, minority groups remain closed among themselves as they reproduce their culture and experience conflicts between it and the culture of the absorbing society.<sup>26</sup>

The overlap between state and nation in Israeli society has given birth to an encounter between the official Zionist narrative of the dominant Jewish nation-state and the narrative of the national Palestinian minority group. Israeli political rhetoric, which is cast in terms of violent ongoing conflict, defines the Arab citizens of the state as a “dangerous” national minority. In terms of citizenship, Palestinians are included within the general polity, but at the same time, they are socially excluded on the grounds of their supposedly unbridgeable foreignness.<sup>27</sup> According to Sammy Smooha and Oren Yiftachel, this is why Israel is a deeply divided ethnonational state that must prove that the rights it bestows upon its Arab citizens entitle it to inclusion in the family of democratic nations.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PALESTINIAN IDENTITY

In 1948, only 160,000 of the 900,000 total Palestinians remained in the part of Palestine upon which Israel was established. They currently constitute 19 percent of Israel’s population.<sup>29</sup> Although granted formal citizenship, these Palestinians live in an “ethnic state” in which national identity is not inclusive of all citizens, but rather is limited to the members of one ethnic group. The Israeli state developed an extensive system for marginalizing and controlling Palestinian people based on segmentation, collaboration, and dependence.<sup>30</sup>

The interface of the Jewish and Palestinian populations in the new state of Israel was accompanied by the enactment of emergency regulations that defined restricted military-administered zones until 1966. Thus, two distinct political regimes were created. Adriana Kemp refers to these as two different ecological systems—the first, a