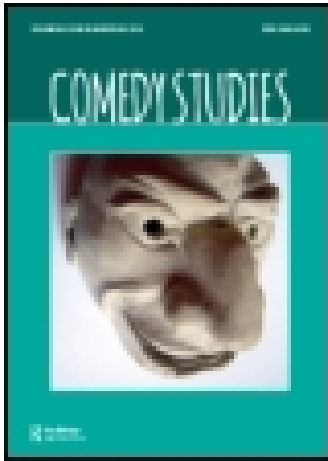


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Comic relief: the ethical intervention of 'Avodah 'Aravit (Arab Labor) in political discourses of Israel–Palestine

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When it comes to Western discourses of Israel–Palestine, the value and efficacy of satire as a vehicle for both critique and reconciliation are often underappreciated and rarely employed. Canadians and Americans, in particular, treat the ongoing geopolitical conflict almost exclusively in the serious terms of security, a discursive paradigm that consistently positions Arab Israelis and Palestinians as security threats. By contrast, Israeli mainstream media accommodates vibrant satirical counter-discourse critical of the Israeli state that is entirely absent in North America. In this article, I argue that due to the closeness of the countries' political and economic ties with Israel, it is essential that Canadian and American public discourses move beyond framing Israeli–Palestinian relations exclusively in terms of security. This article, therefore, aims to intervene in these discourses by arguing that satire, and comedy in particular, can engage Israeli–Palestinian relations more ethically than the dominant security paradigm. To begin this intervention, the paper conducts a close reading of 'Avodah 'Aravit, an Israeli television sitcom about Arabs living in Israel, demonstrating the show's simultaneous nation-building function and criticism of Israeli state policies through satire and comedy.

Keywords: *Arab Labor*; 'Avodah 'Aravit; comedy; Israel–Palestine; satire; sitcom

Introduction

Few subjects are taken more 'seriously' in North American public discourse than the ongoing geopolitical conflict in Israel–Palestine. Despite the geographical distance, the conflict maintains a particularly affective proximity in North America, especially for those in Arab and Jewish diasporic communities. The conflict's divisiveness, its increasing correlation to political, religious and generational fault lines, and the fact that ignorance regarding its supposed deep history and myriad details is common, means that many commentators identify the situation in Israel–Palestine as one of the most avoided topics, even among educated elites.¹ Moreover, when the intractable conflict is discussed, it is usually in 'serious' contexts like news reportage and political activism. Compounding this situation, there is growing evidence that public discourse surrounding the conflict has increasingly become subject to state surveillance. Yasmeeen Abu-Laban and Abigail B. Bakan (2012), for example, document a 'surveillance of discourse [...] governing actual or perceived criticism of Israeli state policies and/or human rights abuses toward Palestinians' among Western nations and particularly within Canada since 11 September 2001 (319). This monitoring of public discourse, 'watching of words, organizations, and loyalty', argue Abu-Laban and Bakan, competes with the level of surveillance found in Israel itself (320–321). One of the major consequences of this surveillance is that discussions of Israel–Palestine are curtailed not only in terms of content, but

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also in terms of form and tone. By contrast, however, Israeli mainstream media accommodates vibrant satirical counter-discourse critical of the Israeli state, which is entirely absent in North America. Save the occasional *Daily Show* segment, one or two films and a few Internet video clips, there is little room for satirizing the Israel–Palestine conflict in the heavily monitored Canadian and American public spheres.²

This near-complete ‘seriousness’ marks a significant difference between Western and Middle Eastern discourses of Israeli–Palestinian relations. While the conflict is indeed treated ‘seriously’ by both Israelis and Palestinians – for example, Israeli journalist Amos Elon refers to ‘the difficulty of confronting, morally and politically, the plight of the dispossessed Palestinians’ (2006, viii) in his introduction to Hannah Arendt’s famously divisive *Eichmann in Jerusalem* – mainstream Israeli and Palestinian discursive communities are open to satirizing Israeli–Palestinian relations in a manner that is simply not seen in mainstream North American political discourse. This openness to satire should not be particularly surprising, especially given that Israelis and Palestinians live with manifestations of the ongoing conflict every day. Humour is a powerful tool for the disempowered and the disenfranchised, and, as Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones and Ethan Thompson argue, ‘humor is able to deal powerfully with serious issues of power and politics’ (2009, 11). In considering the function of satirical television (which they identify generically as ‘satire TV’), Gray, Jones and Thompson argue that satire TV is uniquely able ‘to speak truth to power [. . .] throughout the world’ (2009, 6). Thompson explains separately that ‘to satirize is to scrutinize, which requires an object to study’ (2009, 40), and the mechanisms used to sustain Israel’s Occupation of Palestine (such as house demolitions, checkpoints and the separation barrier, to name just a few) provide ample lived experiences for satirical scrutiny by both Israelis and Palestinians.

When it comes to Western discourses of Israel–Palestine, the value and efficacy of satire are clearly under-used and under-represented in public discussion. Gray, Jones, and Thompson explain that critics may avoid satire ‘because satire is coded as a subgenre of comedy, and comedy and humor represent for many the opposite of seriousness and rational deliberation’ (2009, 8). Satire, then, and comedy in particular, may be considered inappropriate for discussing Israel–Palestine, which is treated as a subject of required seriousness. Instead, Canadians and Americans frame the conflict almost exclusively in terms of security (consider the familiar phrase ‘Israel has a right to defend itself’), which presumes the very seriousness and rationality demanded by those critics of satire to whom Gray, Jones, and Thompson refer. But, as Jeff Halper demonstrates in his book *Obstacles to Peace* (2009), security is by no means an inherently rational – let alone reliable – discursive framework: ‘the security framing leaves out, or misrepresents, the issue of power. Israel has managed, in a wonder of framing, to successfully present itself as the victim’ (40). Halper contends that this framing ‘distorts the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians’ (40) and is used to justify ‘the unrestrained use of military force against a civilian population and a degree of destruction so greatly disproportionate to the actual threat’ (38). Given that Halper’s research and work indicate that only ‘major pressure applied by the US on Israel will end either the Occupation or the conflict’ (35), and since Abu-Laban and Bakan’s research shows that Canada ‘has equaled, and perhaps even surpassed, the uniquely close relationship the United States has had with Israel’ (328), it is essential that Canadian and American public discourses move beyond framing Israel–Palestine exclusively in terms of security. Building on Halper’s assessment of the role of discourse in the Israel–Palestine conflict, this paper aims to intervene in these discourses by arguing that satire, and comedy in particular, can engage Israeli–Palestinian relations in terms of power more ethically than the dominant discourse of security. To begin this

intervention, I conduct a close reading of *'Avodah 'Aravit*, an Israeli television sitcom about Arabs living in Israel, and demonstrate the show's ability to criticize the Israeli state while simultaneously serving a nation-building function through satire.

'Avodah 'Aravit's sitcom satire

The series *'Avodah 'Aravit*, subtitled in Arabic as *Shughl 'Arab* and marketed internationally as *Arab Labor*, is a controversial, award-winning and popular Israeli sitcom currently in its fourth season. It is also 'the first Israeli TV series created by an Arab-Israeli' (Gal-Ezer and Tidhar 2012, 151). Sayed Kashua, the show's creator and head writer, is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and a well-known political satirist, formerly associated with the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*. *'Avodah 'Aravit* revolves around a central character, journalist Amjad 'Aliyyan (a quasi-autobiographical representation of Kashua), and his family and friends, paying particular attention to the social interactions of Jewish and Arab Israelis³ based on Kashua's own life experiences. The nation-building potential of *'Avodah 'Aravit* operates on two key levels. First, it makes Palestinians visible in mainstream media. Miri Gal-Ezer and Chava Tidhar state that prior to the sitcom's inception, Arab Israelis were either 'depicted stereotypically, or as symbolically "extinct" in Israeli television (147). Second, it makes *seeing* Palestinians normal: 'Broadcast in primetime, for the first time the series exposes Jewish-Israeli viewers to [Arab-Israeli] petit bourgeoisie: a middle class Arab-Israeli "normative" family' (147). Simply by watching the sitcom, argue Gal-Ezer and Tidhar, the series allows Jewish-Israeli audiences to 'overcome their general alienation to the [Arab-Israeli] minority' (151). These two simple features of broadcasting *'Avodah 'Aravit* on prime-time television – making Palestinians visible and rendering that visibility normative – resist the discursive coupling of Arabs and Palestinians with violence and terrorism. This provides an important alternative to framing Israeli–Palestinian relations in terms of security, which generally positions Arabs and Palestinians as security threats.⁴

It is worth foregrounding that the purpose of this paper is not to conduct a general analysis of Arab or Palestinian humour based on the content of *'Avodah 'Aravit*. My interest in the comedic nature of the series is not ethnographic, but rather discursive. I ask: What does comedy enable the show to do? How does comedy facilitate or produce political meaning in the context of the show? What can discourses of the conflict outside of Israel–Palestine gain from the intervention made by *'Avodah 'Aravit's* comedy? Brett Mills argues in his work on the sitcom genre: 'Sitcom can be positioned as an entirely different kind of discourse, for it is one which, even when dealing with "serious" subjects, does so through what can be termed a discourse of frivolity' (2009, 7). Mills identifies *M*A*S*H* (CBS 1972–1983) and *Blackadder Goes Forth* (BBC1 1989) as two powerful western critiques on war, and, borrowing from Neale and Krutnik, argues that 'the "messages" which each of them contains is forever communicated via the comedic "mode" [see Neale and Krutnik 1990] which defines them' (8). Thus far, there are no North American critiques of Israel's military Occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza or discourses of Israeli–Palestinian relations that make extensive use of comedic satire, let alone the sitcom genre. Following in the footsteps of serials like *M*A*S*H*, *'Avodah 'Aravit* offers a much-needed alternative to the security paradigms currently saturating North American discourses of the conflict.

The show makes no attempts to understate its political commentary. The American DVD jacket for the first season describes the series as: 'a raucous and irreverent critically acclaimed comedy series from Israel [...] that pierces the taboos of acceptable language

and humor surrounding the prickly, long-standing status quo in which Palestinian and Jewish Israelis live side by side' (2008). Even the sitcom's title, *'Avodah 'Aravit*, which translates as *Arab labor*, is a widely understood Hebrew slang term 'meaning work that is substandard and unreliable, carried out by Arabs' (Gal-Ezer and Tidhar 2012, 152). While the racism underlying the term 'avodah aravit' can be seen as adding to the controversial nature of the show's subject-matter, the title has been praised for being consistent with the show's efforts to expose racism where it is 'not recognized as such' (Hochberg 2010, 80).

In order to explore the cultural and political work of *'Avodah 'Aravit*, this paper draws on several episodes from the sitcom's first two seasons, with particular attention paid to the episode 'Memory' (*Zikaron*), which occurs midway through the second season. As one of the strongest episodes of the series in terms of plot, character development, comedic effect and cohesion with the series' narrative arc, 'Memory' is the best example of the sincere intervention that the sitcom *'Avodah 'Aravit* makes in Israeli public discourse about the state's relations with Palestinians. Through a careful analysis of 'Memory' and engagement with the series as a whole, I aim to demonstrate the ethical imperative of a comedic intervention in North American political discourses of Israel–Palestine.

The sitcom format allows *'Avodah 'Aravit's* satirical representations of Israeli left-wing and right-wing political discourses to enter into popular culture. It is remarkable in its popularity as it is the first bilingual (Hebrew and Arabic) sitcom on prime-time Israeli television, and 'the first to focus almost exclusively on the experience of Israeli Arabs' (Hochberg 2010, 69). Its primary characters include the 'Aliyyan family: Amjad, his wife Bushra and their daughter Maya; Amjad's parents, Abu Amjad and Umm Amjad; Amjad's best friend, colleague and eventual neighbour Me'ir; and Amjad and Bushra's family friend Amal, who falls in love with and eventually marries Me'ir, despite their ethnic and political differences. Importantly, the sitcom juxtaposes realistic relationships with farcical crises in such a way as to lampoon stereotypes of both Jews and Arabs, and Jewish–Arab relations in Israeli society. As the show's protagonist, Amjad is the primary site of this juxtaposition.

A 'good' (assimilated) Arab, Amjad struggles to fit seamlessly into (Jewish) Israeli society, but, as Gil Hochberg argues, the series (consistent with Kashua's oeuvre) demonstrates that this struggle is always-already impossible.⁵ Amjad's determination to transcend this 'principal of separation' (Hochberg 2010, 68) produces a series of antics that frustrate his wife, Bushra, and embarrass his father, Abu Amjad. This is particularly true when Amjad's efforts affect his daughter, Maya. For example, in the episode 'Kindergarten' (*Gan Yeladim*) from *'Avodah 'Aravit's* first season, Amjad becomes convinced that the informal education his parents provide for Maya as her daytime caregivers is insufficient, even though Abu Amjad is a retired school principal (Kashua 2007a). Amjad decides he must enrol Maya in kindergarten to ensure she has the best education possible, and sets his sights on the Peace Kindergarten (*Gan ha-Shalom*), a secular Jewish school attended by his friend Me'ir's niece.

Though there are no laws in Israel prohibiting Arab Israelis from enrolling in Jewish schools, segregation is predominant and discriminatory state funding drastically benefits Jewish schools over Arab schools (White 2012, 71). The episode 'Kindergarten' exhibits and satirizes this segregation through an exchange between Sigalit, the Peace Kindergarten administrator, and the 'Aliyyans. Throughout their meeting, Sigalit attempts to dissuade Amjad and Bushra from enrolling Maya in the school by listing all of the ways the Peace Kindergarten incorporates Judaism and Israeli patriotism into its education. She

explains, with increasing intensity, that the school teaches Biblical stories about Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and Moses; emphasizes national identity and loyalty to the (Israeli) flag; and conducts Shabbat ceremonies every Friday.⁶ To counter these potential obstacles, Amjad explains with increasing deference that these Biblical figures are considered prophets and spiritual leaders in the Muslim tradition; that he and his family are also patriotic citizens of Israel; and that Maya would *enjoy* participating in weekly Shabbat ceremonies. Desperate to deter Amjad, Sigalit then informs the 'Aliyyans that on Purim, most of the children dress as soldiers and 'play at shooting Arabs'.⁷ Amjad, wanting the best for his daughter yet also representing the self-effacing Arab, replies: 'Yes, they're children. That's why I say that we have to get to know one another from an early age.' During the exchange, it rapidly becomes clear to Bushra that Sigalit has no intention of allowing Maya to be enrolled in the Peace Kindergarten. She confronts Amjad as they leave, asking: 'Why do you always put yourself into these embarrassing situations? Did she [Sigalit] have to say "We don't want any Arabs" for you to understand?' Bushra later concedes that Amjad simply has a 'big heart', and in doing so identifies Amjad's willingness to believe the best in everyone (made possible because of his assimilation) as the catalyst to most of his embarrassments.

Me'ir, who functions in many ways as Amjad's Jewish foil, is another important locus of the series' satirical juxtaposition of realism and farce. While he self-identifies as a leftist early on in the series, Me'ir is also a passionate Israeli patriot, and the tensions brought on by the contradictions of these two identifications becomes an ongoing target of 'Avodah 'Aravit's satire. In particular, Me'ir demonstrates the ignorance commonly held by Jewish Israelis of the myriad structural prejudices with which Arab Israelis (not to mention Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza) live daily (Kashua 2007b). For example, in the episode 'The Shower' (*ha-Miklahat*), which occurs early in his efforts to woo the 'Aliyyans' friend Amal, Me'ir is awoken by the squeals of Arab children playing with his condo tower's garden hose. Irritated by the awakening, Me'ir calls the police and reports the children as a 'gang of hoodlums [...] making trouble' outside his building, later demanding that they be punished 'to the full extent of the law'. The scene in which the children play in the condo's abundant water supply – emphasized by one child's cry, 'Wow, look how much water they have' – is juxtaposed with scenes of Amjad showering before work, demonstrating the almost non-existent water pressure in the 'Aliyyans' village. This juxtaposition highlights the staggering infrastructural differences between East Jerusalem, inhabited mainly by Arabs, and West Jerusalem, inhabited mainly by Jews.

Not only is Me'ir ignorant of the luxury of West Jerusalem's water supply, he also has no idea how disproportionately Israeli law will punish the Arab children at his behest simply for playing in the water. On learning that Amal is the children's defense attorney, Me'ir attempts to abort the children's punishment by paying their bail. This does not, however, put an end to their trial and places Me'ir in the undesirable position of earning Amal's disgust. Initially unaware that Me'ir is the person who reported the children to the police, Amal explains to him that the children cannot be released because the complainant insisted that they 'be punished to full extent of the law'. Hearing his own words quoted back to him disparagingly by the woman he loves marks Me'ir as complicit in the oppression of Arab Israelis, and renders that complicity shameful.

Me'ir's gaffe in 'The Shower' does not immediately awaken him to his privileged position as a Jewish Israeli, but it initiates a significant shift in the developmental arc of his character. His growing realization that Jewish Israelis tolerate and enforce the systemic oppression of Arab Israelis culminates in the episode 'Amjad is a Superstar' (*Amjad*

Kokhav 'Elyon) (Kashua 2012). As he and Amal enter the airport to fly to Cyprus to be married, they present their passports to the Israeli security guard.⁸ On learning that Amal is Arab, the security guard tells her she must stand in another, much longer line – presumably for further security checks, though the guard offers no explanation. In a watershed act of solidarity, Me'ir tells the guard: 'this woman is about to become my wife, so if you don't mind I'll go with her. You can give me a second-class citizen sticker, too.' Thanks to his relationship with Amal, Me'ir's main function in the series shifts away from helping acculturate Amjad to (Jewish) Israeli life as he begins to recognize his *own* need to acculturate to the lifestyle of his Palestinian-Israeli wife and friends.⁹

'*Avodah 'Aravit*'s focus on Arab Israelis necessarily means that the ongoing military Occupation of the West Bank and blockade of the Gaza Strip are recurring subjects throughout the series. For example, Amjad and Bushra's friend and Me'ir's love interest, Amal, is an Arab-Israeli human rights lawyer whose parents become trapped during an Israeli airstrike while visiting relatives in Gaza. The airstrike coincides with Amal and Me'ir's engagement, leading to a crisis for Amal when she learns that her fiancé has been deployed to Gaza by the Israeli Army Reserves. Lampooning Israel's military intervention in Gaza, the episode resolves with Me'ir recognizing Amal's last name on the identification papers of an Arab couple. He confirms that the two are Amal's parents, and calls her immediately to reassure her that in addition to being safe they have given him permission to marry her. As viewers, we recognize that their consent is given out of fear and confusion, but in his delight, Me'ir forgets his position as an Israeli Defense Force soldier and waves his assault rifle enthusiastically at the Arab couple. The episode thus turns farcical in staging Me'ir's first meeting with his Palestinian in-laws-to-be at gunpoint, yet in doing so emphasizes the military stranglehold Israel exercises over Palestinians. In a similar fashion, the show also addresses how the ongoing violent conflict leads to distrust between the two populations. For example, at the end of the episode 'Kindergarten', we find Me'ir accepting a ride home after a photo shoot from two Arab Israelis who speak only Arabic. Himself a unilingual Hebrew speaker, Me'ir becomes convinced that he has been kidnapped; meanwhile, the Arabs come to believe that Me'ir is in desperate need of a toilet. While the circumstances are themselves absurd, the crisis allows the show to ridicule to notion that all Arabs are potential terrorists and kidnappers, as well as reveal the prejudices against Arabs held even by Israeli leftists like Me'ir, and demonstrate the conditions in which most Arab Israelis live – conditions so squalid that they reinforce Me'ir's conviction that he is being held for ransom.

While it certainly uses humour as a vehicle for politicised revelation of the everyday conditions engendered by the Israel-Palestine conflict, '*Avodah 'Aravit* should not simply be understood in terms of negative critique. Indeed, there is also a proscriptive, nation-building function in the idealization of Arab–Jewish relations in '*Avodah 'Aravit*. Though some (real-life) Arab Israelis do assimilate into Jewish-Israeli society, many do not, and most Israeli Jews do not co-mingle with Arab Israelis with the same familiarity or to the same extent as do the characters on the show. However, the show is neither written nor received as a fantasy; it relies on the audience's understanding of Israel as a nation in which Arabs have a place, albeit a contested one over which both Arabs and Jews have conflicted feelings. Indeed, the show's normalizing of Arab Israelis living with and participating in Jewish-Israeli public spheres and cultural activities suggests an 'imagined community' in the Andersonian sense. But, '*Avodah 'Aravit* actively problematizes its own idealism as well. Amjad's assimilation, much like Me'ir's ignorance, is necessarily challenged via satire in order to portray the complexities of Israel as a heterogeneous society.

For all its discursive strengths, the sitcom genre is limited in its stereotypical representations of stock characters, even if those characters are stereotypical for the purposes of satire. Mills argues: ‘the sitcom is often presented as a *problem*, whose humour contributes (unwittingly?) to stereotyped representations of underprivileged groups, turning such social issues into nothing more than something worthy of laughter’ (2009, 10). *‘Avodah ‘Aravit* has certainly received criticisms of this kind from Palestinian critics.¹⁰ But, as Mills explains, ‘Running through such accounts is an assumption that the comedy in sitcom is easily understood, and that the pleasures which sitcom offers help such problematic representations be laughed away’ (10). *‘Avodah ‘Aravit*’s comedy may be shallow at times, but it is also multilayered and scathing in its criticism. The combination of this satire with its traditional sitcom conventions is precisely what allows the series to successfully challenge dominant discourses of Israel–Palestine. Its serial nature, in Mills’ terms, ‘allows audiences to build up a rapport with comic characters’ (17), and this is essential to the humanizing of Arab Israelis and Palestinians. That is, as Arab characters become more complex, endearing and normative, the stereotype itself begins to shift. Further, Gray, Jones, and Thompson identify satire as:

the ability to produce social scorn or damning indictments through playful means and, in the process, transform the aggressive act of ridicule into the more socially acceptable act of rendering something ridiculous. Play typically makes the attack humorous, in turn enlisting the audience in a social rebuke through communal laughter. (2009, 12–13)

Thus, in addition to humanizing the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian characters, stereotypical Jewish characters – especially Me’ir and other lampooned leftists – expose Jewish-Israeli viewers to their own prejudicial ignorance, and its complicity with the ideologies satirized in the show.

In addition to the accounts of the sitcom format by Mills and Gray, Jones, and Thompson, it is also worth considering Gareth Palmer’s discussion of the ‘conservative’ structure of the genre in his analysis of *The Cosby Show*. He writes:

A central feature of the sitcom is the family [...] This focus on the family is reflected in the fact that the shows are targeted at, and help construct, the family audience. [...] Thus the sitcom serves to promote the nuclear family as the ideal model despite the fact that such a model finds little ‘fit’ with reality. (1994, 189)

Though sitcoms have in recent years moved beyond a consistent focus on the nuclear family, such a conservative focus in *‘Avodah ‘Aravit* serves the necessary purpose of resisting common racist stereotypes. In making the day-to-day activities of an Arab family the focal point of a narrative about Palestinians living in Israel, the series moves the discourse of Arabs and Israel away from security – particularly terrorism – and presents to viewers instead the much more common daily business of Arabs being a family. Further, through Amal and Me’ir’s marriage and the birth of their son, the show actively normalizes their interracial union, and adds the subsequent challenges they face to the fodder of *‘Avodah ‘Aravit*’s satire.

‘Memory’ as comedy, critique and collaborative nation-building

‘Memory’ (*Zikaron*), the eighth episode of the second season, focuses on the ethnocultural significance of memory for both Israelis and Palestinians, and the tensions implicated in remembrance that are actively manifest in the respective commemorations of

Memorial Day and Nakba Day, and the celebration of Israel's Independence Day (Kashua 2010).¹¹ The importance of Memory to Israeli and Palestinian cultures is so great that both form substantial sub-fields within trauma studies.¹² *'Avodah 'Aravit's* use of comedy to engage the subject of memory, then, takes significant risks in its execution of the episode 'Memory', and this is evident in the care and construction of the episode as a whole.¹³ As mentioned earlier, 'Memory' is among the strongest episodes of *'Avodah 'Aravit* in terms of plot, character development, comedic effect and cohesion with the series' narrative arc. The crises forming the episode's plot culminate from problems and relations that have escalated since the first season, and in 'Memory' form significant turning points for the characters involved.

'Memory' is organized around three points of crisis: Maya's education, Amjad's assimilation and Me'ir and Amal's relationship. In the first, the 'Aliyyans' daughter Maya, previously enrolled in a Jewish elementary school, wants to participate in her school's Memorial Day ceremony. Her parents and teacher all struggle and fail in articulating to her why her participation in the memorializing of Jewish soldiers killed during the first Arab–Israeli war (1947–1949) would be inappropriate. Her desire to participate in the ceremony signifies both her distance from and the erasure of the history of Palestinians in the creation and maintenance of the state of Israel – an issue that has concerned her mother since Amjad removed Maya from her grandparents' daytime care in the episode 'Kindergarten'. In Bushra's words, Maya's (Jewish) education has led the child to 'forget who she is and where she comes from'.¹⁴

The episode also reveals the problematic orchestration of Memorial Day activities in (Jewish) Israeli elementary schools. Viewers come to realize that Maya's school has no mechanism for the formal inclusion *or* exclusion of its Arab students in Memorial Day events. Maya only learns of the Memorial Day ceremony accidentally. In conversation with her friends, she discovers that there is a choir practice about which she has not been notified, even though she is a choir member:

Maya: What rehearsal? Today is Monday, and the recital is on Thursday.¹⁵

Friend 1: But the teacher announced to everyone that there is a special rehearsal. Did she not inform you?

Maya: No.

Friend 2: You fool, it's the Memorial Day ceremony and Maya is an Arab, like. . .

Maya: How is that relevant?

Friend 1: Maya is not like them. She is one of us. Right, Maya?

Maya's exclusion suggests that the school takes for granted a homogenously Jewish student body, further evincing the aforementioned segregation of Arab and Jewish school-children. Moreover, the attitude expressed by Maya's first friend's statement, 'Maya is not like them. She is one of us', demonstrates the very prejudice produced by such homogeneity. For Maya to belong, she cannot be 'like' an Arab, but as the experiences of her father attest, she can also never fully be 'like' a Jew, either.

When Maya confronts her teacher about the rehearsal, the teacher is visibly uncomfortable and stammers to explain why Maya was not invited to participate:

Teacher: Yes, Maya. But the rehearsal is for the ceremony for Memorial Day for IDF¹⁶ casualties.

Maya: I don't understand! But I am in the choir!

Teacher: True, true. And you sing wonderfully. But it's simply . . . it's . . . it's a special event that I don't think will be appropriate for a girl like you.

Maya: Why? Am I not like everyone else?

Teacher: No, you are. Of course you are. And you are wonderful. But . . . understand, I would want you to very much, but I . . . I think . . . You know what,

Maya? I just need to speak with your parents.

The teacher's discomfort and inability to explain to Maya why her participation is not regarded as appropriate further signals to viewers that the scenario is unprecedented. The teacher's reassurances that Maya sings wonderfully and *is* 'like everyone else' suggest that choosing to withhold information about the ceremony from Maya was a practical rather than malicious choice. Nevertheless, Maya comes to understand herself as *other* due to her Arabness, even though the teacher refuses to identify this as the reason for her exclusion.

Maya's parents likewise struggle to explain why she should not participate in Memorial Day. Bushra, refusing to give her permission, eventually becomes frustrated and exclaims to Maya: 'There is no need to understand', and 'You are not like all your friends!' Bushra's exasperation culminates from her constant countering of Amjad's assimilation – and his encouragement of Maya's assimilation – into Jewish-Israeli culture throughout the series. Her daughter's proclaimed desire to commemorate fallen Zionist soldiers is the final straw, for it elucidates the impact of the Jewish school system on Maya's identity formation. Maya sees herself, as her friend aptly articulated, as belonging to the dominant Jewish culture, not to the *other* Arab culture.

Amjad's attempt to explain the situation to Maya is underscored by the knowledge that his influence has largely produced this problem with Maya's identification. He tells Maya:

We are Arabs, and these are not holidays for everyone. I am not saying it is a simple thing. No, it's not at all. But it's the reality, and we can't do much about it. These ceremonies are not for us, and they don't speak to us. We are not present in those ceremonies. Not present at all.

Amjad's phrasing is interesting because in Arabic he says they are not '*mawjudin*', which can mean either 'present' or 'existing' (in those ceremonies). The official Hebrew subtitle, '*kayemim*', literally translates to 'we do not exist' (in those ceremonies). The Hebrew subtitle reflects not only Maya's presupposed exclusion from the ceremony, but also the larger complication of the 'existence' of Arabs in Israel, if Israel is a Jewish state. Maya's identification with her Jewish classmates is thus microcosmic of the requisite erasure of an Arab's Palestinian identity in exchange for belonging as an Israeli.

Maya's plot in 'Memory' is largely dramatic, which is to say serious, and leaves little space for comedy: in addition to her unwillingness to recognize herself as *other*, her story also highlights the strain that her Jewish elementary schooling causes for Bushra. Amjad's enthusiastic participation in Jewish-Israeli society imposes solely on Bushra the responsibility of providing her children's Palestinian cultural education – a responsibility that Amjad increasingly takes for granted. As such, Maya's plot provides a critical break from the hilarious antics of her father to show the repercussions of the family's assimilation into Jewish-Israeli culture. Consequently, it is possible to read Maya's plot as simply part of sitcom conventions. Mills argues that just as "'comic relief" is an accepted part of

tragic theatre, the opposite can be seen for sitcom' (2009, 7). That is, the function of 'tragic relief' in sitcom 'helps reassert and define [the comic impetus] precisely by being a respite for the ceaselessness of the comedy' (2009, 7). Maya's plot, then, can be understood as interrupting not only the episode's otherwise ceaseless comedy, but the comic impetus of the series as a whole. The concept *situation tragedy*, however, which Lauren Berlant takes up in *Cruel Optimism*, may be more appropriate given the political valence of the show. Berlant identifies situation tragedy as 'the marriage between tragedy and situation comedy where people are fated to express their flaws episodically, over and over, without learning, changing, being relieved, becoming better, or dying' (2011, 176). When it comes to Maya and the ways Jewish-Israeli society rejects her, it becomes clear that her 'flaw' is simply that she is Arab. This is certainly apparent in the episode 'Kindergarten' (*Gan Yeladim*), discussed above. By contrast, Amjad's relatively successful assimilation into Jewish-Israeli society facilitates comedy because, in Berlant's terms, '*the world has the kind of room for us that enables us to endure*' (177, emphasis in original). As Maya is a child, she is only just beginning to learn that the world she inhabits (Israel) does not make room for Arabs. Berlant states:

In the situation tragedy, one moves between having a little and being ejected from the social, where life is lived on the outside of value, in terrifying non places where one is a squatter, trying to make an event in which one will matter to something or someone, even as a familiar joke (in the situation tragedy, protagonists often try heart-wrenchingly to live as though they are in a situation comedy). (177)

Maya's attempts to fit into Jewish-Israeli society mirror her father's comedic efforts, but rather than making the audience laugh, they remind the viewer that '*Avodah 'Aravit* is comical, but being Arab in Israel is not.

Amjad's plot parallels Maya's, but, as discussed, depends on the fact of his assimilation for comedic rather than tragic effect. Unlike Maya, who desires to participate in her school's Memorial Day ceremony, Amjad agrees *accidentally* to participate in a national Memorial Day torch-lighting ceremony.¹⁷ Having been at loggerheads with Bushra over Maya's education and the influence of Amjad's enthusiastic assimilation on her identity, Amjad attempts to prove to his wife that he is still Palestinian by participating in an *alternativi* Nakba torch-lighting ceremony organized by Bushra's friend and Amal's then-boyfriend, Jamil (a rebound between her relationships with Me'ir).¹⁸ When Amjad receives a call from a ceremony organizer's secretary, he enthusiastically agrees to participate. Amjad's boss, Amnon, notified by the organizer, praises Amjad for his courage and beams about the publicity this will bring their newspaper. What Amjad fails to notice, however, is that the secretary who calls him about the ceremony speaks to him in Hebrew. While many *alternativi* commemorations are organized by Jewish Israelis in solidarity with Palestinians and are conducted in Hebrew (the Israeli NGO Zochrot is an excellent example¹⁹), Jamil, a Palestinian activist, is notorious in the show for both refusing to speak in Hebrew and encouraging the other Arab characters to do the same. No secretary working for Jamil would conduct business with other Arabs in Hebrew. Moreover, Jamil does not actually have a secretary to help him organize the Nakba ceremonies. The Hebrew-speaking secretary thus signals to the viewer that Amjad's eagerness to show up Bushra is getting him into trouble. By inadvertently agreeing to light torches in the national Memorial Day ceremony, Amjad not only affirms Bushra's accusation of his assimilation, but it also implicates him as a token 'good' Arab in a public spectacle that negates the history of Palestinians in Israel.

The severity of Amjad's blunder, and his desperation to get out of it before Bushra learns of his mistake, becomes the central site of the episode's comedy. In the scene following his fight with Bushra about Maya's participation in Memorial Day, Amjad calls Me'ir for his advice. As he is driving Maya to school, Amjad (using the speaker phone) asks Me'ir to speak in English so that his daughter, he assumes, will not understand their conversation:

Amjad: You don't believe. You don't believe. What a balagan [mess], Me'ir.

Me'ir: Why, what happened?

Amjad: What happened? Ha- [the] burning, shel ha- [of the] — ekh omrim, ha-meso'ot [how do you say (torches)] — that I told you about

Me'ir: Yes, nu, zeh [come on... that is] — ekh omrim alternativivi [how do you say (alternative)]

Amjad: Exactly. It was not alternativivi.

Me'ir: Not alternativivi? Then what was that?

Amjad: It was the real one, Me'ir. The real fucking thing. The real fucking Independence [sic] Day.

Me'ir: What are you saying! [A literal translation of the Hebrew exclamation for 'No Way'] The real thing?! With the president and all the government?

Amjad: And I tell you, I don't know what to do. And if my wife know, she will kill me.

Me'ir: Wow. The Name [a literal translation of Ha-Shem (how Jews refer to God)] help you.

Amjad: And the big problem is Amnon [Amjad and Me'ir's boss]. Amnon, now he gets tickets for the — ekh omrim har [how do you say (mountain, i.e. Mt. Herzl)?]

Maya: Mountain.

Amjad: Mountain. Herzl Mountain.

The comedy of this scene relies both on Amjad and Me'ir's broken English translations of Hebrew, and in the irony that Maya — whose presence necessitates their speaking in English — understands every word. She then uses this information to blackmail Amjad:

Maya: If you don't let me participate in the choir, I will tell mom that you are going to light a torch on Mt. Herzl.

Amjad: Shhhh, you are going to say what?

Maya: What I heard. I will tell mom everything.

Amjad: Who told you?

Maya: We started learning English in second grade.

Amjad: Not in fourth grade like in Arab schools?

Maya: No. We started in second grade.

Amjad: I insisted to your mother that there would be nothing like going to Jewish schools...

Amjad, though pleased to learn he was correct about the superiority of Jewish schools, reluctantly collaborates with his daughter to keep Bushra from learning of his own

Memorial Day activities. When Maya later tattles on her father to her grandfather Abu Amjad, Amjad expresses his betrayal by likewise tattling on Maya:

Amjad: Well, you know how tomorrow is Independence Day.

Umm Amjad: It's called Nakba Day, Amjad.

Amjad: Nakba, Nakba, this year it truly is a nakba day, Mom.

Maya: What does nakba mean, Grandma?

Abu Amjad: Ah, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Anyway, what happened?

Maya: Dad is going to light a torch tomorrow on Mt. Herzl.

Abu Amjad: What? [leans in towards Amjad, angrily]

Amjad: [stepping away from his father, panics and points to Maya] And she is going to sing in the Memorial Day ceremony tomorrow!

Umm Amjad: How can it be?!

This scene collapses the comedy of Amjad's crisis with the tragedy of Maya's, allowing the seriousness of Amjad's influential assimilation to take centre stage. Maya's need for an alternative education becomes imperative, for she does not even know the meaning of *nakba* – ignorance for which Abu Amjad wittily blames Amjad. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Amjad's comedic *accidental* commitment to torch-lighting with Maya's serious *willing* participation in the Memorial Day choir demonstrates how little she understands of the ethnic cleansing and discursive erasure of her people.

The third locus of crisis in 'Memory' is the fraught relationship of Me'ir and Amal. The two date briefly in 'Avodah 'Aravit's first season, but Amal is unable to tolerate Me'ir's flippant attitude towards the plight of Palestinians and Arab Israelis. Unlike Amjad, Amal does not wish to assimilate into Jewish-Israeli society; rather, she wants Palestinians to be recognized as equals and thus be given their equal rights. After breaking up with Me'ir, she rebounds with Jamil whose Palestinian activism complements her human rights legal work. In spite of her efforts, however, she remains infatuated with (though frustrated by) Me'ir. Me'ir, similarly unable to overcome his infatuation with Amal, pursues her throughout 'Memory'.

Though separate from Maya and Amjad's mirrored storylines, Me'ir and Amal's plot complements the struggles over identity and assimilation that have reached a boiling point in the 'Aliyyan household. In spite of their political and ethnic differences, the two are overcome by their desire for one another during Bushra and Amjad's shouting match regarding Maya's education:

Amal: It's not right for me to be with a Jew/right-winger/soldier/trash. Okay? Especially not two days before Nakba Day.

Me'ir: Again with the Nakba? Tell me, it's my fault you guys lost? Enough, you lost, so what?

Amal: So refugees mean nothing to you?

Me'ir: Not a thing.

Amal: I hate people like you. Just so you know.

Me'ir: Wallah²⁰?

Amal: Wallah.

Me'ir: Wallah.

Me'ir and Amal's argument in the hall outside the 'Aliyyans' apartment ends in a passionate kiss and a hasty, sexually suggestive exit. Later, a remorseful Amal attempts to confess her tryst with Me'ir to Jamil, but he is unwilling to make time for her – and by extension, their relationship – during his planning for Nakba Day. By contrast, Me'ir goes to great lengths to communicate with Amal, and, in response to being ignored, confronts her outside of her apartment.

Me'ir: Why are you not answering my phone calls?

Amal: Me'ir, Me'ir, Me'ir, please, this is difficult for me, too. Stop coming around. Stop calling. Stop. That's it. It's over.

Me'ir: But why? But, I love you. One moment! Amal. . . Amal, Amal, Amal.

Amal: Listen, this is not my natural place. Okay? I feel that this is too complicated. I don't know. . .

Me'ir: What relevance does 'natural place' have, Amal? I know that you love me. Amal, one moment.

Amal: But there are things above feelings, Me'ir. We both come from two worlds that are so different. This has no chance. Leave it alone; stop.

Me'ir: What do you mean there is no chance? What, is this the Jewish-Arab thing? Is that what you are talking about? I don't give a fuck about that, okay? What, the Nakba? The Nakba doesn't interest me. 1948 doesn't interest me. . .

Me'ir, still unaware of the degree of his privilege as a Jewish Israeli, refuses to believe that the two cannot make a relationship work. He does not understand the risk that Amal's love for him poses to her Palestinian identity, or the depth to which he is affected by Zionist ideology. In the very moment that he claims not to care about 1948 – implying that the Arab–Israeli war and the division between Jews and Arabs means nothing to him – the nationwide siren inaugurating Memorial Day begins to sound.²¹ The siren interrupts Me'ir mid-sentence and, contradicting the very words he has just spoken, he stands silent and alert. Amal, visibly disappointed, walks away and re-unites with Jamil.

As is common for the series, Abu and Umm Amjad's intervention facilitates the episode's resolutions. While Abu Amjad chastises (and chases with a shoe) his son for agreeing to participate in the national Memorial Day celebration, Umm Amjad sits with her granddaughter and a photo album, teaching Maya about the history of their family and Palestine. This moment is especially significant as it recalls Amjad's second-guessing his parents' ability to provide a suitable education for Maya in 'Kindergarten' (*Gan Yeladim*). In teaching Maya about the Nakba, Umm Amjad also reminds the viewer of the existence of Palestine and the Palestinian people prior to 1948. This education, and thus the very premise of the episode, overturns 'the Zionist narrative that has actively denied their presence or coherence as a national people' (Makdisi and Silverstein 2006, 17). Moreover, the education Umm Amjad provides for Maya allows the child to participate meaningfully in her school's Memorial Day ceremony. The viewer hears Maya singing the famous 1948 song '*ha-Re 'ut*' ('The Friendship') about remembrance, friendship and sacrifice, while a montage of images from Umm Amjad's photo album overlap with scenes of the school's ceremony, Amjad's boss, Amnon, threatening to fire Amjad if he does not participate in

the torch-lighting, and Amjad reconciling with Bushra in their home. With the knowledge of her people's history, Maya is able to make the national day of memorial relevant to her; she is not just participating in a Jewish ceremony, she is also remembering what the Palestinians have lost. In this way, she shows that both Arab and Jewish Israelis can come together even on those terms, emphasizing the nation-building function of the episode.

Abu Amjad, who is regularly called upon to get both his son and Me'ir out of trouble, outdoes himself in the resolution of their respective crises: Amjad cannot choose the torch-lighting over his marriage, but if he refuses to play the token Arab celebrating the state of Israel, he will be fired, and Me'ir needs to prove to Amal that she is more important to him than the nationalism that segregates Jews and Arabs. As the montage accompanying Maya's song concludes, the scene moves to the ceremony atop Mt. Herzl, and the viewer sees Me'ir at the microphone. He speaks to the audience – both his own and the viewers of *'Avodah 'Aravit* – and states: 'I am Amjad Elian. The son of. . . Umm and Abu Amjad Elian. A writer for the newspaper *Kol Yerushalayim*. I am honoured to light this torch in honour of love.' It becomes clear to the viewer that Abu Amjad has convinced Me'ir to take Amjad's place in the ceremony, thus allowing the newspaper to earn its publicity (the loss of which would have led to Amjad's firing), and giving Me'ir a public platform through which to reach out to Amal. He says, 'I hope you see this and that you are listening, my love', at which point the soldier holding the microphone begins to pull it away, thinking Me'ir ('Amjad') is rambling. Seeing this, Me'ir begins to emphasize that he is talking about the country, though as viewers we know he is in fact professing his love to Amal:

My homeland, my country. I love you. I am sorry if I hurt you. [. . .] I know that it is hard, but you are like a home for me. Exactly like I will be for you. And I am ready to do everything for our home. It does not matter to me what language you speak, and it does not matter to me in what language you dream. I want to be with you. And I know that together, we can overcome all the difficulties. Religion does not matter to me, nor does nationality, nor wars, nor history. You matter to me. You, and only you. And I am not going to give up on you ever.

While Me'ir's speech is in praise of 'my homeland, my country' (*moledeti, artsi*), he offers no praise for nationality. This distinction is critical because, in official Israeli discourse, nationality (*le'om*) and citizenship (*ezrahot*) 'are two separate, distinct statuses' and 'Palestinians [. . .] as non-Jews, can be citizens, but never nationals and are thus denied "rights and privileges"' (White 2012, 12). Therefore, Me'ir's patriotism is dedicated to a shared homeland rather than to a singular nation. Further, his willingness to do 'everything' to keep their shared homeland includes discarding many of the typical trappings of Zionist nationalism, and is thus unexpectedly confrontational, if not outright subversive, when spoken in this context. For example, in stating that: 'It does not interest me what language you speak, and it does not matter to me in what language you dream. [. . .] Religion does not interest me, nor nationality', the unseen fictional audience will assume he is speaking to a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multinational Israel. Amal, watching the ceremony with Jamil, is moved by Me'ir's speech and, like the viewer of *'Avodah 'Aravit*, she is able to identify the significance of Me'ir's declaration as not merely being *about* her, but about the type of homeland that he is willing to build *with* her. Importantly, Me'ir's love for and commitment to Amal signifies his rejection of Israel as a homogeneous – that is, an exclusively Jewish – state. Me'ir and Amal's union is thus solidified in opposition to the very segregation of Jews and Arabs (distinguished as Israelis and Palestinians) inherent in the respective commemorations of Memorial Day and Nakba Day.

The possibilities and limitations of comedy

It would be remiss not to acknowledge that not every episode of *'Avodah 'Aravit* carries the weight and seriousness of 'Memory' (*Zikaron*). There are some episodes that emphasize frivolity but never at the expense of serious subjects like remembrance and racism. However, regardless of its subject matter, the sitcom's comedy humanizes the Arab characters, problematizes the value of assimilation, lampoons Israeli leftist politics and ridicules Israeli right-wing racism. Moreover, the series intervenes in its own sitcom conventions through the incorporation of situation tragedy to resist reducing Israeli–Palestinian relations to a laughing matter. As a result, *'Avodah 'Aravit* functions as a whole to validate and normalize the co-habitation of Arabs and Jews in Israel, and in doing so, *'Avodah 'Aravit* produces a critical, nation-building discourse through comedy and satire. By both resisting and ridiculing the dominant paradigm of security, the series positions comedy and satire as an ethical intervention in the dominant discourses of Israel–Palestine.

It would be disingenuous, however, to ignore in this conclusion the fact that, at the time of writing, *'Avodah 'Aravit*'s creator, Sayed Kashua, decided to leave Israel. In his column for *Haaretz*, aptly titled 'Why Sayed Kashua is leaving Jerusalem and never coming back' (2014), Kashua makes clear that he has given up on Israel as a land that can ever be shared by Jews and Arabs. He writes: 'I was silent, knowing that my attempt at living together with others in this country was over. That the lie I'd told my children about a future in which Arabs and Jews share the country equally was over.' His column appeared in the wake of the funeral for a kidnapped and murdered Palestinian child from Jerusalem, apparently killed in retaliation for the recently kidnapped and murdered Israeli teens. Kashua's column expresses anger, heartbreak and fear for his children's lives. It is a devastating and ironic ending to Kashua's years of political satire, and it contravenes the hopeful, if at times bitter, tone that underscores *'Avodah 'Aravit* as a series. Understandably, there are limits to comedy, and the retaliatory murders of children must be among those limits. Tellingly, he concludes this column with an exchange with his first-born daughter, echoing his father's words from when Kashua was a boy: "Remember that for them you will always, but always, be an Arab, understand?" "I understand," my daughter said and hugged me close, "I understood it already by myself."

The future of *'Avodah 'Aravit* following its fourth season is uncertain, and it is unclear whether the series will ever be syndicated in North America. What is certain, however, is that the dominant paradigm of security has been unsuccessful in resolving the conflict or improving Israeli–Palestinian relations. In writing this essay, my hope is that a comedic intervention in North American public discourse, such as that provided by *'Avodah 'Aravit*, will bring with it a respite from discourses of terrorism, and create space for more understanding to take place.

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Notes

1. John Cook's blog post for *Slate.com* 'How to Pick a Fight With Your Relatives This Thanksgiving', Brian Schaefer's recent *Haaretz* article 'How to survive a conversation on Israel' and the film *Discordia*, which documents the infamous 2002 Concordia University Netanyahu riot that led to the university's ban on events related to Israel–Palestine, are useful examples of the subject's taboo.
2. See, for example, *The Daily Show's* 2005 segment 'Withdrawal Method' and the Academy Award-winning film *West Bank Story*.
3. The terms 'Arab' and 'Palestinian' both carry important, semantic weight in discussing Israeli–Palestinian relations, and the terms should not be perceived as either interchangeable or mutually exclusive. Throughout this paper, I attempt to mirror the terminology employed by 'Avodah 'Aravit, and thus refer to the Arab characters as 'Arab Israelis' rather than 'Palestinians' or 'Palestinian citizens of Israel' except where the distinction 'Palestinian' is implied in the show. This decision does, however, perpetuate a false binary between Jews and Arabs, for, as noted in Hochberg (2010), Mizrahi Jews are of Arab and African origin (see *n.* 5).
4. The 2012 film *The Attack (L'Attentat)*, based on the novel of the same name by Yasmina Khadra, is an excellent example of the way in which discourses of security frame all Arabs and Palestinians as potential terrorists.
5. Hochberg takes care to remind readers that the 'profound and all-encompassing principle of separation that divides Israeli society into Jewish and non-Jewish (namely "Arab") citizens [...] operates even *within* the Jewish-Israeli community in the distinction between two "types of Jews": Ashkenazi (European) Jews and Mizrahi (Arab and African) Jews' (2010, 68–69).
6. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest (Sabbath), beginning at sundown on Friday. It is traditional to welcome Shabbat by lighting candles.
7. As of January 2015, the online resource *Chabad.org* describes Purim as an annual festival commemorating the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from a plot to annihilate them hatched by Haman, the King's anti-Semitic vizier. Purim's carnivalesque traditions have come to include dressing up in masks and costumes. See Horowitz (1994) for a history of violence and the carnivalesque in Purim festivities.
8. Marriages in Israel fall under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbinate, and as a result interfaith and same sex marriages are prohibited. Couples seeking a civil marriage are forced to marry abroad.
9. The role of the patriotic Israeli leftist, still vital to 'Avodah 'Aravit's satire, becomes filled in the second season by a new secondary character, the 'Aliyyans' politically correct neighbour Timna' (and to a lesser extent, her husband Natan).
10. Hochberg (2010) provides a useful survey in his essay on Sayed Kashua's oeuvre.
11. Memorial Day precedes Israel's Independence Day to commemorate the soldiers and civilians killed in the country's various conflicts. Nakba Day commemorates the Palestinians' national disaster (*nakba*): the end of the British Mandate and the failure to create a Palestinian state, and the subsequent displacement of the majority of the country's Arab population. While most Palestinians mark 15 May as Nakba Day (the date following the creation of Israel in 1948), Palestinian citizens of Israel tend to commemorate the Nakba on Israel's Independence Day.
12. See, for example, Yosef and Hagin (2013), Masalha (2012), Nassar (2007) and Silverstein and Makdisi (2006).
13. A reading of 'Memory' focusing exclusively on the function of comedy in representing inter-generational trauma would be extremely valuable.
14. All translations of quotations from 'Memory' by Jacob Passel.
15. The Thursday recital to which Maya refers is not the Memorial Day ceremony, from which she is excluded, but likely a celebration for Israel Independence Day, which follows one day later.
16. Israel Defense Forces, the State's military forces. See Perko (2003) on the IDF's role as an educational institution.
17. Before the solemn Memorial Day becomes the joyous Independence Day, there are torch-lighting ceremonies to light fires to mourn and celebrate the occasion. This format has been mimicked by Palestinian Israelis to commemorate the Nakba.
18. Hebrew for 'alternative', but, in this context, denoting anti-establishment, opposed to the hegemonic Zionist discourse.
19. See Nets-Zehngut (2011, 278–279).
20. An Arabic word meaning 'by God'; equivalent to 'wow' in Hebrew slang.

21. Memorial Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day are both inaugurated with nationwide sirens in Israel, during which the whole country is supposed to stand at alert. The refusal to do so is considered a major separation from the bulk of the country's citizens and those who refuse, namely non-Druze Palestinians and most ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Notes on contributor

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