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## The Gender Blindness of Good Theorists: An Israeli Case Study

By Henriette Dahan-Kalev

This article began life as a lecture at a conference that celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Shlomo Swirski's book *Lo Nechshalim Ela Menuchshalim: Nituah Sociology Vesihot Im Pe'eilim Upe'eilot* (literal translation - *Not Naturally Inept But Socialized to be Inept: A sociological Analysis and Discussions with Social Activists Both Men and Women*)<sup>1</sup>. The publication of this book was a landmark in the history of Israeli Sociology in that in it Swirski put forward an interpretation and analysis of Israeli society that contradicted that which was put forward by those who belong to the Israeli sociological establishment<sup>2</sup>. Until Swirski Israeli sociologists attempted to explain the ineptness and lack of success of the Mizrahim<sup>3</sup> in Israeli society as being a direct result of their coming from Arab and Muslim countries. In his book Swirski offered a Marxist class analysis of their situation and showed that their so-called ineptness was a direct result of institutional arrangements and discriminatory policies. In doing this Swirski was the first sociologist to give expression to the Mizrahi view of their own situation that had previously been ignored<sup>4</sup>. Swirski, the sociologist and the man, is concerned with many marginalized groups in the Israeli state. This shows itself not only in his academic work but also in the social action in which he is engaged. Swirski has been active in the initiation of many social projects amongst which was the foundation of the *Kedma School* (in which I also had the honor to participate). This school was founded to teach children that the national educational system had given up on. In the *Kedma School* many did, what they did not do, in their previous schools – learn - and many of them also excelled in their learning.

In this article I shall use Swirski's book as a sounding board for a theoretical discussion about issues of marginality and gender in Israeli society. The first thing I want to do is to draw your attention to the subtitle of Swirski's book. There he writes about both male and female activists. (In Hebrew, unlike in English, there is a different word for activists of each gender). This shows that when the book was published in 1981, that Swirski was sensitive to gender issues even though then it was not the politically correct thing to do so. Swirski displays this gender sensitivity throughout his book in that he never simply talks about for example, physicians and teachers but about male physicians and female physicians and male teachers and female teachers. However, with all this gender sensitivity Swirski failed in his explanation of the so-called ineptness of Mizrahim, to distinguish Mizrahi women from Mizrahi men. This is so even though in his book he discussed occupations and professions where most of the workers are Mizrahi women. It is clear that he seems to believe that his analysis and explanation of the ineptness of Mizrahi men applies equally to Mizrahi women. This to me is a shortcoming of Swirski's analysis in that it exhibits what feminist theorists refer to as 'gender blindness'.

My aim, in what follows, is to discuss a number of issues connected with gender blindness that are prevalent in sociological studies about Israeli society. Namely: (1) what is the sociological manifestation of the phenomenon referred to as gender blindness? (2) Why is it that women are often excluded in theoretical analysis? (3) Why is it that women are marginalized either intentionally or accidentally? (4) What are the causes of women's invisibility and transparency?

I draw attention immediately to the fact that in the previous paragraph I have used a number of different words such as 'invisibility', 'blindness', 'exclusion' and

'marginalization' that are often not distinguished. This to me is a mistake. For example when an invisible group is discriminated against, than those discriminating against it are unaware that they are engaged in discriminating against that group because they are unaware of the existence of the group as an identifiable group. The use of the word 'exclusion' implies an active form of discrimination – a form of discrimination that can only be practiced by people who can identify and recognize as members of the group the people they wish to exclude from participating in some activity or receiving some benefit. Failure to note what is implied by the uses of these different words will lead to a failure not only to understand the phenomenon being analyzed but also to identify and describe it correctly. For example, the Israeli establishment discriminates against both Arab citizens of the state of Israel and foreign workers in Israel. However, the causes for their discrimination are different in the sense that the Israeli establishment is 'officially' blind to the plight of the foreign workers while it discriminates against Israeli Arabs by actively excluding them from enjoying many opportunities and rights that are open to Jewish citizens of the state of Israel. In other words while it makes sense to talk about the marginalization of Israeli Arabs being a result of policy of exclusion this is not so with regard to the foreign workers whose invisibility is a direct result of that they are officially blind to Israeli policy makers. Uses of these words also has important theoretical implications as the different words imply both different political and sociological circumstances, and so different social positions of the groups one is using these words to talk about. In his book Swirski correctly draws attention to the underclass position of Mizrahim as well as to their low economic and social status; but he fails to draw attention to their identity as Orientals which is what distinguishes them from Jews of European and American origins. Similarly he also excludes from his analysis factors pertaining to gender. In this sense Swirski failed in his analysis to see and understand the special plight of Mizrahi women in Israel, and so with regard to this issue, his book was no different than that written by most members of the Israeli sociological establishment. Some of the clues for understanding the causes for the gender blindness of Swirski and other Israeli sociologists can be found in the writings of feminist theorists. And so what I do in this article is to use ideas of some feminist theorist in order to uncover the gender blindness that Swirski exhibits in his book. My focus in this essay is not the feminist ideas themselves – and so I do not engage in a critical discussion of them and I am very brief in my explanation of them<sup>5</sup>. My aim is to use these ideas to uncover the gender blindness of an extremely good sociological theorist whose work I greatly admire.

Diane Coole, in her book *Women in Political Theory*<sup>6</sup>, gives us a perceptive analysis of the nature of women's invisibility in classical political theory. She shows that the universalistic mode of expression that is commonly found in the classical works of political philosophy contributes to rendering women invisible. Coole shows that in books like John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* in which he claims that "all men are born equal" and in doing so he presumes and is presumed to be using the word 'men' to also bespeaking about women, where in point of fact, he excludes them. She argues that although the abstract use of the word 'men' is meant to include women, and may even do so as it concerns their entitlements for rights, for Locke, women *as* women remain transparent. She claims this because she identifies in Locke's writings specific references to women that show that they and their special needs are invisible to him. Locke, like other classical political theorists such as Mill, Hegel and Marx does not refer to women in an abstract and transparent way when he is talking about issues that are related to the gender division of labor.

Mill for example in his essay on *The Subjection Of Women*<sup>7</sup> underlines women's social roles as to bear children and as being the 'axle' around which the family turns. While Mill is in favor of improving the situation of women in relationship to that of men, and supports the idea that they should enjoy the same rights as do men, including the rights to be educated and the right to own property as well as the right to vote, he fails to explain how they can practically do so while still being responsible for their roles in the private sphere of running the household and bringing up the children. For women to enjoy rights in the public sphere they need to be able to play roles in the public sphere. As to how they are supposed to perform these roles while still being responsible for bringing up children and running the household, Mill is silent. Hence, while Mill does not *theoretically* limit women to the private sphere and claims that they are entitled to the rights that can be enjoyed by men in the public sphere, he also makes it clear, they can legitimately enjoy these rights only if they do not neglect their responsibilities to their children, their family and their household. Then again while Mill claims that women are responsible for the private sphere of the household, it is also clear that even for him it is still the men who are ultimately in control of it. Many consider Mill to be the founding father of feminist liberalism because he claimed that women *should not* be excluded from the public sphere. Now this is all very well as far as it goes but it really does not do anything to change the patriarchal order of society. Mill, I am sure thought himself to be a progressive thinker, as does Shlomo Swirski. But both of these progressive thinkers were largely blind to the real situation of women.

Hegel also speaks about 'men' in an abstract inclusive fashion. However while he is clearly aware of the existence of women he claims that not only do they have no rights to take part in the political process he is clearly terrified of what could happen if they tried to do so. He does everything he can, as a political theorist, to make sure that women stay as far away from the public sphere as possible. In his *The Philosophy of Right*, for example, he writes:

“...Women may have happy ideas, taste, and elegance, but they cannot attain to the ideal.

The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling. When women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated – who knows how?”<sup>8</sup>

My friend Rakefet Levkowitz-Efrat, who first drew my attention to these remarks of Hegel said to me with regard to them: “I often think that we feminist scholars must be masochists to spend our time dealing with writings like this. Don't you agree?” I do not agree with her. I believe that feminist scholars cannot afford not to comment on remarks such as this from such an influential and important political theorist like that of Hegel. Not to comment on remarks such as this is in a sense to affirm them once more. When important thinkers such as Mill and Hegel speak of values and rights which must be distributed universally to all mankind, women for them become either

a transparent social category or a differentiated social category, that describes women instrumentally as child bearers (Hegel) and as the axle around which the family turns but never as being suited for government. Hegel goes so far as to assert that the public sphere must be protected against women. For him this means that women are to be excluded both from government and the military. This is not accidental, for these are the spheres where power, authority and public resources are most concentrated. What is the cause of Hegel's fear of women – or some might say his misogyny – and what leads him to exclude them from the public sphere and so to protect the patriarchal order are questions that go beyond the scope of this article.<sup>9</sup>

The exclusion of women from the public sphere is not only a result of gender blindness; it is also a result of class struggle. As a result of this women of the lower classes find themselves positioned not only on ranks of the ladder below that of men they also find themselves positioned on ranks of the ladder below those of better off women. Swirski's writings, and also his social action, have been devoted to social groups that have been pressed to the margins. In his book on the inept he concentrated on class as the primary cause of marginalization. More than this he devoted space to explain the marginalization of women as being a direct result of the distribution of labor on gender lines. In the interviews in part two of his book, in the sections that deal with the housekeeper<sup>10</sup> and kinder garden teacher<sup>11</sup> (pp.275-280), he stresses the class aspects of their work which positions them in the margins in the sense that their work is labor intensive with low remuneration. From this it follows that as Mizrahi men are engaged in labor intensive work with low remuneration then Mizrahi women are placed even lower on the ladder than Mizrahi men are, for their income, as is the income of women of all identifiable groups, is lower than that of Mizrahi men. These conclusions are re-enforced by the findings of the research of Debbie Bernstein<sup>12</sup>, who was also Swirski's co-editor of the journal *Mahbarot Le'bikoret (Critical Notebooks)* which was published in the 1970s by the University of Haifa Press. Now while, on this analysis, it follows that Mizrahi women comprise not only a different category than do Mizrahi men, but also a different category from Ashkenazi women, as I shall shortly explain, what is hidden in the Swirski-Bernstein analysis is the part played in their positioning on the margins of society by the fact that they are Mizrahi women and not simply by the fact that they are Mizrahi. This is a clear expression of the phenomenon of the transparency of women as it appears in the writings of Israeli sociologists. In this instance the women in question are Mizrahi. The question of the lower positioning on the ladder of Mizrahi women than that of Ashkenazi women and Mizrahi men is not simply the result of a social arithmetic function which claims that 'a Mizrahi woman = a non-Ashkenazi woman + a non-man'. The status and identity of women in general is not simply a function of the fact that they are not-men, but is also a function of the fact that they are constructed as women in a patriarchal world at a certain time and place. Swirski appears to be unaware of fact for on his analysis there is no place for a category of Mizrahi women. Swirski works with two dichotomies that fail to pick out what is specific to Mizrahi women: the first is the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi dichotomy and the second is the men/women dichotomy. His fixing on the occupations of kinder garden teacher and cleaning lady as the occupations that Mizrahi women are concentrated in fails to explain *why* Mizrahi women congregate in these occupation and *why* Ashkenazi women and Mizrahi men do not. To address that question Swirski would have had to go beyond his Marxist analysis and look at Mizrahi women not only as members of a certain socio-economic class but also as comprising a social category with their distinctive own

characteristics and this would entail distinguishing Mizrahi women both from Mizrahi men and from other Jewish Israeli women.

Marx, the thinker whose theories provides Swirski with the framework for his own analysis of Israeli society, also errs on the issue of gender blindness. Marx's analysis leaves very unclear the question of women's liberation. On his view the revolution will liberate all proletarians – men and women alike – from their chains. However, Marx's analysis fails to cross the threshold to the family home and ignores the work done by women in the kitchen, the children's room and the bedroom. Marx does not speak directly about sexual relations or child rearing or household work as relationships that help construct the subordinating relations that women have to men. While Marx talks a lot about the division of labor in the public sphere he does not talk at all about the questions of division of labor in the home, either before, or after, the revolution. Some of these tasks are partially performed for Marx by Engles in his monograph on *The Origin of Family*<sup>13</sup> and later on by Marxist feminist theorists such as Firestone<sup>14</sup> Jaggar<sup>15</sup> and McKinnon<sup>16</sup> and others. McKinnon, for example, claims that the place of sexual relations in feminist theory is comparable to the place occupied by labor relations in Marx's own theory<sup>17</sup>. Sexual relations, she claims, have as much influence in patriarchal society as Marx claims that labor relations do in capitalist society. As labor relations are the source of alienation, exploitation and false consciousness in capitalist society, sexual relations are the source of alienation, exploitation and false consciousness in patriarchal society. Firestone compares the way that the earliest feminist theoreticians dealt with sexuality to the way that Owen, Fourier and Babel – thinkers Marx labeled 'Utopian Socialists' - dealt with class<sup>18</sup>. She points out that it is impossible to develop an overall understanding of the historical materialistic process simply by concentrating on the class relationships that flow from the production process without also taking account of the relationships between the sexes. Jaggar claims that Marx's gender blindness is obvious in what he say when he talks about the worker struggle, against oppression. While women are expected to join the struggle she claims that Marx simply neglected the oppression that women suffered in the homes<sup>19</sup>. Marx's (and Engel's) call at the end of *Communist Manifesto* for "all the workers of the world [to] unite" overlooks both the oppression women workers suffer simply because they are women as well as the exploitation they suffer at home at the hands of their own husbands, who within the household and are not simply only their husbands but also their own personal employers. This shows that the male worker who is oppressed and exploited is not made immune by this oppression and exploitation from becoming an oppressor and exploiter himself. This is a point I would have liked to have seen discussed in Swirski's book because it raises in an acute form a problem that arises in connection with the claim of some feminist activists that all women should show solidarity because being women, they all belong to a group marginalized by men. However, history shows that women of the upper classes, who seem to act out of the same economic motivations to lower class women, as do their husbands, often exploit women of lower classes. In her book, Caroline Ramazanoglu<sup>20</sup> shows how capitalist's interest can undermine feminist solidarity. This is definitely true in Israel where Mizrahi women have often found themselves exploited and oppressed by Ashkenazi women.

All the classical political theorists mentioned so far attempted to put forward a comprehensive theory of justice. This being the case the question arises: What, despite their concerns and sensitivity to questions of equality, justice and their desire to overcome exploitation and oppression, cause them to be gender blind? How is it

that a theory which is ostensibly concerned with the justice for all regardless of color, creed and sex, and which is consciously inclusive and egalitarian in its intent, is also blind to the injustices done to women? Iris Young in her book *Justice and The Politics of Difference*<sup>21</sup>, Iris Young argues that the cause of this gender blindness is a direct result of the attempt of those theorists to put forward a universal conception of justice. The attempt to put forward an abstract conception of justice which has universal application to all places and at all times, is in Young's view, the chief culprit. All such theories are expressed in concepts that are very abstract because only abstract concepts can have universal application. Concepts that are grounded in empirical reality are concepts which do not have universal application. This means that the universal concepts used to give expression to conceptions of justice in classical political theory are at once very general and at the same time very far removed from the facts of the real world at any specific time or at any specific place. Young's suggested solution to the problem is that theories of justice should be based on empirical data and should give up the hope of being universally applicable. If this would be done and theorists of justice would attempt to put forward theories that are applicable to certain societies at specific times, that is that their theories would be molded to fit the empirical social facts of the specific societies they are talking about. If they did this it would be less likely that these theorists would be blind to the injustices done to the members of any large group in the specific societies that they are talking about. That is to say that Young attempts to collapse the distinction between normative theorizing and empirical research. She recommends that theorizing be grounded in empirical facts. She wants the theoreticians to theorize about specific societies and the people in them. She also claims that until theoreticians become aware of the differences between the different positions that different groups occupy in the society, as well as the power relationships that hold between them, they will have a real understanding these societies. She also wants the concepts used by theoreticians to be based on empirical facts. What she does not want is that empirical facts be organized and made sense of in according to abstract universal concepts. To follow the latter course, as the classical political theorists of justice have tended to do has led them to put forward theories which are at once both removed from the world and blind to many injustices in it.

At first sight it seems that Swirski is engaged in the type of research that Young talks about. Swirski shows on the basis of empirical how the inequalities that exist in the State of Israel between various ethnic groups are re-enforced by institutional arrangements that have existed from the beginnings of the State until the 1980s. Swirski does not attempt to define an ideal of equality that is theoretically applicable to all societies. What he does is identify concrete instances of inequality and these examples come largely from his discussions both with workers - male and female - as well as with their union representatives from different geographic positions within Israel. His discussions with these people took place not only in the center of the country but also in the periphery, in development towns, in poor suburbs, both in the workers homes and in the places where they earn their low wages. The inequality he talks about is the inequality as it is experienced by individuals who are largely Mizrahim. This is the source of the importance of Swirski's research for our understanding of the so called ineptness, and the exclusion that goes along with it, of Mizrahim, as being not the result of some arbitrary invisible hand, but as being the result of specific social policies which were deemed to be just and to promote equality, according to some abstract universal theory. It is at this point that Swirski's research connects with the claims of a conspiracy that Young talks about, when she

quotes Marilyn Frye approvingly, who claims that there is no need for apartheid laws for racist relations to exist amongst different racial groups within society<sup>22</sup>. Ethnic differences in Israel are papered over in the nationalist and Zionist discourse about the unity of the Jewish people and in the claim that all the Jews are in the same boat. However, this discourse, as it is blind to the ethnic discrimination, also functions as an obstacle to overcoming it.

Within the Israeli context this discourse about the unity of the Jewish people translates into a claim that all Jewish citizens of the state belong to the Zionist Jewish national collective. This claim functions to support and protect the unity of this national collective, and so the identities of those Jews whose cultures do not fit the stereotype of 'the new Jew' that the Zionists wished to create in the land of Israel, were simply not recognized. That is to say, all the cultures that of those Jews which failed to stress the Eurocentric modernistic and non-religious values of Zionism were simply not given recognition in the public expressions of the Zionist ethos. The political and social structures and the processes of socialization encouraged the detachment of groups and individuals from the cultures they brought with them from the Arab and Muslim countries of origin. These processes of encouraging people to break their ties from their culture was never viewed as a form of racism nor even as a form of discrimination that was practiced against people on the basis of their ethnic origins. Hence, while groups in Israel were marginalized and discriminated against on the basis of ethnic membership it was almost impossible to expose it as such because the national ethos was simply blind to the existence of these ethnic groups.

One of the most important things that Swirski did in his research was to expose one form of the powerful mechanisms that controls and regulates how this situation of exclusion and marginalization works in the area of employment. He showed how the mechanisms of the division of labor mirror the economic social and political policies to ensure that those whose ethnic origin is Mizrahi will end up working in jobs that are labor intensive and for which remuneration is low. Mizrahim, Swirski showed, were not marginalized by chance. He shows that their marginalization was the direct result of employment policies that were formulated and implemented by those who speak and govern in the name of the national unity, and who from an economic point of view had the most to gain from it. At the same time other mechanisms were also in operation that worked both to marginalize Mizrahim and to detach them from their cultural ties. The mechanisms in question were those of socialization that were actively encouraged in the educational system as well as in the media. One of the aims of these mechanisms was to cope with any criticism that might be expressed by those who claim that the treatment of Mizrahim contradicted the talk of unity that is expressed in the national ethos. These mechanisms worked so as to create the impression that the concept 'Mizrahi' was not recognized to be a real social category. When anybody claimed that they were being discriminated against or exploited simply because they were Mizrahi they were identified not only as someone who was talking nonsense – after all there is no such social group as Mizrahim – but also as a trouble maker who wished to undermine the unity of the Zionist Jewish collective as it was expressed in the Zionist ideology. That is to say any criticism of the Zionist ideology was looked upon as something more than a criticism; it was looked upon as an attack upon Zionism, and as such the Zionist leadership who governed the state, tended to overreact against any such criticism and in doing so usually exacerbated the situation. Hence, the category of Mizrahi was excluded from the public discourse, and every attempt to use it in that discourse was immediately identified as a threat to Zionism. This in turn led to the exclusion of problems faced by Mizrahim, because



they were Mizrahim, from the Israeli public discourse and so is a contributing factor to their marginalization.

Similar, but even more powerfully exclusion mechanisms operate to marginalize Mizrahi women; they operate once against their Mizrahiness (because they are not Ashkenazi) and they operate also against their femininity (because they are not men, neither Mizrahi men nor Ashkenazi men). This duality of the exclusion mechanism creates a special problem for Mizrahi women when they make demands of those who are responsible for their marginalization. The point quite simply is that the demands that they make of men are different from the demands they make from Ashkenazim and so when they make demands of men (both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi) their Mizrahiness tends to be overlooked and when they make demands of Ashkenazim (both male and female) their femininity tends to be overlooked. Hence, the special social category seems to get lost in the larger social picture. This fact at once functions to turn groups like Ashkenazi women and Mizrahi men to play a part in marginalizing Mizrahi women and it also helps give credence to the claim that all Israeli women are sisters and so they should practice solidarity for they are fighting against a common enemy.

However, as I have already pointed out, this seemingly egalitarian stand papers over and so helps to hide, policies of exclusion, exploitation, as well as marginalization. When Mizrahi women complain that they are being marginalized, discriminated against and are suffering from exclusion they are at once accused of threatening either the unity of the larger Mizrahi group or the unity of the feminist solidarity. In this Mizrahi women in Israel suffer a fate similar to other so-called social transparent groups do in other societies. The claim of the larger group is usually that the smaller group is raising irrelevant side issues that threaten the ideology of group unity. Experience shows that the ideological mechanisms of the claims for unity usually succeed in silencing the claims of the smaller but more marginalized group. However, now they are being marginalized by groups who belong to the same family of social categories that they do. The extensive literature that deals with identity construction is full of references to the problems that are connected with what is involved in using one category rather than another to refer to a particular group. The point is one category highlights certain features while repressing others that another category would not. One such author who writes perceptively about this problem from a feministic and cultural pluralistic perspective is Elisabeth V. Spelman<sup>23</sup>.

In her article "The One and The Many" Spelman shows how a universalistic liberalism blurs the distinction that exists between various essential social categories by abstracting the individual from his context and social relationships, and eventually leading to the negation of what is specific to the identity of any specific individual or groups of individuals. All the different properties that go together to make up the identity of specific individuals are not constantly exhibited and visible. Nevertheless, those who belong to marginalized social groups find themselves forced to hide parts of their identity more than do those who belong to non-marginalized social groups. In Israel an Ashkenazi Jewish male does not attempt to hide either his Ashkenaziness or his maleness when he moves into the public sphere, whereas an Arab women when she moves into the public sphere would tend, as far as possible, to mask her Arabness and her femaleness<sup>24</sup>. Spelman clarifies this situation by using the metaphor of "the custom's hall". She asks us to imagine that when we get to the entrance of the custom's hall we see that men and women have different doors to go through: The green door is for women only while the red door is for men only. Now through each

of these respective doors enter women and men whose other identifiable properties are not given any recognition. So, for example, through the green door will enter women who had different color skin, those who are poor and those who are rich, those who are religious and those who are atheists, those who are handicapped and those who are non-handicapped, and those who are young and those who are old. The differences that are not recognized in the custom's hall are very important when it comes to the cultural, economic and political identities of women when they step out of the custom's hall into society at large. Here the fact that a woman is simply not a man is not enough to establish who each of them is. It is clear that each woman's identity is constructed from many different traits and properties, and simply to fix on one of them as is done in Spelman's "custom's hall" hides more than it reveals. If the "custom hall" for example was divided not according to gender but according to skin color and people would enter through the door that is appropriate to the pigment of their skin, what would remain hidden would be not only their gender and the classes they belong to and whether they were old or young, religious or not, but everything about them apart from the fact as to whether their skin color was light or dark. What gets lost in the picture is the positioning of various groups and individuals who go to make up the larger categories. These groups and people appear in the picture – they entered into the custom's hall – they simply don't appear there as who they are. Those who decided how those who want to enter the custom's hall should do so; it is they who are responsible for what qualities of people are recognized (and regarded as being important and significant) and those qualities which are not to be recognized (are regarded as being unimportant and insignificant). The point is that there are hegemonic groups that decide what enters the public discourse and what enters into the arena of the public agenda. The implications of all this is that those groups and individuals who find themselves low down on the social hierarchy will not be helped to rise up the ladder by the universal talk about the equality of men and or the sisterhood to which all women belong to, for these universalistic categories do not recognize as important and significant the qualities that marginalized groups need to identify themselves with.

What Spelman does not write about, but is discussed by such people as Nancy Fraser<sup>25</sup> and Charles Taylor<sup>26</sup>, who write about the 'politics of recognition' and the 'politics of identity' (identity politics), is the danger that can follow abandonment of universalistic values in favor of values of specific group identities. Both Fraser and Taylor point to the potential danger of identity politics, namely that the traditional hegemonic groups who now control the public sphere by deciding which qualities are important and so to be recognized as universal, because they are so powerful will know how to utilize the new talk of identity values to protect the power that they presently enjoy. Fraser's and Taylor's message is that it is important not just *what* is said but *who* it is that is doing the speaking and from *what social position he or she is speaking*. Is this person speaking from the center or from the margins? Is he or she speaking from a position of power or from a position of weakness? Is he or she speaking as a have or as a have-not? Fraser and Taylor stress that it is important to distinguish two types of talk about equality and justice according to who is speaking. Is the person speaking a member of the hegemonic group who speaks from the center in the name of the common interest of society, or nation, or state, or is he or she a person who speaks from the margins when he or she speaks about those self same collective values of society, or nation, or state, but is claiming that these values do not work to the benefit of all?

Bell hooks, in her book *Feminist Theory*<sup>27</sup> clearly displays how important it is to recognize the place that people argue from. What she stresses is that all talk of all people is partial no matter where they placed. Those who are placed in the center and formerly speak in the name of the state are just as partial in their talk as those who talk from the margins. Therefore, as the talk of all people is partial, the talk of no particular person is more important than the talk of anyone else. hooks discusses this issue in the American feminist context. The agenda of African-American women she stresses, time and time again is completely different than that of the white American woman. Whereas white women see their agenda as universal and talk of all women belonging to one sisterhood but in point of fact their so called universalistic agenda is not good for all women but is only good for women who are like themselves. hooks refers to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and claims that its principal message is that "What is good for white women in America is good for all women in the world"<sup>28</sup>. In other words to return to the "custom hall" metaphor the notion of solidarity becomes the passport to let all women enter through the green door. But in doing so it does not allow us to see the different types of women, those who are marginalized, those who are excluded and those who are transparent. hooks' complaint about white middle class feminists like Betty Friedan, is that although they talk for all women and talk in terms of a universalistic feminist agenda, in point of fact that they are unaware of the plight of women who are different from them and they are also incapable of comprehending the different types of feminist agenda. If they know something, they know their own situation and then illegitimately project this on to all women and put forward an agenda that is supposed to be universal simply on the basis of their own understanding of their own situation. Because they are powerful, and because they are highly educated, and because they are articulate and have access to the centers of power, then the categories while middle class feminists use to talk about women's problems and their feminist agenda, develop a hegemonic hold on the public discourse. This situation makes it very difficult for transparent and excluded groups of women to be heard in the public domain.

In his analysis about the ineptness of Mizrahim, Swirski showed in effect that the Mizrahim entered "the custom hall" via the door of 'national unity'. Hence their Arabness was played down, it was not seen as something that distinguished them essentially from other Jews. Their Arabness was seen as simply an 'ethnic trait', and so marginal to whom they basically were - Jews. The official line was that being Mizrahi was simply another way of being Jewish. This enabled the Zionist establishment, who were largely Ashkenazi, to deal with the Mizrahim as Jews – in this context simply as non-Arabs – and so to ignore their Arabness. This policy helped facilitate the social, cultural and political positioning of Mizrahim in the Israeli State: being Jews, they were positioned above the Arabs, but being ethnically Arab they were positioned below Ashkenazim.

Whereas in the early days of the State the Zionist discourse functioned in such a way as to integrate various groups into Israeli society, later on it no longer succeeded in doing so. Today, the public discourse centers around questions not about whether Israel is Zionist or not, but about whether a Zionist Israel can be both a Jewish and a democratic state while it rules over a large permanent Arab minority<sup>29</sup>. Part of the public discourse today turns on questions of identity, and as such, many groups who were previously lumped together within the larger group of Jews are now able to speak in their own voice in the public arena. This allows various groups that in the past were unable to give voice to their demands to do so now. However this places these groups in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, they claim rights which are

supposed to accrue to all citizens simply because they are citizens but which they did not enjoy because they were Mizrahim or Arabs or women or handicapped, but on the other hand, they demand from the state to treat them as citizens and not to treat them as Mizrahim or Arabs or women or handicapped, that is they demand that the state be blind to their particular identities.

The rest of this article will be devoted to the question how can weak social groups, oppressed social groups and transparent social groups become empowered noticeable and recognized? And more specifically, how is it possible to apply this with regard to Mizrahi women?

Mizrahi women do not comprise a single homogenous category. In terms of economics, culture, education and political orientation there is nothing that characterizes all Mizrahi women. Unlike other distinct marginal groups such as the Ethiopians women, Palestinian-Israeli women and Ultra-Orthodox women, Mizrahi women as a group are at once invisible and lack legitimacy in Israel public discourse to present themselves as belonging to a distinct social group. This invisible and lack of legitimacy is caused by the complicated ethnic political struggle that is as old as the Israeli entity itself. Before I can expand on this I need to draw a distinction between different types of socially repressed and marginal groups, namely, between groups that are legally and theoretically recognized and acknowledged, and those groups that are transparent both to the law and to the social theory.

The constitution writers who were influenced by social contract theory not simply to incorporate the abstract universalistic values of these theories into their constitutions, but to add details specified to which specific groups the universalistic values and principles espoused by the contract theorists would be applied to. For example where social contract theorists claimed that all men should be treated equally, the constitution writers specified which specific groups of men, and with regard to what, they should be treated equally. This finds expression in the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel in the paragraph that states that: "The State of Israel...will uphold complete social and political equality amongst all its citizens without regard to differences of religion, race and gender."<sup>30</sup> Why, some may ask did not the composers of this declaration simply write the universal claim that "all people, without any exception, will be treated equally before the law"? Why when they talked about equality, did they choose to specify that no exceptions would only be made because of "religion, race and gender" and why did they not specify also ethnicity and/or nationality, for example? Those who draw up constitutions, as well as those who legislate laws are aware that there are certain categories of social groups that are weak, and this awareness often leads them to protect them. This awareness is also the basis of the justification for policies of affirmative discriminative action. I talk about 'affirmative' discriminative action and not 'negative' discriminative action because the aim is to correct a wrong done to a group, because it has been discriminated against in the past. The aim is to help them catch up to others. Justifiable though this type of affirmative action might be, it contradicts the universal principle that *all* people (meaning 'without exception') should be treated equally. The recognition that people in the past suffered from discrimination that was connected with their identity that is on the basis of gender and/or their color and/or their beliefs, is a step in the direction of justice. However, it is also contrary to the universal principle of treating everyone equally. When a specific identity trait, like gender, is picked out to justify affirmative action, like it was by the Israeli High Court, shows that the Israeli legal system acknowledges that women are discriminated against and that this discrimination both needs to stop and

those suffering from it need to be compensated. The same applies to groups like the handicapped and the Israeli Arabs, groups that are recognized as deserving legal protection. This acknowledgement of these groups by the legal system is what allows the claim to be made that there is a state of inequality between men and women, between Jews and Arabs and between the handicapped and those who are not handicapped. The law here identifies the cause of the inequality, but it also separates this cause from those who perpetrate it. This is clear, for example, to anyone who reads the High Court's Decision numbers 453/94, 454/94 with regard to women sitting on board of directorship as stated in paragraph 2c that "as it is both clear and easy to understand the universal applicability and obligatory character of the principle of equality, what is not clear and easy is to understand why women do not enjoy this right. *For historical reasons that are related to religious laws and ethnic traditions* equal treatment for women posed a particular problem until legislature passed the Law of Equal Rights for Women (1951), which gave expression, content and legally obligated the right that women should enjoy completely equally. (522 c-f)" (p.503, my emphasis HDK) These words indicate that it is clear that the judges identified women as a disadvantaged and discriminated against group and even explicitly identified what caused them to be disadvantaged and discriminated against, namely, traditions, religions, ethnicity. However, the judges failed to connect these causes to any specific groups who are carried out the discrimination. The judge's decision did not talk in terms that one identifiable social group is responsible for the discrimination suffered by another identifiable social group, and in doing so, the judges in effect absolved the discriminating group for responsibility for the discrimination which it practices. The decision does not identify men, and or even to women of a specific religion or of a specific ethnic group or a specific tradition, that they discriminate against women of all other religions, of all other ethnic groups, or of all other traditions. This in effect implies that it is only the survived historical relics of religions, traditions and ethnicity that they are the causes of the discrimination that exists within a contemporary Israeli society that ostensibly values the principle of (universal) equality. The decision, by failing explicitly to identify those responsible for the discrimination, that is those people groups and institutions that actually carried out the acts of discrimination, prevents itself from identifying and punishing those responsible for acts of discrimination to those they have wrong. This situation co-exists with the claim of the Israeli Declaration of Independence recognizing that there are specific categories of people that have been discriminated and so need legal defense.

The logic of the Israeli Declaration of Independence is that the law ostensibly defends the most weak. For example, that as women, Arabs and the handicapped have been discriminated against in the public service by being under represented there, affirmative action should now be carried out to secure these groups a fair representation. It would seem to follow that that a women who is both Arab and handicapped is protected three times by this law and that such women should be well represented in the Israeli public service. I am willing to go out on a limb and surmise that there is not one woman who is both Arab and handicapped in the Israeli public service. What I am certain of is that if there was such a woman she never took the public service to court because she was being discriminated against three times simultaneously. To classify individuals in society according to a scale of how many handicapped groups they belong to as well as to how many privileged groups they belong to does not in practice guarantee that those belonging to the handicapped groups will be protected. Then again, the system of classification appears to be

completely arbitrary and this holds even for those belonging to the social categories the law specifically specifies should be protected. With regard to the people who belong to categories that are invisible, that is categories that the law is blind to, and does not specify that these people deserve compensation by policies of affirmative action, the question of their compensation does not even arise. It is clear is that disadvantaged groups that are not recognized by law and in public discourse, are groups that are neither protected by Israeli law and are not the beneficiaries of policies of affirmative action. This is the fate of Mizrahi women: the law and Israeli public discourse is blind to their existence as a social group and so the law does not protect them and they are also not the beneficiaries of policies of affirmative actions. As I have argued earlier, Mizrahi women fall within two social categories, those of Mizrahim and those of women. Many Mizrahi women, like many Mizrahi men, find themselves pushed to the margins of Israeli society, excluded and discriminated against, over many years by many state institutions, simply because they are Mizrahi.

According to the liberal legal tradition in order that a Mizrahi woman will be recognized by the law, she is required to show that she falls under two conditions which results in discrimination: 1) That she has difficulties in enjoying in a manner equal to others certain specific resources that are distributed by the state, and 2) And the reason she has difficulties in enjoying those specific resources that are distributed by the state is because she belongs to the group of Mizrahi women. In this sense Mizrahi women are like Ethiopian women and Ultra-Orthodox women but unlike Israeli Palestinian women. Women belonging to this last group can come to court and claim that they are being discriminated against simply because they are Palestinians and/or women as the law is not blind to either group. Frances Raday, in her article "On Equality"<sup>31</sup> highlighted how difficult it is in a system of laws that is based on liberal principles, for one lone woman to prove that she is suffering from discrimination. The difficulty arises from the fact that liberal principles speak in terms of the humanity of the person and do not speak of persons in terms of their identifying characteristics, such as sex and ethnicity. And so a Mizrahi woman who claims that she is being discriminated against because she is who she is, is making a claim that liberal theory has difficulty in recognizing. Liberal theory only recognizes concrete acts of discrimination that are made against individual people on the basis that they are human beings and not because they belong to certain social groups. Raday, following Cathrine MacKinnon, emphasizes that the appellant is required to prove that the discrimination she has suffered was part of a *pattern* of discrimination. That is to say she is required to prove that there were number of similar incidents of discriminations that preceded her in which other women were discriminated because they shared common characteristics for example that a certain company consistently refuses to employ qualified women because they are women or more specifically, because they are Mizrahi women. But until such time that the law is not convinced that there is no such pattern the law will be blind to that woman's claim. What is more, until the law does not recognize that there is such a pattern the chances that particular women will be able to convince the court that they are each discriminated against because of their identity, are very low.

Within each society, different individuals display different levels of invisibility. The invisibility of different individuals is directly related to whether the characteristics by which they identify themselves are recognized both by the law and the community. For example foreign workers are recognized by the law simply as "a pair of working hands": The other aspects of their identity, such as their origin, their religion, their culture, is something that Israeli law does not see and so with regard to

discrimination in these areas it cannot help them. In this respect foreign workers find themselves on an equal footing to those social groups in Israel, like Mizrahi women, that are not entitled to affirmative action even though they suffer from exclusion and discrimination. Lacking legal recognition, the only thing left to those belonging to such social groups is to involve themselves in a struggle for their right to define themselves as they themselves see fit and not the hegemony be it the ruling class or the law.

Chantal Mouffe, in her article “Feminism Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics”<sup>32</sup> has written about the fight against the hegemonic power that women need to undertake as being the only option for their liberation. While in her article, “The Question of Identity”<sup>33</sup> she writes about the struggle of women to articulate their own political identity. For Mouffe marginalized groups must engage in a political struggle to establish their own identity, a process that involves amongst other things liberation from what she calls “hegemonic articulation”. Engaging in a political struggle begins a process that involves the reconstruction of identity that moves the subject from holding arbitrary positions that contribute to his or her oppression. For example, a battered woman, engaged in political struggle will reconstruct her identity as a feminist, and this lead her to give up adhering to the position that a battered woman deserves being beaten. The political struggle for women, involves a process of transformation from accepting positions of subordination as well as the things that follow from it. Feminist politics for Mouffe, is a struggle of women to remove themselves from the swamp of different connotations of subordination they find themselves trapped in. This struggle she sees, has to go along with and is a part of the struggle against all types of oppression. The payoff for women begins only when they are recognized as a legitimate social group and so are transformed from being invisible to being visible.

The subordination of Mizrahi women in this sense begins as soon as they enter the customs room either through the door labeled ‘Mizrahim’ or through the door labeled ‘Women’. No matter which door they go through certain aspects of their identity, of their humanity, and of what is unique to their life experiences fail to be recognized and so are in practice invisible. This is so even when their plight is discussed in contexts of discrimination as in Swirski’s book and certainly in the Israeli High Court’s decisions concerning affirmative action (see Israeli High Court’s Decision no. 453-454, 1994), and the Reform of the Law passed by the Knesset in the December 2000 concerning the nomination of women to boards of directors and their representation in the higher ranks of the public service<sup>34</sup> – in all these Mizrahi women are not identified as such. John Rajchman in his introduction to a collection of essays *Identity In Question* refers to an article by Stanley Aronowitz in which he discusses the problems that the minority creates for the hegemonic group in society when they fight for the legitimate recognition of their own identity. Rajchman points out that Aronowitz argues that the struggle for recognition by an identity of a minority group, which cannot be fused or assimilated with the identity of the hegemonic group, can only begin a process where by the minority will be recognized as something “other”. Rajchman claims:

“Minority identity is not only tragic and hopeful; it also becomes problematizing when it mobilizes something “other” – something which cannot be assimilated within visible, established, public categories,

and which causes them to be rethought.”  
(p.2)<sup>35</sup>

Mizrahi women are officially invisible in the sense that legally their status is equal to that of Ashkenazi Jewish men. However, it is obvious to everyone who knows anything about Israel that this is simply not the case. As such the only option open to Mizrahi women is to organize themselves and engage in a political struggle to establish the recognition of their own identity. This is not a struggle for them to receive recognition that they are women+Mizrahi. They do not want to be recognized as simply belonging to these two groups. They have learnt from their own experience that when they have engaged in struggles either with Mizrahi men or with non-Mizrahi women, that their specific agenda have not being addressed. In order for their agenda to be addressed they need to be recognized as comprising a separate social category with its own agenda and its own needs. The expression of their specific identity and the specific forms of discrimination suffered by Mizrahi women are only visible when Mizrahi women are seen to belong to a separate social category. Mizrahi women can only be themselves, and the types of discrimination they suffer can only be addressed, when Mizrahi women are seen to be a distinct group and not part of either the group of Mizrahim or the group of women in general. To repeat, the life experience of Mizrahi women has been constructed differently from that both of Mizrahi men and of non-Mizrahi women. Hence, the stage of organizing themselves for the struggle to place their agenda before the public involves a process of making clear to others that they have an identity which is separate from the two groups that people often classify them as belonging to. Obviously, Mizrahi women are not identified with the strongest women's groups in society and they are not directly competing with them for resources, because in such a competition they are bound to always loose. By the same token they are not in competition with the group of Ashkenazi men. Mizrahi women are in direct competition for resources with Mizrahi men and Ashkenzi women in the same sense that bus-drivers are in direct competition with taxi drivers and not with airplane pilots. The theoretical basis of their struggle is with the groups that Charles Taylor refers to as their “significant other”, which are somehow close to them but from which they are distinguishable.

This type of struggle is in part essentially an antagonistic one because the group in question is fighting for the recognition of its own identity by differentiating itself from groups close to it. The struggle with these groups is a struggle for recognition both of who they are and also of who they are not: Mizrahi women are not Ashkenazi women and they are not Mizrahi men. Their first step in the process to receive public recognition of who they are is to differentiate themselves from those groups they are close to and to which they are related. This negative struggle is but the first step the people must take in order to move away from the subordination Mouffe wrote about and from the reduction of their identity that Spelman wrote about. Mizrahi women must also engage in a struggle to identify themselves positively and this requires them to define themselves by saying who they are, in order to secure their recognition as comprising a separate social group. But their public recognition will only be secure when their existence is recognized by the law. As the law only recognizes groups that are defined positively Mizrahi women need to show that they have a specific form of life experiences with specific contents.

Today, this struggle is carried on, like many other social struggles, only by small number of Mizrahi women who are organized in a non-governmental agency that calls itself Achoti (my sister). Achoti is only the latest organization in a number



of organizations to take on this task. It was preceded by a number of other organizations since the early 1990s<sup>36</sup>. I want to stress that even today within organizations that are more powerful than Achoti, especially within women's organizations dominated by Ashkenazi women and within Mizrahi organizations dominated by Mizrahi men, Mizrahi women are not acknowledged as having their own distinct existence.

The most important source for the content of the specific identity of Mizrahi women is their culture and history, a history that has yet to be written and which will obviously speak of their struggles against oppression and stereotyping as well as their struggle for liberation from poverty and misery, in their struggle against contempt and subordination of women who had to live in the shadows of their caricatured images of the Moroccan *Freiha*, the Oriental *Aliza* Mizrahi, the Yemenite *Tziona* and many other figures that are the stock and stable of Israeli culture and show business. In her book on Israeli cinema Ella Shohat presented the first analysis of the traditional role played by Mizrahi women in the Israeli film industry<sup>37</sup>. What she shows is that in Israeli films until the mid-Eighties the Mizrahi woman was usually a figure of ridicule.

The process by which Mizrahi women construct their identity and gain recognition for it involves them in a struggle against being articulated and defined by the hegemonic groups in society that Mouffe talks about. This process is a process of dialogue, combative dialogue. This combative dialogue takes place within what Taylor calls the "politics of recognition". Engaging in this type of politics of recognition, will force Mizrahi women to recreate a new language of the body, of love, of art, of hate, of politics of women. This new language will be used by Mizrahi women to define their and fix their relations with members of other groups. This type of dialogue Taylor points out displays the relationships and ties that individuals have to others within a specific group and the relationships and ties that one group has to other groups. Hence, if until now Mizrahi women were forcibly positioned in subordinate relations, ridiculed by the culture and invisible not only to the law, but also in the political arena and to the history taught in schools, it follows that the dialogue that they are now engaged in is both with those groups close to them as well as to other groups in the society. This is not a dialogue in which they simply assert their differentiation from the groups close to them; it is also a dialogue in which they reconstruct their identity. I talk of "recreate" and "reconstruct" because this is not simply a nostalgic return to their roots, nor a process of romanticizing the memories of "the good old days", but the construction of a form of identity that will give expression to their specific life experiences, as Mizrahi women who comprise a recognizable social and political group with its own differentiated status and that warrants recognition both by the law and by the Israeli public. The Mizrahi women's perception of sex, gender, motherhood, reproduction, family etc, distinguishes them from other groups of women in Israel. The stories they tell of their own experiences as Jewish women with roots in the Arab world, the traumas they went through following their *Alyiah* to Israel<sup>38</sup> and even their pleasant experiences were all different from the stories told by Ashkenazi women or Mizrahi men. Their stories of Motherhood and of their familial attachments whose foundations are to be found both in Arab and Jewish History, influences their perception and experience of western civilization that they encountered in Israel. This is a subject that is only now beginning to be seriously studied (Dahan-Kalev, 2002).

It is worthwhile to repeat so as to emphasize that the invisibility of Mizrahi women as a group does not imply anything with regard to the existence or absence of

their story. The invisibility of the Mizrahi women only points to their absence in the *official* historical story of the state of Israel, and as a result of this absence, the political and the legal systems have failed to recognize them, and so they find themselves marginalized both economically and culturally, and also find themselves repressed in the sense that as a group their existence is not regarded as legitimate. The importance of the type of dialogue that Taylor speaks about in this context is that if it was practiced it would allow Mizrahi women to express themselves and eventually receive recognition as women who possess a specific form of consciousness, with its own specific history, with its own specific political and economic positioning, that at once has things in common with other groups but also possesses characteristics that are specifically their own. Since Mizrahi women have begun to take part in this type of dialogue some of them have found that their recognition for who they are does not constantly need to be proved. That is to say that taking part in this dialogue is in effect establishing them as an autonomous social category, differentiated from the general group of women and from Mizrahi men as well as other groups such as Ultra-orthodox women, Ethiopian women and Palestinian women.

This process of dialogue carries within itself the capacity of expanding the ability of Mizrahi women to give expression to what they think and so this process of dialogue works at the same time to undermine their discrimination. While they are engaged in the struggle they are also uncovering hidden aspects of their identity well as creating for themselves a place in political space. Then again the more Mizrahi women engage in this dialogue the more they will be capable of talking not just on behalf of themselves but also on behalf of other groups and so help open the doors for them to enter the public arena. So in creating their own political space in the public sphere by breaching the wall around it, Mizrahi women can an opening through which others can also pass.

Prior to stating my conclusions I shall remind you of the principal themes of this paper. It began with a discussion of transparency of women in patriarchal social and political theories as they have been expressed in researches that focus on discrimination, marginalization of social groups even by researches who are clearly in favor of social reform. My point of reference has been Shlomo Swirski's *Not Naturally Inept But Made to be Inept*. While Swirski in his book deals with the problem of discrimination against Mizrahim and their marginalization within Israeli society, he displays gender blindness with regard to Mizrahi women treating them only as a part of the Mizrahim. In order to create recognition that Mizrahi women comprise a separate social category, they themselves must tell their own separate story historically, sociologically, politically, and culturally. Telling this story involves a political struggle which takes the form of a dialogue in order to construct the category of Mizrahi women as differentiated from categories into which they are dumped, like 'Mizrahim' and 'women' and entails them giving expression to their identity as Mizrahi women. Israeli law already recognizes women as comprising a group that is potentially subject to discrimination, and so it can come to their aid when they are discriminated against either economically, politically and socially. Mizrahi women of course fall within the category of women so the type of discrimination they suffer simply as women is amenable to legal defense. However, the discrimination they suffer as *Mizrahi women* is not amenable to legal defense because *as* Mizrahi women they are invisible to the law. Hence, in the struggle for their liberation in Israel Mizrahi women are partially dependent on the good will of the Ashkenazi feminist activists who began and still lead the struggle to improve the status of women in Israel. The first step that Mizrahi women have to perform to

address their special needs is to differentiate themselves from other groups of women. The second step in this struggle is to distinguish themselves from within the category of Mizrahim. This second step is more complicated than the first because whereas women are recognized as a social category by the law this is not the case with Mizrahim and this is something that is preventing the adoption of policies of affirmative action. The struggle for Mizrahim to receive the recognition that women possess as a group that is potentially subject to discrimination is a political power struggle that has been going on for years and for which there is no end in sight. Mizrahi women stand side by side with Mizrahi men in this struggle, however, their doing so has led to their special needs being swamped by the needs of the group as a whole. In the political activity of Mizrahim organized both within political parties and in NGOs Mizrahi women have always been, and continue to be, invisible. However, there is one Mizrahi organization, The Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow<sup>39</sup>, that displays some awareness of this problem in the sense that at least ideologically they pay some lip service to the special plight of Mizrahi women and attempt to give them equal representation wherever possible. But even this organization fails to give Mizrahi women the space they need to pursue their specific agenda. Hence, the only conclusion that Mizrahi women can draw is that they must differentiate themselves from Mizrahi men and pursue their own agenda in their own organizations. This differentiation of Mizrahi women to fight for their own recognition, if successful, would probably contribute to the wider group of Mizrahim also being recognized.

### **Conclusion**

Three main conclusions seem to follow from my analysis: Firstly, exclusion, invisibility and discrimination are not only the results of a binary relation between the hegemonic group and subordinated groups. Phenomena of discrimination, exclusion and invisibility also occur within the subordinated groups themselves. Recognition and differentiation of the specific character of different subordinated groups, can only follow upon their setting up their own organizations, to pursue their own agenda, and by engaging in a political struggle. Secondly, recognition by the law and the adoption of government by policies of affirmative action are dependent on the success of a prior political struggle that paves the way for the public recognition that must precede legal recognition. Thirdly, because groups have been discriminated and marginalized this does not imply that they themselves have been immunized against performing acts of discrimination and marginalization themselves<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Swirski, Shlomo; 1981, *Not Naturally Inept But Socialized to be Inept: A sociological Analysis and Discussions with Social Activists Both Men and Women*, Haifa University Press, Haifa. The conference that celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this book took place at Ben Gurion University in May 2001 in the presence of the author himself.

<sup>2</sup> Ram, Uri, 1994, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology: Theory, Ideology, Identity*, NY, SUNY Press.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Mizrahi’ and its cognate ‘Mizrahiot’, are terms used to refer to Israelis whose origins are in Muslim and Arab countries in North Africa and in West Asia. These are terms used only in Israel.

<sup>4</sup> See Ram above.

<sup>5</sup> I assume that most readers of this journal will be familiar with these ideas so there really is no need for me to say more than I do say about them.

<sup>6</sup> Coole, Diana H., 1988, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny To Contemporary Feminism*, Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex.

<sup>7</sup> Mill, John Stuart, 1929, (First edition 1869) *The Subjection Of Women*, Everyman, London.

<sup>8</sup> Hegel, G.W.F., *The Philosophy of Right*, Translated by Knox, T.M., 1978, Oxford University Press, London, #166, pp. 263-264.

<sup>9</sup> For a number of interesting and perceptive feminist discussions of Hegel see *Feminist Interpretation of G.W.F.Hegel*; 1996 ed. Jagentowicz Mills, P., Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>10</sup> Swiski, *ibid* pp. 230-234.

<sup>11</sup> Swirski, *ibid* pp. 275-280.

<sup>12</sup> Bernstein, Deborah (1991) "Oriental and Ashkenazi Jewish Women in the Labor Market." pp.186-192 in Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir (eds), *Calling the Equality Bluff*. New York, Pergamon.

<sup>13</sup> Engels, Friedrich "The Origins Of The Family, Private Property And The State" in a collection *Feminist Framework* edited by Allison Jaggar and Paula S. Rothengberg, MacGraw-Hill Press. 1993, NY pp. 160-170

<sup>14</sup> Firestone, Shulamith, 1970, *The Dialectic Of Sex, The Case For Feminist Revolution*, Quill William Morrow, New York;

<sup>15</sup> Jaggar, Alison M. 1983, *Feminist Politics and Human nature*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc. Totowa, New Jersey.

<sup>16</sup> MacKinnon, Cathrine A. 1989, *Toward A Feminist Theory of The State*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachussets.

<sup>17</sup> MacKinnon, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Firestone, *ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Jaggar, *ibid*, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> Ramazanoglu, Caroline; 1989 *Feminism and The Contradictions of Oppression*, Routledge, NY

<sup>21</sup> Young, Iris M., 1990, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey

<sup>22</sup> Young, *ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Spelman, Elizabeth, 1997 "Women: The One and The Many" in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, Diana Tiejens Meyers, ed. Routledge, New York, pp.160-179.

<sup>24</sup> What I am referring to is an Israeli version of the phenomenon identified by Franz Fanon of black people who "mask" themselves as white (see Fanon, F., 1967, *Black Skin White Masks*, Grove press, NY.) Mizrahim in Israel who try to pass themselves of as Ashkenazim are referred to by a Hebrew term 'Meshuknazim' (literally "Ashkenazified").

<sup>25</sup> Fraser Nancy, "Rethinking Recognition", *New Left Review* 3, June 2000, pp.107-120.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor Charles, "The Politics of Recognition", in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann, 1994, Princeton University Press, New Jersey

<sup>27</sup> hooks, bell (1984) *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

<sup>28</sup> hooks, *ibid*, p. 95

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- <sup>29</sup> See the debate that begins in 1997 in *Israeli Studies* and goes through to 2000 see bibliography for specific references to articles by Smooha, Gavison, Asa'd Nadim and Yiftahel, Dowty and Yonah.
- <sup>30</sup> *Official Document 1948*, vol. 1, p. 1. Hebrew (translation mine HDK).
- <sup>31</sup> Raday Frances, 1995, "On Equality" in *The Status Of Women In Society and Law*, edited by Frances Raday, Carmel Shalev and Michal Liben –Kobi, Shoken, Jerusalem (Hebrew)
- <sup>32</sup> Mouffe, Chantal, (1997) in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, Diana Tietjens Meyers, ed. Routledge, New York, (pp.532-545)
- <sup>33</sup> Mouffe, C., "Democratic Politics and The Question of Identity" (1995) *Identity In Question*, ed. John Rajchman Routledge New York, pp.33-46
- <sup>34</sup> Amendment no. 11 to the Law of Civil Service (Nominations), Law book no. 1767, December 27, 2000, p. 78.
- <sup>35</sup> Rajchman John, ed., *Identity In Question*, 1995, Routledge New York, p 2.
- <sup>36</sup> See Dahan-Kalev, Henriette, 2001 "Tensions In Israeli Feminism: The Mizrahi Ashkenazi Rift", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 2001 pp.1-16.
- <sup>37</sup> Shoat Ella, 1989, *Israeli Cinema: East/ West and The Politics Of Representation*, University Of Texas Press.
- <sup>38</sup> Dahan-Kalev, Henriette, 2001 "You Are So Pretty, You Don't Look Moroccan", *Israeli Studies*. Volume 6, Number 1, pp.1-14
- <sup>39</sup> The Democratic Mizrahi Rainbow is a movement founded in 1995 by a group of Mizrahi people who struggle for issues of social justice and human rights.
- <sup>40</sup> I would like to acknowledge the help of Niza Yanay who read the first Hebrew version of this essay with me and made a number of suggestions which I incorporated into this version. I would also like to thank Netta Amar who drew my attention to the blindness of Israeli Law to Mizrahi women and to Rakefet Levkowitz-Efrat for drawing my attention to one of Hegel's derogatory remarks about women. This version of the essay includes many suggestions made by anonymous reader for this journal of the penultimate version. And to her I say thank you. I also thank Haim Marantz without whose help this article would not have been reached its final form.

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