

Research Article

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“We Are All the Sons of Abraham”? Utopian Performativity for Jewish–Arab Coexistence in an Israeli Reform Jewish *Mimouna* Celebration

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Abstract: *Mimouna* is a North-African Jewish festival, which in the past symbolized good neighborly relationships between Jews and Muslims. Today, however, this festival has transformed into a neutralized interfaith encounter, resembling a culinary-focused musical show. The particular event explored in this case study was organized by an Israeli Reform Jewish congregation, which is a non-Orthodox liberal Jewish denomination. In this event, the congregation strived to reconceptualize the diasporic concept of this festival. In effect, the performance is a cultural appropriation that reveals the failures to turn this tolerant vision into a current local political reality. The performance is constructed as a marketing script to brand Reform Judaism’s liberal ideology agenda and its sociopolitical position in Israeli society. The endeavor to establish the *Mimouna* as a safe space for fostering interreligious discourse and dialogue exposed its ideological vulnerability, thus bringing to the forefront the conflictual relationship between the Jewish and Muslim Arabs in Israel.

Keywords: Israel, coexistence, performance, *Mimouna*, ethnography, Reform Jewish congregations, utopian performativity, safe space

It is May 2015, and the sky of Jaffa, a Jewish–Arab region in the southern Tel Aviv metropolitan area, is growing darker as evening settles in. The preparations at the Daniel Congregation, a Reform Jewish congregation, for the Jewish–Arab *Mimouna* are in full swing. *Mimouna* is a Jewish North-African diasporic festival marking the good neighborly interaction between Muslims and Jews. However, following the immigration of Moroccan Jews to Israel and the subsequent shift in cultural dynamics vis-a-vis others who share the same space, new social concepts¹ emerged regarding familiar customs and practices. Thus, in Israel in general, the festivities are no longer framed within this sociocultural context due to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The inter-subjective encounter between Israeli Jewish and Muslim Arab citizens has become conflictual, full of tension and suspicion.

The performance began with a *Havdalah* ceremony, which is conducted at the end of every Sabbath to mark the transition from the holy Sabbath to the secularity of a new week. This time, the ritual was infused with a new interpretation, namely, connecting the two peoples rather than separating them. Wearing a traditional Moroccan caftan,² Rabbi Mira Raz, who has been leading the Daniel Congregation for the past

¹ These concepts were often shaped by reactions to the ‘other’ or defined in contrast to them.

² A variant of the robe or tunic worn in several cultures around the world for thousands of years.

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two decades, faced the audience and presented a Kabbalistic contextual interpretation of the ceremony as symbolizing neighborly relations:

“In the end, we all believe in one God. We are all the sons of Abraham [...] the beauty of it is that we are different, and we have learned to rise above our differences. It is one essence. Our goal is to embrace the essence of the holiday. The Arabs are part of our lives, and we are a part of theirs. I think that the *Mimouna* in Reform congregations must become a tradition, but that’s not enough; we should learn from the Jews of Morocco and make it relevant to our time.”

To establish the gathering as a safe space for both Jews and Muslim Arabs, even a temporal shared one, Rabbi Raz called for the blurring of differences between the two nations, providing a socio-religious context for coexistence based on spiritual rhetoric. In her sermon, she emphasized the extent to which Moroccan Jewry and the *Mimouna* can provide insights into the establishment of political relations in shared spaces. Her conception of the *Mimouna* performance suggests a Durkheimian approach that recognizes performance as fulfilling a function: as a means of establishing neighborly relations and confirming the wisdom of *Kabbalah*, according to which “we are all originally one.”

Her political statement is anchored in the grim reality of life, in which the rift and tensions between Israel’s Arab and Jewish citizens are still present. Various studies have demonstrated the extent of the discrimination and inequality between the two sectors (Golan-Agnon, 2006; Okun & Friedlander, 2005; Rubinstein, 2003), and how interreligious conflict in Israel is waged in the public sphere (Stadler, 2015). Although Israeli Arabs are represented in the Knesset, academic institutions, and legal and medical systems, distrust nonetheless reigns supreme. For instance, rhetorical attacks against Israeli Arabs, including public incitement by elected officials, have become more frequent in public discourse and the media. Jewish ethnonationalism has become more blatant, with racist declarations on the part of some Orthodox rabbis and right-wing activists (Engelberg, 2017, p. 229).

Therefore, the recent escalation in the political climate and racist attitudes towards Israeli Arab citizens have led the Israeli Reform community, which is a non-Orthodox religious denomination based on liberal values, to hold interfaith events to further facilitate coexistence (Ben-Lulu & Feldman, 2022). In both 2014 and 2015, the Daniel Congregation held special *Mimouna* events dedicated to promoting good Arab–Jewish relations. The main purpose of these social gatherings was to reconstruct the original diasporic message of this holiday, namely, good neighborly interaction. In this contemporary rendition, the diasporic ritual constructs cultural intersection and advances social relations not with the land of origin of the *Mimouna* – namely, Morocco – but with Israel, the performers’ current homeland, and their social interaction with other groups in this ethnonational space, such as Israeli Arabs (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The *Mimouna* table overflows with sweet treats, and a huge poster shows the traditional blessing of “Welcome” in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as the inscription “Like we celebrated in Morocco – Arabs and Jews together” (The ad states that this is a holiday for Arabs and Jews in Morocco, thus erasing a huge percentage of the Muslim population in Morocco, whose *Mimouna* was also a holiday: the Amazigs). (Photo by the author).

However, there is a gap between the utopic notion and concrete reality, as the number of Arab participants was small, and almost non-existent, except for several local Arab Muslim public figures. In an interview, Rabbi Raz outlined a goal:

“We must increase the number of Arabs in the *Mimouna*! We must! In the first year, approximately six hundred people participated in the event. It was the first time Arabs took part in the event since the members of the congregation lived in Jaffa and they invited their friends and neighbors. Making an event for Jews and Arabs, that’s the only way we will understand that it is really working.”

As Rabbi Raz also noted, the quantitative aspect of the *Mimouna* is no less important than the qualitative one, especially when it comes to minority groups seeking to assert their existence within a multicultural space. This situation reflects the difficulties encountered when the vision is put into practice and demonstrates the *Mimouna* as a utopian performance. It made us wonder: is a one-sided coexistence possible?

In *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, Dolan (2010) characterizes the potential of the community that can arise in the fields of performance and alternative theater, even if temporarily. She relies on the concept of “communitas” coined by the anthropologist Victor Turner and describes the possibility of a “performative utopia” – those moments during the show when the spectators or participants feel they are part of the actual event. During those moments, connections and a sense of belonging are created among the spectators, as well as between them and the artists who perform on their behalf. She argues that utopian performatives persuade us that, beyond this “now” of material oppression and unequal power relations, lives a future that might be different, the potential of which we can feel as we are seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later. According to Dolan (2010), the potential of works that fulfill these performative and ceremonial ideals lies in encouraging the participants to add and be active, following what was staged in the theater, even if it is at the end of the show: “The affective and ideological ‘doings’ we see and feel demonstrated in utopian performatives critically rehearse civic engagement that could be effective in the wider public and political realm” (p. 7).

Theater researcher Fischer-Lichte, following John Austin and Judith Butler, asserts the essence of the performative event as such that is not a descriptive expression of a case that happened “there and then,” but an event of which’s essence lies in the happening in the present, as well as the meanings given to it at the time, and by the very fact of it happening:

“[...] performative acts/performances do not express something that pre-exists, something given, but. they bring forth something that does not yet exist elsewhere but comes into being only by way of the performative act/performance that occurs. In this sense, they are self-referential - i.e., they mean what they bring forth- and, in this way, constitute reality” (Fischer-Lichte, 2007, p. 27).

Following their theoretical framework, we claim that the attempt to create a safe space of a good neighborhood from which an optimistic message for peace between peoples will emerge turns out to be a fragile site full of contradictions and failures. During this attempt, the Reform congregation re-appropriates performative-alternative elements of the traditional ritual; thus, instead of the ceremony demonstrating a situation of coexistence, it is, in effect, a strategic showcasing of the Reform community as a liberal religious agent in the shaping of Israeli social order. In other words, via analysis of Jewish and Muslim leaders’ sermons, participants’ interaction with cultural objects, and the specific design of the *Mimouna* posters, we argue that this antiracist and multicultural performance serves as yet another opportunity to protest against its own social exclusion from Israeli society.

According to Michael (2013), religious communities that eagerly promote interfaith dialogue, and present themselves as pioneers of this message, should consider three themes: how to connect religion more closely with culture, thereby placing interfaith relations within the context of intercultural awareness; how to develop a regional initiative which, informed by urban history and sociology, would complement and dovetail with preexisting interfaith and intercultural activities; and how to translate the general principles of dialogue into the operational environments of local communities. We will examine how the Reform Jewish congregation performs the *Mimouna* by engaging with these conditions.

Indeed, since the Reform Movement is still perceived by some Israeli sectors as an outcast and a genuine threat to the continuation of Jewish heritage (Tabory, 2004), the Daniel Congregation's *Mimouna* has exposed the public who were formerly unfamiliar with its existence or activities to the Reform Jewish ideology. Nonetheless, in this study, we do not wish to define the meaning of performing a "Reform *Mimouna*," but rather discuss how the participants may dismantle binary categories of time and space and reclaim and transform traditional customs, while reflecting and challenging clear and concealed contemporary political perceptions and views. In addition, in the Israeli reality where religious communities mostly voice statements that do not promote coexistence between Jews and Arabs, this is another arena for promoting political activism under framework of Jewish stinging.

1 Studying the *Mimouna* Through the Lens of Performance

Culture shapes its identity, and verifies its values, beliefs, and customs in a variety of cultural performances, which are particular cases of organized cultural activity. Culture is produced, represented, and transmitted through performances that are inherently embodied and transient and are therefore a practice of cultural knowledge that is difficult, or even impossible, to reproduce.

Performance does not strive for an exclusive idea, nor does it reveal an objective truth; rather, it aims to create a fluctuating reading in order to allow for numerous interpretations. The meaning of the performance flows from the performers to the audience and back again. Thus, with a new audience, or in a different performance space, the meaning of the performance may change radically, possibly creating an intertextual mosaic with open-ended meanings (Arweck & Keenan, 2006; Taylor, 2022).

According to Schechner (1985, p. 36), performance is an activity that occurs more than once, the repetitive element being its cornerstone – twice-behaved behavior. On the other hand, Phelan (2003) argues that the mechanism of performance is, in fact, revealed by singularity as the basis for creating resistance to power mechanisms, since its temporary and transient character defines performance as being not closed but existing completely in the present. This theoretical dispute between Phelan and Schechner forms the basis for the analysis of religious performances founded on the bipolar concept of conservation and innovation of tradition embraced by Reform Judaism.

The paradigm of performance facilitates connections between different fields that mediate and translate the phenomenological experience into actual social reality (Schechner, 2017, p. 28–30). Compared to other Jewish customs, the *Mimouna* performance lacks a single folkloristic structure, hence, every community or family exhibits its distinctive form of expression, referred to as "Ada." According to Levy (2018), "Ada" is a Maghrebi term for flexible customs, not limited to *Mimouna* celebrations. It represents unique family traditions, often passed down patrilineally, mainly focusing on culinary practices influenced by locale. While typically paternal, it can incorporate traditions from both sides, though solely maternal customs are rare. This open ceremonial pattern is compatible with the fluid and flexible liturgical approach of Reform Judaism towards Jewish practices.

Therefore, while performance has previously been defined within phenomenological or gender approaches (Butler, 1999; Clark et al., 2007), we suggest considering it a "restored behavior" (Schechner, 2002, p. 29) that uses texts, sounds, body gestures, and material objects within a given time and space (Riley, 2013, p. 175; Schechner, 2017). This study examines how the Reform congregation created a performance of a *Mimouna* designed to reconstruct diasporic elements and sociopolitical messages, infusing them with new and current interpretations.

According to Turner (1988), performance is a vital key to better understanding people's thoughts and feelings, as well as the social environment in which they operate. Similarly, Taylor (2003) notes that, in order for performance to constitute a system for the transmission of information, it must include a conserving element through which information is passed on. In her view, performance is an epistemological system for learning, conserving, and transmitting knowledge. Taylor asserts that the innovation of performance is inherent in the means used for the transmission of knowledge from a written and textual culture to a physical, multi-sensory one. The repertoire requires the community members' presence and active participation as part

of this transmission of knowledge; therefore, while constantly changing, it also has the power to conserve and change the “choreography of meaning” (2003, p. 20).

Consequently, Taylor suggests viewing performance as a scenario that contains elements from the literary-textual discourse (plot and narrative), while also enabling researchers to address questions regarding its actual space, physical presence, and practices in a way that avoids reducing and redefining them in textual terms. Performance is manifested in the body, producing, documenting, and transmitting social knowledge.

The interactions with the “other” validate the ritual as a dramatic performance that subverts social order and exposes the fragility of that which is considered permanent. Congregants’ active participation in the performance may constitute a public violation of social norms, generating a crisis in which the rift between various identity categories grows wider. Alternatively, it may lead to increased social cohesion, alleviating social tensions and reintegrating the excluded group. In the Israeli–Palestinian context, observing the *Mimouna* through these theories of performance is a driver in the identification and decoding of diverse political agendas regarding life under continued conflict, stigma, and fear.

Although social tensions can be processed in the ritual space, their radical and transformative element cannot be completely neutralized, and may even permeate mainstream culture (Bakhtin, 1941). Rather than interpreting or serving one another, liminality encompasses both subversive and hegemonic elements simultaneously. It permeates public fantasies and leaves traces there, reproducing and, at times, changing the cultural repertoire. Performances have the ability to reproduce themselves through their unique structures and codes. These processes of dialogue, repetition, and change enable performance to transmit narratives and values too.

The focus on performance distills the way in which individuals and groups can undergo a transformation that changes their positionality in the social order (Green, 2007; Kirsch, 2013). An analytic view of performance as a political act may contribute to the examination of the politics of the identities of minority groups – both Israeli Arabs and the Reform Jewish community – that are struggling for equality and recognition in Israel. Thus, the performance of the *Mimouna* conducted by the Reform congregation may challenge nationalistic and racist stigmas both against the Reform community and Arabs in Israel.

2 *Tirbehu Ou Tisadu*³: Historical and Cultural Background on the *Mimouna*

The *Mimouna* – one of the most well-known festivals among Jews in the Maghreb (celebrated primarily in Morocco, but also in Algeria and Tunisia) – marks the end of Passover. The *Mimouna* is defined in the research literature as a ritual of inversion in which Jews wore the clothes of Muslims, played Arab musical instruments, and adopted foods typical of the local cuisine (Romanow, 2013). According to research on the origins of this festival and its Islamic influences, Muslims provided the bread for the *Mimouna* celebration, in return for the bread originally given to them by their Jewish neighbors for safekeeping during the Passover holiday (when the consumption, and even sight of *hametz*, or leavened bread, is forbidden for the entire week of the holiday).

Thus, Goldberg (1978) suggests exploring this springtime celebration by adopting a structuralist methodology, which pays attention to relations of contrast, opposition, and inversion in addition to those of similarity and contiguity, and aids in bringing about this integration. The discussion on the *Mimouna* festival of Moroccan Jews involves two perspectives: one inspired by Turner’s “power of the weak” theory, and another employing structuralist comparisons of Jewish and non-Jewish cultural forms. The former approach incorporates interpretations from traditional informants, which align with anthropological concepts, while structural analysis reveals hidden connections between Jewish and Muslim practices, emphasizing the broader social context of Jewish life in Morocco.

³ The traditional Moroccan blessing in Darija, and used only for this occasion. Translation: “Earn/gain and be lucky.”

Since the North-African Jewish mass immigration to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, the *Mimouna* has lost its social-interreligious characteristics and has become a culinary performance, at first mostly in the periphery of Israel (where the government forced many Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries to settle), and nowadays, all over the country.⁴ Celebrities and politicians often appear in the media holding North African pastries. In addition, there have been some attempts by the younger Israeli-born generation to restore past glory and preserve Jewish Moroccan culture (Sharabi, 2009).

Indeed, the adoption of the *Mimouna* festival in Israel serves as a lens to examine power dynamics between the Moroccan Jewish population and broader society. Shaul Ben Simhon, a prominent Moroccan activist, played a pivotal role in organizing large-scale public celebrations. Ben Simhon, who was also the chair of the World Organization of North African Jews, organized in the mid-1960s the first public event in Jerusalem. Initially, the event in Jerusalem drew modest attendance but rapidly gained momentum, with participation increasing to 10,000 by 1967. Despite logistical challenges for Moroccan Jews residing in Israel's periphery, the event's success underscored its resonance. Moreover, it stood in contrast to the prevailing assimilationist "melting pot" policy, eventually necessitating a shift to the larger Sacher Park in Jerusalem, which became emblematic of the *Mimouna* festivities in Israel. For instance, in March 1971, the Black Panthers, a group largely comprised of politically aware Moroccan activists, staged a protest during the *Mimouna* celebrations at Sacher Park, seeking to address discrimination against Jewish immigrants (*Olim*) from North Africa in Israel. Despite organizer Shaul Ben Simhon's support of their message, they were denied a platform by the police, highlighting the limitations of the *Mimouna*'s political influence (Levy, 2018).

According to Israeli anthropologist Levy (2020), despite the questions surrounding the origins of the festival and its meaning, as well as the prominence and popularity of the *Mimouna* in Israel, it has not yet undergone a comprehensive anthropological analysis.⁵ Levy argues that this anthropological lacuna is due to the peripheralization of the festival, which differs from other festivals since it celebrates the Diaspora, includes Muslims, and is a vegetarian celebration. Levy (2021) also criticizes Israeli anthropologists by showing how they missed this perspective, widely endorsing accepted premises regarding the holiday's marginality. Levy notes that "ethnographic texts of the *Mimouna* remove it from the legitimate societal sphere, mainly by overlooking it. When studied, it is "taken outside," by framing it as deviant, as not belonging to legitimate Jewish-Israeli cultural manifestations" (2021, p. 125). Following Levy's study, our study illustrates another aspect of the politicization of the *Mimouna*, as the Reform community suggests viewing the tradition as a means to foster a shared communal life.

According to Stadler (2015, p. 742), Jewish rituals express political imagination that symbolizes the dramatic return of the Jews to what they call "the Promised Land." Weingrod and Levy (2006, p. 694) claim that a "return to the homeland does not necessarily bring about the end of ties and identifications with one's former land, or the formation of new links." How does the performance in the Reform constellation challenge this premise due to the rhetorical effort to establish an equal place for Israeli Arabs, while voicing a liberal religious ideology that calls for the denunciation and condemnation of racism? In the Reform congregation, the intent was that by performing the diasporic holiday, the connection between Casablanca and Jaffa would illuminate the temporality relationship of space and time.

The following ethnographic descriptions reveal how rhetorical and textual elements, as well as material objects, transform their alleged "original" meaning when performed, and amplify the political message conveyed by the *Mimouna*. By classifying the findings into three themes, we demonstrate how the various components of the performance are exemplified by speeches conveying a universal message, and the use of various cultural objects, such as food or music.

⁴ Yiftachel and Tzfadia (2004, p. 204) argue that the settlement of *Mizrahim* (Jews of Middle-Eastern and North African origin) in peripheral towns led to the creation of a "trapped identity." A number of salient factors molded Mizrahi identities in the towns, including discriminatory state policies, partial inclusion in the Zionist nation, persisting Jewish-Arab tensions; continual Judaization of Israel/Palestine, deepening socioeconomic stratification, and the decline of the welfare state. Thus, the identity of the *Mizrahim* in the towns crystallized in the "gray areas" between Israeli-Jewish and Arab culture by way of inclusion and exclusion.

⁵ There are only incidental references, usually as part of a discussion on "the ethnic problem in Israel" (Goldberg, 1984; Handelmann, 2020).

3 Field Description and Methods

The Daniel Congregation has been operating at the Ruth Daniel Residence Hotel in Jaffa for over 20 years. According to the Israeli anthropologist Monterescu (2011, p. 270), as a binational geographic space, Jaffa has played a pivotal role in situations related to the national conflict. He suggests that Jaffa is a mirror of the Jewish and Arab Palestinian relationship, as well as a site with potential for transformative activism and regional interfaith dialogue. The relations between the Muslim and Jewish residents in Jaffa are marked by class divisions, political fragmentation, and alienation.

The Daniel Congregation consists of 50 congregants, most of whom are native-born Israelis living in Tel Aviv-Jaffa and other adjacent cities. Many of the congregants are elderly women from a variety of ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds, who seek a connection to their Jewish heritage in a gender-equal space. Most of the congregants define themselves as secular or traditional Jews, while some identify as Reform Jews (Ben-Lulu, 2020, 2022).⁶ They regularly participate in a variety of activities, among them Shabbat services, Torah study, and holiday rituals, such as Sukkot and Chanukah. Some of these rituals promote good neighborly relations between Jews and Israeli Arabs.

Drawing from ethnographic participant observations conducted in 2014 and 2015, our analysis encompasses the rabbi's speeches, the reactions of local Arab Muslim leaders and Daniel congregants during the *Mimouna* celebrations, and interpretations of religious symbols and cultural artifacts derived from 20 informal interviews. All of the participants' names have been anonymized, except for those of Reform rabbis and Muslim leaders, who are well-known public figures and have granted us permission to publish their names. Daniel congregants and rabbis were aware of the research while it was being conducted and were very cooperative. In addition, we present textual resources, such as *Mimouna* posters, as well as both visual and linguistic analyses of graphic components within them. We have classified the findings into three categories: Jewish and Muslim leaders' sermons; participants' interaction with cultural objects; and the specific design of the *Mimouna* posters.

Although the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by the principal scholar, who engaged in 3 years of fieldwork in Israeli Reform congregations,⁷ both of us maintained a reflexive approach and cautiously avoided generalizations or ethnocentrism. The trust forged between the primary researcher and members of the congregation made them feel comfortable enough to express their responses to the ceremony as well as to the reactions of their fellow participants. We were both familiar with the *Mimouna* ritual. Sometimes, during the fieldwork itself and also in the analysis process, we found that the Reform *Mimouna* had challenged our traditional habitus and family customs, but we were aware and reflexive in these moments, making every effort to remain open-minded.

The second researcher is a scholar whose main field of interest is theatre and performance by Israelis of Jewish–Iraqi and Iranian descent (not North African). In the analysis of the findings, the second researcher's distance from the field, coupled with the fact that the principal author, Prof. Ben-Lulu, had conducted the fieldwork, allowed us to maintain a critical yet nonjudgmental analysis.

4 Historical and Spiritual Justifications: “We Know Exactly What it Means to be a Minority”

The Reform Movement in Judaism has a diasporic genealogy and, over the years, has migrated from one place to another. It was originally founded in the early nineteenth century in Germany, in the spirit of

⁶ This situation sheds light on local Jewish identity politics, especially considering that Reform is still perceived derogatorily by many Israelis (Sperber, 2023). Unlike in the United States, where identity is often defined by affiliation, Israelis generally do not feel the need to define their identity in such terms.

⁷ The prolonged duration of the fieldwork, which was conducted between 2014 and 2017, facilitated the observation of diverse rituals, as well as the discovery of changes and spontaneous performances.

enlightenment and secularization. The movement later spread to North America, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, Reform congregations also began to be formed in Israel.

Currently, there are 50 Reform congregations in Israel, all offering a wide variety of religious and cultural services. Due to its liberal religious ideology and being a non-Orthodox movement in Israel that is excluded by Israel's Jewish Orthodox monopoly, the Reform Movement has been plagued by institutional delegitimization and social exclusion. The general public's familiarity with these congregations is mostly due to media reports that have covered their struggle for equal rights. Reform congregations have been subject to budgetary discrimination; as opposed to Orthodox communities, most congregations do not have permanent venues subsidized by the government. Both male and female Reform rabbis are not legally recognized, for example, for the purpose of officiating wedding ceremonies. Thus, couples married in such weddings are not officially recognized by the authorities as being married. In fact, the general Israeli attitude towards Reform Judaism remains hostile (Tabory, 2000, 2004). Although Reform Judaism is currently one of the more dominant movements in the Jewish world, there is little sociological and anthropological research on this community (Libel-Hass, 2016; Yozgof-Orbach, 2017).

The performance of a *Mimouna* was another way of expressing the Reform Movement's liberal approach and solidarity with other minorities suffering from exclusion (Ben-Lulu, 2021, 2022, 2024; Libel-Hass & Ben-Lulu, 2024). As Stacey reminds us, "imagining solidarity in the 21st century is particularly difficult in light of three factors: religious diversity, a religious/secular binary and uncertainty as to the political future" (2017, p. 141).

In 2014 and 2015 in particular, the public atmosphere was especially difficult to ignore due to the Israeli Defense Forces' operation in Gaza, the abduction and murder of three young Jewish boys by the names of Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah, and the murder of the Arab youth, Mohammed Abu Khdeir. According to reports by the Israeli media and local non-governmental organizations, these events undoubtedly polarized Israeli society, leading to increased incidents of racism and fear. Consequently, the *Mimouna* performance celebrating coexistence was perceived as an appropriate response by which to emphasize the contextuality of this diasporic festival, although the attempt to recreate the original performance and transfer it to the sovereign Jewish space, perforce occurred within a reality of exclusion and racism.

In 2015, the *Mimouna* festival fell on a Saturday that happened to be especially rainy. Such weather, which is uncommon in Israel during Passover, led to the cancellation of *Mimouna* events throughout the country. The planned event was supposed to be held outdoors, in the square in front of the Daniel Congregation's place of worship, and attendance was expected to be high. The congregants ended up celebrating the *Mimouna* in a small room at the entrance to the building, where the congregation holds its communal activities. It contained several tables loaded with trays of Middle Eastern desserts, as well as the traditional *Mimouna* dish – *Mufleta*, a Moroccan pancake topped with honey and butter.

Rabbi Meir Azari, the executive director of the Beit Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism in Tel Aviv,⁸ opened the evening:

"We live together, and this event is proof of this fact. We were all minorities and immigrants in different parts of history. We have a historical responsibility not only to maintain our traditional customs and holidays, but also to ask ourselves how we can make them relevant to our lives. How can Judaism contribute to improving our relationship with other groups living among us?"

In his remarks, he linked the fate of the Jewish people, who had lived in the Diaspora for centuries, to that of Israeli Arabs. He believed that the mission of Judaism was and is to offer a tradition that continually adapts itself to the changing reality. The same message was also delivered at the beginning of the *Mimouna* in 2014, when Sheikh Walid Machmid, head of the Islamic Movement in Jaffa, described the lack of interaction between the Muslim religious leadership and the local Jewish one:

⁸ The Daniel Congregation in Jaffa is one of three congregations which are supported by the Beit Daniel Centers for Progressive Judaism.

“We have never sat down or joined forces with rabbis. This is not cheap demagoguery. This is the first time that the Imam of Jaffa and I have come to the Reform Jewish congregation, and it’s a shame that we don’t know a place that is right next to us. Let’s do things that can really contribute to coexistence. Enough with the talking!”

His words were, in effect, a call for interreligious cooperation due not to lofty principles of nationalism, similar theology (since both groups are the sons of Abraham), conflicting histories and narratives, but to the simple fact that the two communities share a space that has established the interaction between them. In addition, after confessing that he did not know the Daniel Congregation, and even adding a critical note about the intentions versus the actions, Sheikh Machmid probably directed his words mainly at the Jewish public, since he realized that there were no Arabs in the audience. That is, he recognized the privilege of his status, which perhaps allowed him to “take the risk” of participating in a Jewish event, which ordinary residents preferred not to attend.

The participants enjoyed eating sweets and drinking Moroccan green tea. The tea-drinking moment helped to create a warm environment among those participants who preferred not to dance, while creating a space for open and informal conversation.⁹ However, Gili, a young male congregant, explained why he did not really need to reframe the ritual as a “coexistence performance”:

“It’s open, without politicians. It’s for everyone who believes in peace. It is not a political performance; it is a multicultural event for everyone. It is a nice chance to be exposed to traditional Moroccan rituals and support coexistence in Jaffa. But it’s not the main thing here because it’s so obvious for me to believe in coexistence. I do not need a special ritual to remind me of the significance of civil rights and coexistence. It should be on our minds on a daily basis.”

Gili had made a distinction between a political act and an ethnocultural event to justify the notion of coexistence as a performance that is generally accepted by the Israeli public sphere. The special reframing of Reform hospitality made him feel uncomfortable because it could be interpreted as a suggestion that interfaith dialogue was not required in everyday life. Thus, he revealed the extent to which naming shares in the fragility of the utopian intention to produce a slightly different reality, if only for a few hours.

Sarah, one of the Daniel congregants, clearly defined the *Mimouna* as a political act. On the one hand, the ethnic category is not a dominant factor in the custom. On the other hand, the historical–national framing confirmed her motivation to reclaim diasporic traditional customs to forge good neighborly relations:

“Most of the congregants are not Mizrahi and do not belong to families that are originally from Morocco or the Maghreb, but that is not the issue. It’s not an ethnic performance – it’s a political activity to advance the connection between Jews and Muslims in Jaffa. We live together and we don’t really know each other enough. As in Casablanca in the past, and in Jaffa today, we have to invite them [Muslims] to our holidays, show them our tradition and respect their holidays. We know exactly what it means to be a minority, it’s our narrative.”

Sarah’s desire to show the “other” the celebration of *Mimouna* as a Jewish holiday is contrary to Levy (2018), who concludes that the Israeli mainstream public does not consider the *Mimouna* to be a serious event; her interpretation repositioned the *Mimouna* as a collective national custom (“our tradition”). The motivation for holding the event is not based on ethnic-family ties, or a desire to continue a past tradition, but a contemporary drive to change the reality of enmity between the nations. She justified her position by explaining the good relations that existed in the Diaspora and called for identification with minority consciousness due to the diasporic DNA of the Jewish people throughout history. Thus, she legitimized the cultural reclaiming, made redundant the importance of the presence of Moroccan participants in the event, and was even content to replace the Arab Muslims of Morocco with the Arab Muslims of Jaffa. Her reference reflects the Mizrahi imagination and representation in which the distinctions between the Arab communities collapsed and mixed, as exemplified by the idea that Moroccan Muslims can easily be replaced by Palestinian Muslims, who should happily take their place.

⁹ For more information regarding the social impact of coffee/tea gatherings, refer to the study by Tesfaye (2011), who explores how the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony serves as a forum for participatory communication for women around Merkato, Addis Ababa, to resolve cases of child abuse, exploitation, and other problems.

5 The Challenge of Creating an “Authentic” Moroccan Performance and Space

Anthropologists and performance researchers consider the components of material culture to be agents of both change and the conservation of ideas and customs. For instance, objects and clothing are infused with a variety of meanings, thereby facilitating new performative interpretations. All of these add visual, sensory material, as well as musical dimensions, to the performance, and prove the effort to create an “authentic Moroccan space,” even in the absence of Moroccan attendees. Authenticity should also be considered fiction, as Abarca argues (2004, p. 2): “Those who award themselves the privilege to define authenticity in any ethnic food, whether they are cultural outsiders or insiders, can inflict wounds that either appropriate cultural and personal knowledge or essentialize it, causing a stifling of creative growth.”

Material culture occupies an important place in the analysis of the *Mimouna*, helping to frame the Reform performance as an “authentic” Moroccan event. An external production company specializing in organizing Moroccan events was tasked with producing Daniel Congregation’s *Mimouna* and provided both the equipment and Moroccan delicacies. Employing commercial companies to produce family events (such as *henna* celebrations) has become a common practice among Moroccan Jewish people in Israel. This neo-liberal trend reveals the ethnic commercialization and manner in which people consume ethnic culturalism.

At the entrance to the Daniel Congregation’s building, there were several tables laden with oval trays of the sugary *sfinj* (a fried Moroccan doughnut – Figure 2) and honey-glazed *mufletas*, as well as Moroccan handmade cookies (Figure 3) and Arab pastries (*baklavas*). A young employee of the production company dressed in a traditional Moroccan caftan stood by the tables and handed out the Moroccan doughnuts to guests. The women wore colorful caftans, and one of the men wore an open and sleeveless gold jacket and red *tarboosh*, which is a close-fitting, flat-topped, brimless hat shaped like a truncated cone with a tassel attached at the top. They were clearly not from the congregation, since the back of the man’s jacket bore the logo of the production company. The *Mimouna* and its various performative and material symbols, including the traditional dishes, help establish the boundaries vis à vis the “other.” The choice to serve Moroccan cookies alongside Arab baklavas symbolically exposes the changing representation of Arab culture in different times and spaces (in the past in Casablanca vs today in Jaffa), as well as the political identical meaning of this culinary performance (Amram, 2019).

Dina, one of the congregants, handed out traditional Moroccan hats and costumes for “an authentic performance,” as she described it:

“Look at the Moroccan caftan: it’s an Arab outfit worn in a Jewish performance. That is proof that difference is only a matter of time and place. In Morocco, Jews and Arabs looked the same. Today it’s different, but this moment is an opportunity to remind us of our similarities – to break stigmas and remind us we are all the same.”



Figure 2: Fried Moroccan doughnuts.



Figure 3: Moroccan handmade cookies.

By repositioning the categories of time and space, Dina demonstrates how Jewish communities were affected by the other ethnic groups alongside which they had lived. This historical fact of diasporic life supports Dina's attitude to the ritual custom and its cultural artifacts. The comparison between the Arab Muslims in Israel and native Moroccan Muslims affirms hospitality as a relevant performance for the construction of respectful interreligious relationships, not only in the diasporic space but in the Jewish ethnonational one too. The caftan demonstrates how clothing is not merely an instrumental item; rather, it is a cultural artifact that reflects values of nationalism, religion, and gender (El Or, 2012). It is a material-political agent that supports the agenda to rehabilitate the currently conflictual relationship between Israeli Jews and Arabs.

Nevertheless, the attempt to strip the local Arabs of their clothing (which was not a caftan), and impose on them an image that is not necessarily relevant to their culture, may also reflect an approach that erases the particularity of the local Arab. For the sake of the sanctity of the idea, any attempt to support the establishment of local Arab agencies and subjectivization, even if without malicious intent, has been changed.

In addition to food and material cultural objects, music also played an important role in demonstrating multiculturalism. Throughout the evening, the DJ played popular Moroccan music together with Hebrew songs. One of the songs was an Israeli popular song, which includes an Arabic word "Salaam" – سلام – peace": *Od yavo'shalom aleinu, Salaam aleinu ve'al kol ha'olam, Salaam* (Peace will soon be upon us and on everyone. Salaam upon us and upon the whole world. Salaam, Salaam). It demonstrates the political power of music and challenges trends of cultural Arab canceling in the public sphere (Karkabi, 2013), specifically in Jewish religious spaces.

Furthermore, the Arabic language and oriental calligraphy also contributed to the performance. Language may challenge the obedience, supervision, and regimentation of social order, and may even express a deviation from the accepted discourse (Austin, 2016). It facilitates the formation and shaping of a consciousness of ethnic and cultural identity that is separate from other linguistic identities (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002).

As part of the publicity and marketing of the Daniel Congregation *Mimouna* event, posters with oriental elements and visual art related to writing were distributed all over Jaffa. These posters (Figures 4 and 5) included Arabic tiles, a drawing of a doorway resembling a mosque or the Muslim panorama of Morocco, and details about the food to be offered at the event, namely *mufletas* and other sweets. The poster also included the traditional Moroccan blessing *Tirbehu Ou Tisadu* ("earn/gain and be lucky") and the traditional Arab greeting *ahalan wa'sahalan* ("Welcome"). The word *Mimouna* was written in Arabic and accompanied by the Hebrew announcement that "Jews and Arabs are celebrating together as they did in Morocco." This statement aims to authenticate the event, normalizing its presence amid a national conflict, and offering historical context and justification. It highlights the diasporic reality of Jews and Muslims celebrating together in Morocco, drawing relevance to the contemporary Israeli situation.

Why did the Reform Movement choose to use oriental or Arab elements in these posters? What is the meaning of the colors and symbols featured? What are the relations between the Hebrew and Arabic texts?



Figure 4: The poster invites a joint celebration of Jews and Arabs at the Mimouna.



Figure 5: The poster invites a joint celebration of Jews and Arabs at the Mimouna.

The poster shown in Figure 4 is characterized by the particularly glaring yellow-orange color that stands out and constitutes the artistic focus of the poster. The hue is reminiscent of the *hamra* soil characteristic of Morocco and was designed to add another layer to the *Mimouna* experience, one that would give an authentic touch. The shape of this element, which is composed of a dome and square, is a familiar oriental motif characteristic of Arab countries in North Africa and Asia. Indeed, this poster demonstrates that there is no representation of local Arab visuals.

Another identifiable element in the poster is the arabesque that envelops the central element. This repeated ornamental theme creates a large surface with the same pattern. There are two arabesques – an inner one wrapped around the main yellow-orange motif, and an outer one at the top, from right to left. The two main colors in this poster are yellow and blue – two contrasting colors that, together, express the contrast between Jews and Arabs, while also demonstrating how opposites can achieve harmony. From a typographic point of view, an attempt was clearly made to balance out the oriental elements with a modern font. Hence, like Jaffa, this poster represents hybrid and contrasting worlds of color, shape, typography, and patterns, alongside tradition and diverse cultures, merged into a single message on one canvas. However, note that the poster addresses Jews first and foremost. They appear first (“Jews and Arabs”), are the ones who mainly benefit from the Hebrew text in the poster, and serve as the main targets the congregation was aiming for, with the added lure of *mufletas*.

The center of this second poster (Figure 5) features a hybrid typographic element consisting of the word *Mimouna* in both Hebrew and Arabic. Contrary to the rest of the poster’s typography, this element is very prominent in its attempt to unify the two languages and worlds by linking the Hebrew and Arabic letters. Not only do the two words merge, but they are also the same color, thus creating one whole entity that is greater than the sum of its parts (notably, the previous poster had the Hebrew and Arabic in separate colors and different parts of the poster).

This poster addresses both Arabs and Jews, and the Arabic letter و (*waw*, which means “and” in Arabic, and looks like &) is used to link the words “Arabs” and “Jews” – a choice that continues the orientalist motif, this time by using a linguistic element to convey the message. However, another interpretation will prompt to see this graphic as an attempt to erase the Arabic language by merging it with one language or by using it as a bottom decoration for the Hebrew inscription.

In an interview, Dalit, one of Daniel’s congregants, explained the significance of combining the two languages in one poster:

“It’s not just circles and triangles, it’s the fact that Hebrew and Arabic appear together in the same poster. Where else do you see such a thing? Perhaps on street signs throughout the country. Also, quite often here in Jaffa, the Arabic writing is blotted out with spray paint, or there were often mistakes made, or the Arabic name was a direct translation of the Hebrew, altering its meaning. It was ridiculous. Language—it’s everything. How we speak to each other is how we communicate with each other... The fact that more than half of the congregation members looked at the poster and couldn’t read the Arabic is shameful... It’s not a technicality – it’s fundamental. It’s part of us getting to know their religion, their culture. Just like the Jews in Morocco spoke the language of the Moroccans. That’s why it’s not just another poster; it has immense power to tell the whole story.”

Dalit clearly recognized the use of Arabic as a practice of power, especially where languages are not equal (Zak & Halabi, 2000). In Israel, Hebrew and Arabic are both official languages, but “in practice, Hebrew is the main language, both officially and in practice, and Arabic is a completely marginal language” (Zak & Halabi, 2000, p. 175). Thus, choosing to include Arabic in the poster turns out to be a means of political mediation aimed at showcasing Arabic in the public sphere and, especially, in the Jewish one. Nevertheless, since only the title was translated and the rest of the event’s details were not, this also constitutes an orientalist practice that indicates the Jewish desire to experience the Arabic language to mark this specific event, thus rendering it as a performative and persuasive component in the authentic production of the *Mimouna*. The combination of the colors, language, and greeting in Moroccan not being adapted to the local Arabic ultimately emerges as no more than a marketing script for branding.

6 Reforming the Israeli Political Compass

Regardless of whether the renewal of the custom successfully expressed the congregants' views of coexistence, or whether it positioned the congregation as an integral partner in Israeli society, a performative utopia was not created, and the *Mimouna* only strengthened the Reform community's image as a politically left-wing player. In Israeli public discourse, the term "left-wing" has become a pejorative or means of implying collaboration with the enemy. As a result, the congregants often deal with various accusations and criticism. Devora told the story of her sister's reaction:

"We had belly danced together, Jewish and Arab women. We didn't stop dancing throughout the whole evening. I sent WhatsApp messages to my family with a picture from the *Mimouna* and wrote 'dancing together for coexistence'. My sister texted me 'Don't believe them, it's not a real friendship. Don't be naive'. I was so sad and angry to read her text message."

Bracha, Devora's friend, was also criticized by her family and friends. In her interview, she explained why she chose to partake in the planning of the *Mimouna* event:

"No matter what you do... if you do it under the title of the 'Reform Movement', you have to be ready to be attacked by people. It doesn't matter if we have organized something good, a real mitzvah or not; once you are labeled 'Reform', you are tainted. It's absurd! Although outside the community, people spread racism all over the country, we still need to justify our actions time after time. Honestly, I'm exhausted, but I know that this kind of hospitality is proof for them to exhibit a normal kind of Judaism – to voice the call of the Reform Movement."

In her words, Bracha describes the difficult public responses of social exclusion and stigma that Reform congregants often face. She perceived the event's hospitality as a political performance conveying the Israeli Reform Movement's political agenda. Thus, Israelis, who are not congregants at Reform congregations, interpret the Reform *Mimouna* that seeks to promote coexistence, as a radical act of resistance, which may dismantle the firm and widespread painful perception – that Jews and Arabs are enemies.

In the 2014 *Mimouna*, a table was set near the entrance with little flowerpots containing herbs such as mint, lemon verbena, and sage. The pots were labeled with stickers proclaiming *Tirbehu Ou Tisadu* in Arabic and Hebrew, as well as the sponsorship of the Reform Movement. Thus, this constituted another example of the attempt to label the event as associated with the Reform Movement. At a certain point, the *Mimouna* turned into a kind of plant nursery, as all the guests walked around with Reform flowerpots. During the participant observation, one of the event organizers, who oversaw the flowerpot table, approached the principal researcher and said:

"Can you keep watch that only those who are actually on the list take a flowerpot? Look at what's going on here! They're hysterically snatching the flowerpots to take home, and I haven't yet put stickers [with the Reform community logo and title] on all of them."

Principal researcher: "Don't worry, it's the thought behind it that counts."

"No, it's important to me that they know who we are. It's a brand, it's our name."

This exchange reveals the importance of the Reform logo as a reaction to the sociopolitical positionality of the Reform Movement in Israel, since the participants ultimately took the flowerpots from the community table back with them to their homes. These flowerpots were now embellished with a logo in Hebrew and Arabic that conveyed the *Mimouna*'s message of coexistence, thus turning into political products. When the flowerpots arrive at the participants' houses, the language of the "other" will penetrate their most intimate space. In addition, another "other" is now part of the congregants' homes – namely, the Reform "other" – since they brought something that represents the Reform community into their homes. Therefore, this is not just a marketing ploy to enhance recognition of the Reform Movement, but a fundamentally political act to position the Arabic language in the Jewish domestic space. A year later, this gesture was not repeated; it seems to have been a one-time gift meant to emphasize the celebratory and inaugural nature of the event. Perhaps, there are those who will see the transition from utopia to dystopia; not only the absence of the subject (Arab) from the Jewish space, but of the language (Arabic) too.

7 Discussion

In this article, we have described how the *Mimouna* organized by an Israeli Reform congregation was constructed as a political performance for the purpose of establishing good neighborly relations between Israeli Jews and Arabs. The act of performance was imbued with socio-cultural mediating elements, for example, by adopting the original diasporic narrative of the festival and disseminating it through sermons, integrating the Arabic language into the ritual space and discourse, as well as using various material and sensory elements (music, food, or customs) that characterize Arab culture. This investment represents the commitment to establish a safe space for fostering a discourse of coexistence between the nations in conflict.

Our conclusion challenges previous readings regarding the peripheralization of the festival, and the popular view whereby the ritual was used to promote certain politicians' election campaigns. Jewish and Muslim leaders delivered political messages, linking the personal and political, the "us" and the "other." In this dialectical interaction, Reform congregants encountered local Muslim Arab leaders, but not the residents. The absence of Arab residents, as well as the attempt to re-appropriate or impose elements associated with the North African space and culture on the local Arab Palestinian culture, reveals the fragility of the intention to create coexistence and even the vulnerability of recognizing a local Palestinian subjectivity. From the descriptions, the ends seemed to have justified the means, as the utopian idea appeared to have been more sacred than the sanctity of the individual self. In other words, the signified survives even without the signifier.

Our findings affirm Gilliland's study (2023), which points out a gap between religious preaching, which seeks to create a utopian reality, and the test of reality. She found that the clergy draws on individualistic, other-worldly, and structural frameworks to explain the causes of and solutions to racism and racial violence. In addition to her findings, we have shown how Jewish tradition, narrative, and history are mobilized by Reform rabbis to justify the politicization of the performance.

In addition to the absence of Arab Muslims, there was also an absence of Israelis from North Africa families. However, although most members of the congregation are not North African Jews, by means of this performance, the Reform community members fulfilled and celebrated Maghrebi culture after years of social exclusion, which had been both official and unofficial, particularly by Ashkenazi¹⁰ leaders and public institutions. Shohat (2002) claims that Zionism had created a double oppression towards both Palestinians and Mizrahim, since both groups were oppressed by the hegemonic Ashkenazi group.¹¹ We, therefore, suggest viewing the *Mimouna* as a political act, since it includes liberal, tolerant, and multicultural voices.

Notably, the public event was not limited to registered congregants only; rather, it was an event marketing a tolerant Jewish declaration, as well as the Reform congregation itself. The *Mimouna* marks the Reform congregation as struggling to gain recognition in Israeli society, an intermediate space that produces interpretative work while providing the means for mediation, persuasion, and adaptation necessary to fulfill the mission of coexistence.

The one-time singularity promotes creative interpretations, such as the coincidence that the *Mimouna* occurred on the Sabbath, allowing us to link the idea of the distinction between the sacred and secular (the *Havdalah* ceremony) to the social isolation between Muslims and Jews. Yet, the recurring performance of the event both in 2014 and in 2015 may indicate an attempt to convey that this is no more than a one-time performance, since the rift between the Israeli, Jewish, and Arab citizens continued unabated.

Therefore, drawing on the insights of Dolan (2001), we can deduce that this particular *Mimouna* strived to establish a utopian performative moment, but failed to achieve its intended success. Dolan elucidates that the utopic element manifests as a fleeting solidarity among all event participants, wherein they embody and undergo an experience that diverges from their familiar social reality. However, this realization does not materialize as the actualization of a specific and tangible utopian program. The performative utopia that could

¹⁰ Jewish people whose ancestors lived in western Europe (northern France and Germany), Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, and Russia.

¹¹ She tries to show how Zionism attempted to present a uniform *Sabra* (native) identity based on Ashkenazi-Western culture while erasing the Mizrahi identity.

have unfolded during the *Mimouna*, embodying a shared existence between Israeli Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and Arab Muslims, may have been possible if all three groups had been present at the event. However, the Reform *Mimouna* did not achieve this goal due to the absence of Israeli North African Jews and Arab Muslims, which hindered the creation of a performative utopian moment that could embody solidarity and coexistence. The absence underscored, perhaps, how complex and difficult it is to bring these three groups together for a joint event, and certainly very complex to create a performative utopian moment, even if it is temporary and limited to the event itself.

The Reform initiative can shed light on new types of civic activism, which are often rejected in the local religious arena while thriving in civil society. The *Mimouna* event placed the Israeli Reform community as an active political agent countering nationalistic and Islamophobic calls against Israeli Arabs. We therefore suggest that further research could develop the context of intersectionality between activism and religiosity.

While *Mimouna*, with its established conceptual-executive historical framework, has played a significant role in fostering peaceful relations between Jews and Muslims, recent years have witnessed additional initiatives by Reform communities aimed at promoting coexistence, particularly in mixed cities like Jerusalem and Haifa. For instance, in light of the hostility experienced by Arabs in Haifa (members of the Maronite Catholic Archeparchy),¹² the local Reform congregation, Or Hadash, organized a joint prayer event during Hanukkah in response. In the current climate, amid a historic low in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict following the events of the Seventh of October, there is a concern about a potential rise in nationalism and hostility towards Arab citizens within Israeli society. However, amidst these challenges, there are also civil initiatives emerging to foster peace between peoples. For instance, in the Bedouin city of Rahat, an aid shelter has been established. This shelter provides various necessities for both Jewish and Arab families residing in southern Israel who have been evacuated from their homes due to the war.¹³ Building upon this civil trend, it is conceivable that religious activism may also emerge during this period of crisis. The Reform movement, in particular, may engage in efforts to promote coexistence initiatives within various religious practices' frameworks.

In summary, the *Mimouna* confirms that the Jewish tradition is a rich toolbox that permits new political interpretations under the shadow of a painful and ongoing conflict. It affirms Sagi and Sagi's argument (2008) that tradition is not only affiliated with the past, but also a contemporary category for understanding social and cultural changes. Jewish tradition is no longer a doctrine of social isolation but facilitates an encounter that transcends the boundaries of time and place, Diaspora or sovereignty. Thus, this case study elucidates the way ethnic and religious practices are appropriated and transformed under new conditions and political circumstances. In the context of conflictual groups, it sheds light on how tradition has become a relevant infrastructure for establishing new inclusive and tolerant perceptions and practices, and not only closed and exclusive ones. However, since this particular tradition also includes within it a genealogy of exclusion and erasure of communities and cultures, so too is this course of re-appropriation of a traditional diasporic custom not devoid of power relations, all the more so within the reality of an ongoing political conflict.

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¹² <https://13tv.co.il/item/news/domestic/internal/stella-maris-903651078/>.

¹³ <https://www.ice.co.il/local-news/news/article/984649>.

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