For Micah and Boaz,
my own identical twins.

Contents

Acknowledgments

I am tremendously grateful to Asaf Hanuka. Hanuka's support of the project yielded permission to reprint images, and more importantly, access to him for answers to all my questions, even of the most mundane variety. While this book could certainly have been authored without having interviewed and interacted with him, it would be a far lesser volume.

Throughout the publishing process, Alessandra Anzani has been a helpful guide. I appreciate her initial curiosity about Asaf Hanuka's collaboration with Italian author Roberto Saviano. Her familiarity with Saviano (and by extension Hanuka) endeared me to the press and made me comfortable knowing that my manuscript was in good hands.

I am grateful for the academic and financial support provided by York University's Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies where I served as a research associate while this project was completed.

This book is dedicated to Micah and Boaz, my two youngest children. Having previously dedicated a book to Sloan and Nora, my older children, it seemed only fitting to dedicate one to them as well. The dedication here is not, however, just coincidental. Having seen the close bonds that exist between them as identical twins, I can better appreciate Asaf Hanuka's relationship with Tomer, his identical twin. My hope is that they will be close like Asaf and Tomer and also be able to find their own unique voices.

This book could not have come into existence without the support of my wife Chani. My ability to find time to work would often come at the end of the day, after the children were asleep but before anything was tidied up and ready for the next day. I am forever grateful to her, not only for her thoughtful questions and suggestions about early chapters, but her willingness to keep everything running so that I could research, interview, and write.

Sections of this book were previously published as journal articles in *Literature and Belief*, the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, the *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, *Shofar, Israel Studies*, and *Prooftexts*. They have all been revised for inclusion in this volume.

Introduction

It is early on a Sunday morning in Toronto in May 2022 and Asaf Hanuka and I are chatting together on Zoom. Over the previous four years, we have exchanged a number of Facebook messages and emails, mostly for permissions requests that I have required for publishing his cartoons in journal articles and book chapters. But this is the first time we have spoken in real time. He is sitting in his office in Ramat Gan at Shenkar College, which is located just outside of Tel Aviv, and we are discussing his readership and appeal within Israeli society when he identifies his work as niche. He says: "let's say you have comics, then you have adventure and superhero ones, and then . . . you have [autobiographical ones like mine]. So [my work's] already niche. And then I do only one page. So that's not really a full graphic novel. And then it's about Israel. So it's so particular." I laugh and say that I, an English-speaking reader living in Canada, am his audience, to which Hanuka replies: "So, yeah. It's pretty much you. It's one person in the world."

Hanuka's wry and self-deprecating response belies the fact that his comics have been translated from Hebrew into French, English, Spanish, Italian, Russian, and Korean, and that he has over 440,000 followers across his social media platforms. Equally relevant to the conversation about Hanuka's diverse readership is the international acclaim that his series *The Realist* has received, having garnered Hanuka an Eisner Award, a Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators, an Award of Excellence from Communication Arts Annual, and a Silver Medal from 3x3.

The Comics of Asaf Hanuka: Telling Particular and Universal Stories is the first full-length work to offer a critical analysis of the totality of Hanuka's comics, cartoons, and graphic narratives. In certain respects, this book is the culmination of my own exploration of the artist's catalogue, having published five scholarly articles about his series *The Realist* and another two about his 2020 serialized digital graphic narrative *Hayehudi Haʿaravi* [The Jewish Arab].[1] This work differs from and expands on these earlier publications due

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1 None of Hanuka's works were published first in English, but most have now been translated. In order to facilitate easier acquisition of the texts for curious readers, works that

to its greater perspective—my attention to the entirety of Hanuka's oeuvre. Unlike an article which might focus on one or two texts or parts contained therein, this work considers all of Hanuka's published works, including ones that have hitherto been neglected in the scholarly literature. This approach provides a deeper and more refined approach to his work and allows one to identify the core themes and topics that he returns to throughout his over twenty-year career as a professional cartoonist.

The central claim of this book is that at the heart of Asaf Hanuka's work are four primary narratives that are returned to again and again. These narratives position Hanuka as a uniquely Israeli cartoonist. The first is the Israeli story. As a cartoonist working at *Calcalist*, one of the country's most respected business newspapers, Hanuka published a weekly series entitled *The Realist.* For more than twelve years of publication, the cartoon addressed the financial, political, religious, and cultural realities of Jewish Israeli citizens. Published in Hebrew (and subsequently translated into over ten languages), these comics engage with the Israeli political and religious milieu, and through them, Hanuka critiques the society in which he lives. *The Realist* is not, however, a purely intellectual commentary on Israeli society. It is a deeply personal autobiographical series in which he explores his own relationship with these financial, political, religious, and cultural dimensions of Israeli society. Over the course of the series, this personal narrative takes on even greater prominence as Hanuka becomes increasingly self-reflective and critical of his country's elected leaders.

In the second narrative, Hanuka interrogates his Jewish identity by considering what it means to be a secular Jew living in Israel, the only country in the world that identifies as a Jewish state. The third narrative concerns his identity as a Mizraḥi, or Judeo-Arab citizen of Israel. While his ethnicity is infrequently addressed in *The Realist*, Hanuka's 2020 serialized graphic novel *Hayehudi Haʿaravi* tells the story of his family's fraught relationship with the state and how, as a Mizraḥi Israeli, he navigates feeling like an outsider in Israel. Published even earlier, Hanuka's 2004 French graphic novel *Carton Jaune!* [Yellow Card!] (with Didier Daeninckx) is a fictional graphic narrative about a Mizraḥi soccer player who experiences antisemitism while

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have since been published in English are referred to exclusively by their English titles alongside an acknowledgment of the original language of publication. Works which have not been translated into English are referred to by their original title, with an English translation following the title at the first usage in each chapter.

playing in France. Here, too, questions of belonging are at the forefront of the story.

Concurrent with these examples of particularistic storytelling, Hanuka has also published works that tell a more universal story. These comics comprise the fourth narrative. Many of *The Realist*'s comics consider what it means to be a husband, a father, and a human being in the twenty-first century. These foci highlight the universal nature of *The Realist*, with Hanuka moving beyond his local setting and engaging with issues and topics of a broader concern. Moreover, stories of a more universal nature were also told in the graphic novels *Simtaʾot Hazaʿam* [Streets of Rage] and *Pizzeria Kamikaze* (both with Etgar Keret), *The Divine* (with his brother Tomer and Boaz Lavie), and *I'm Still Alive* (with Roberto Saviano).

My intention in this volume is not to merely observe that Hanuka's work contains four primary themes or considerations and point out their presence. Instead, by moving through Hanuka's oeuvre in a chronological fashion, identifiable shifts in the ways that the themes are manifested, and the nature of their depiction, can be seen. With all of the themes, Hanuka's work becomes increasingly sharp in its critique of contemporary society. This is especially evident in his comics about Israel, which more regularly feature depictions of an erosion of democracy and criticism about the ways that minority communities—including Mizraḥim—are treated.

Asaf Hanuka

While much of *The Comics of Asaf Hanuka* focuses on Hanuka's creative output, a central consideration of the volume is the artist's evolving understanding of his Israeli, Mizraḥi, and Jewish identities. To that end, a brief biography of Hanuka's life will help orient readers who are not familiar with his life story. Hanuka and his identical twin brother Tomer—also a professional cartoonist—were born in Israel in 1974.

Hanuka's paternal grandmother Leah was born in Israel, while his paternal grandfather Shaul immigrated from Kurdistan in 1929. The latter fled the territory because he had been caught supporting the Kurdistani resistance in their fight for independence from the British Empire. Hanuka's paternal family in Israel soon established themselves as textile merchants. His mother and her family immigrated much later, arriving from Iraq in 1948 when she was four years old. The family spent their first ten years in the country in an

immigration transit camp where they lived in poverty. Both of Hanuka's parents were raised in blue-collar lower-middle-class homes where the value of hard work was inculcated, and where the fear of poverty was used to motivate them to achieve academic and career success. His mother studied to be a therapist and taught at Bar Ilan University, and she and her husband moved the family to nearby Ramat Ilan, a suburb of Giv'at Shmuel in central Israel. The neighborhood was, Hanuka explained to me, notable for being near a highway and "not necessarily economically poor, but . . . visually poor"[2] in aesthetic terms.

Growing up, he would receive packages of American comic books from his aunt who lived in Los Angeles—the most memorable being Alan Moore's and Brian Bolland's *Batman* series "The Killing Joke" and Frank Miller's and David Mazzucchelli's "Born Again," featuring the blind superhero Daredevil. Hanuka recalls how, even before he could read the English words on the page, he would "imagine stories based on the pictures," and that these stories would teleport him "somewhere [he could] be, instead of being in this place where there was nothing to do." Comic books were his "secret door."[3]

While Hanuka's ethnic heritage is Mizraḥi, his parents encouraged him to actively try to assimilate into the European Ashkenazi culture that was dominant in Israeli society. This involved intentionally obfuscating his Mizraḥi identity in order to be, as he told *Haʾaretz*'s Nirit Anderman, "simply Israeli."[4] Hanuka struggled to do so, citing the absence of prominent Mizraḥi cultural icons in the Israeli society of the 1980s who could demonstrate this

2 Interview with author.

3 Ibid.

4 Nirit Anderman, "The Man Who Churns Israeli Anxiety into Comic Art," *Haaretz*, August 22, 2016, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-man-who-churns-israeli-anxiety-into-comic-art-1.5427521.

type of cultural passing.[5,6] Instead, he found his inspiration and role models in American popular culture, especially in the superhero comics that he received from his aunt. Much like those American Jewish or LGBTQ youth who were able to read themselves and their dual identities into comics,[7] Hanuka, too, saw himself as having a secret Mizraḥi identity that needed to be put away when in public. While this would allow him to better assimilate into Israeli society, he could take his Mizraḥi identity out when at home amongst family. Despite his parents' attempts and his own best efforts to hide his ethnicity, Hanuka's contemporaries still saw him as Mizraḥi and, therefore, as an outsider; and he internalized their perception of him as different.

Like most of his Israeli peers,[8] Hanuka was conscripted into the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in 1993 after graduating from high school. During his

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5 First coined by Erving Goffman, passing is a sociological concept that refers to an individual's attempt to gain admission to a community or group that they do not quite belong to. The concept has been used by scholars to describe the methods and challenges of integration, including, but not limited to, the LGBTQ community, mixed-race children in Japan, deaf children and, in Hanuka's case, the Mizraḥi community. See Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Touchstone, 1986), Nathan D. Shippee, "Gay, Straight, and Who I Am: Interpreting Passing within the Frames for Everyday Life," *Deviant Behavior* 32, no. 2 (2011): 115–157, https://doi.org/10.1080/01639621003748514, Shuko Takeshita, "Mixed Children in Japan: From the Perspective of Passing," *Asian Ethnicity* 21, no. 2 (2020): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2019.1639132, Patrick Stefan Kermit, "Passing for Recognition—Deaf Children's Moral Struggles Languaging in Inclusive Education Settings," *Deafness & Education International* 21, no. 2–3 (2019): 116–132, https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2018.1561783.

6 Anderman, "The Man Who Churns Israeli Anxiety."

7 Sarah Briest writes: "Mutants in the *X-Men* comics have been variously interpreted as representative of African Americans, of Jews, of feminists, of LGBT." Briest, "The Allegorical X-Men: Emblems, Comics, and the Allegorical Potential of Text/Image Hybrid Genres," *ImageText* 9, no. 1 (2017), https://imagetextjournal.com/the-allegorical-x-men-emblems-comics-and-the-allegorical-potential-of-text-image-hybrid-genres/. For examples of Jewish identification with superheroes, see: Danny Fingeroth, *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007) and Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008). For examples of LGBTQ identification with *X-Men*, see Sara Century, "X-Men as A Queer Metaphor," *Syfy*, April 15, 2019, https://www.syfy.com/syfy-wire/x-men-as-a-queer-metaphor and Julian Rizzo-Smith, "The X-Men Have Always Been Queer Superheroes, You Just Weren't Paying Attention," *Junkee*, September 25, 2018, https://junkee.com/queer-x-men/175899.

8 Israel has a universal conscription law that applies to Jewish men and women equally, with men serving for three years and women for two. While Arab citizens are automatically exempt, data released in 2020 shows that rising exemption rates for both men and women have resulted in the highest rates of exemption in the country's history. The number of

army service, he worked as a graphic artist for the weekly military magazine *Bamaḥaneh* [In the Camp]. He shared with me that he asked to draw the back page of the magazine so that he could produce comics about soldiers. Electing to capture the quotidian and oftentimes difficult life of a soldier, Hanuka told stories about conscripts who were depressed about being in the IDF and who did not want to serve in the military. He cited the fact that the military establishment "didn't care, because no one read [the magazine]," [9] as license to publish these honest—yet dissident—narratives.

It was during Hanuka's time in the IDF that fellow Israeli Etgar Keret released his first book of short stories. And while *Ẓinorot* [Pipelines] would not garner Keret much commercial success or international recognition, its publication was transformative for Hanuka in two ways. First, Keret's edgy and fantastical writing introduced Hanuka to a style of literature that interrogated the individual in society and the tensions that exist within a person's identity. Keret's stories thus served as an early model for the types of stories that Hanuka would come to tell in his own work. Second, and no less important, was Hanuka's decision to telephone Keret and ask him for permission to use *Ẓinorot* as the basis for illustrated adaptations that would be published in *Bamaḥaneh*. Keret's consent, coupled with their shared interest in telling a new type of Israeli story, led the two to collaborate on a series of short graphic narratives that were published under the title *Simtaʾot Hazaʿam*. Released in 1997, the work would be the first of their two collaborative projects, with the second, titled *Pizzeria Kamikaze*, being published in 2006.

Upon completion of his army service in 1996, Hanuka enrolled at Émile-Cohl, an art school in Lyons, France, to formally study cartooning. Concurrent with his decision to study abroad in France, Tomer decided to enroll at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Hanuka shared with me that when they were growing up, they would frequently draw together and learn from each other. Cartooning "separated us from everyone else . . .

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eligible men exempted before enlistment stands at 32.9% with an additional 15% dropping out during their service, leaving 48% not completing army service. Amongst women, 44.3% of eligible draftees are exempted prior to enlistment. Reasons for exemption are varied but the system allows for all ḥaredi or ultra-Orthodox men, individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities and, increasingly, people who just do not want to serve and who instead feign psychological illness, to be exempted. See Anna Ahronheim, "A Third of Israeli Youth Do Not Enlist in IDF," *Jerusalem Post*, January 19, 2020, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/half-of-israeli-youth-do-not-enlist-in-idf-614604.

9 Interview with author.

and became much more than fan art. It became our identity and a preferred way of communication between us and then the world."[10] At the same time, having an identical twin with whom he shared a profession provoked in Hanuka a deep desire to truly understand himself, what made him unique, and in what ways he could meaningfully contribute to the world as an individual. The twins' decision to study cartooning on different continents was in part motivated by a wish to differentiate between themselves.

While the choice to study apart from Tomer was made in order to develop his own artistic identity, there were two reasons Hanuka went to school specifically in France. First was an attraction to the French artistic style of semi-realist drawing. In this style, anatomy and clothing are all illustrated realistically but are included alongside stylized and less realistic components. Hanuka felt that in order to become proficient in the style, he needed academic training—in particular, to learn how to draw the body and the way that clothes hang upon it. His second reason for going to France was to understand the comic book industry. The opportunities for studying comic books in Israel in the 1990s was primarily limited to working under the French cartoonist Michel Kichka at Jerusalem's Bezalel Academy. Despite being influenced by Kichka's own employment of semi-realism in his comics, Hanuka was interested in being part of a community of cartoonists in a place where he could become a hirable professional. Remaining in Israel would not afford him this opportunity.

It was in France, then, that he illustrated his first full-length graphic narrative. Initially created for his culminating project at Émile-Cohl, *Carton Jaune!* is a collaboration with French author Didier Daeninckx about a Jewish soccer player who experiences antisemitism while representing the French national team. Alongside the success of *Carton Jaune!* and the attention *Simta'ot Haza'am* attracted given Etgar Keret's success in Israel as a short story writer, by the time Hanuka returned to Israel from France in 2001 he was a known commodity and was securing paid work as an illustrator. Additionally, he was also hired to teach cartooning in the graphic design program at Shenkar College—a program which, as of 2019, he heads.

During his first years back in Israel, Hanuka participated in three noteworthy collaborations. First, he and Tomer published a five-issue comic book series called *Bipolar*. While Tomer released his own stories in *Bipolar*, Hanuka reunited with Etgar Keret to produce a serialized illustrated version of one of Keret's previously published short stories. Originally called "Kneller's Happy

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10 Interview with author.

Campers," Hanuka and Keret renamed the story "Pizzeria Kamikaze" after the Tel Aviv restaurant where the story's characters congregate in a necropolis inhabited exclusively by people who committed suicide. Through the use of fantastical and nonrealistic elements, the work interrogates what it means to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. Hanuka would also subsequently publish a collaborative short story with Tomer in 2008. Entitled "The Dirties" and released in an anthology of works by cartoonists from around the world, it is loosely based on a period when the twins were interested in the same girl and how it led to conflict and violence between them.

Hanuka's third noteworthy collaboration following his return from France involved making contributions to Ari Folman's 2008 Golden Globe-winning film *Waltz with Bashir*. Set during the 1982 Lebanon War and in the present, the animated film depicts the long-term psychological toll of the trauma experienced by Folman and his fellow troops when they were stationed outside of the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Working under David Polonsky, the film's artistic director, Hanuka provided illustrations for approximately seventeen minutes of the film. A 2008 post on his blog *Tropical Toxic* contains samples of his stills; among them are battle scenes from the streets of Beirut which show the ways that Israel's military machinery wreaked havoc on the city's infrastructure. Hanuka also contributed the still for one of the film's most iconic scenes. Set in the early days of the war, before the troops have witnessed the horrors to come, four smiling soldiers are sitting on top of a tank and one of them is making the peace sign with his fingers.

Despite his work on these projects, Hanuka primarily recalls these first years as a professional as difficult and challenging. His main source of income was as an illustrator for international magazines, newspapers, musicians, and even wineries, jobs that he did not always enjoy. He also supplied illustrations for graphic narratives set in the American Wild West, a subject he had no interest in. In addition to telling him to never turn down paid work, Hanuka's parents also actively dissuaded him from pursuing art as a vocation. There was no future in it, they insisted. These pressures, coupled with a mounting dissatisfaction with illustrating other people's stories and ideas, left him uncertain whether he would continue working as an illustrator.

Fortuitously, following an introduction to Amir Ziv, the editor of the financial newspaper *Calcalist*, in 2010, Hanuka was hired as the back-page illustrator for a new series called *The Realist.* In this capacity, he produced a weekly autobiographical cartoon documenting his experiences as a Mizraḥi

Jew in Israeli society and his life with his wife and two children. The series ran until 2022 and, as I noted earlier, garnered Hanuka international accolades, including an Eisner Award, and was released in numerous foreign languages.

Over the course of his more than decade-long run on *The Realist*, Hanuka also published or co-published three graphic narratives. The first was 2015's graphic novel *The Divine*. First published in French, the work was illustrated by both Asaf and Tomer, with the story written by Boaz Lavie. The work is heavily rooted in Japanese and Southeast Asian iconography, and it earned them Japan's International Manga Award. The plot follows two American military contractors who participate in oil fracking that displaces indigenous populations and destroys the forests and natural habitats of a fictional country called Quanlom. At the heart of the story lies the tension between Western military technology and Eastern fantasy, with the former represented by the American military and the latter by the children who live in Quanlom's forests.

Hanuka's second graphic narrative produced during this period is his lone solo venture. Beginning in 2020, he took a year-long hiatus from *The Realist.* In its place, he released the weekly serialized graphic narrative *Hayehudi Haʿaravi*. Autobiographical in nature, the work is a long-form exploration of his family's history in Israel and how choices made by his Mizraḥi ancestors in the 1920s continue to reverberate in the present. Even more recently, in late 2021 he provided the illustrations for Italian journalist Roberto Saviano's memoir of his time spent in police protection after revealing detailed information about the Neapolitan Mafia in his novel *Gomorrah*. Titled *I'm Still Alive*, Hanuka's illustrations compliment Saviano's narrative about life in isolation.

Since the release of *I'm Still Alive*, Hanuka has concluded his tenure on *The Realist*, announcing in October 2021 that he would no longer continue publishing weekly cartoons for it. His attention shifted to producing a digital art series called "Moodies." Illustrated with Tomer, "Moodies" is the twins' first venture into the e-commerce and non-fungible token (NFT) marketplace and it launched online in spring 2022.

Primary Identity Constructs in Hanuka's Graphic Works

Three primary identity constructs shape the contents of the cartoons and graphic narratives that Hanuka has published since releasing *Simtaʾot*

Haza'am in 1997. Excepting *The Divine* and *I'm Still Alive*, at least one of the identity constructs of Jewish, Israeli, or Mizraḥi is considered in some capacity in all of his works. To that end, in this section I will provide an explanation of the constructs and how each is employed in this volume.

Israeli Identity

The modern State of Israel declared independence in May 1948 following the passage of United Nations Resolution 181 in November 1947. As voted on by the UN's member states, Mandatory Palestine would be partitioned into two states, one a Jewish national home and one for Palestinian Arabs—but only Israel declared independence in May 1948, with the Palestinian leadership rejecting the partition plan. From its inception, one of the state's major political issues has been how to navigate being both Jewish and democratic. As Sami Smooha observed in 2002, while much of the Western world was shifting away from models of ethnonationalism, Israel was constructed as one.[11] Furthermore, its ethnonationalism has become more entrenched with the passage of the Nation-State Law in 2018, which contends that self-determination in Israel is an exclusive right for the country's Jewish citizens. This right excludes the state's Arab citizens from identifying with the country's national identity.[12] Israel's ethnonationalism is predicated on a confluence of factors. First and foremost is Zionism, the movement that emphasizes Jews' right to political autonomy. Equally relevant to the conversation are notions of Jewish ethnicity, culture, and religion, and the ways that these shape an understanding of what the Jewish state should look like.

It is important to note that ethnonationalism is not necessarily a bad thing nor, as Ruth Gavison, herself a secular law professor at Israel's Hebrew University before her passing in 2020, noted, does it mean that the state cannot successfully promote Jewish and democratic values simultaneously.[13]

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11 Sammy Smooha, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State," *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 4 (2002), https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8219.00062.

12 Knesset, Nation State Law, 2018, https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/Documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawNationState.pdf.

13 Ruth Gavison, "Can Israel Be Both Jewish and Democratic?," in *Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State*, Jewish Law Association Studies 21, ed. Asher Maoz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 115.

In practice, however, as Gavison acknowledges, Israel's promotion of Jewish ethnonationalism often operates in tension with its responsibilities towards its almost 2 million Arab citizens, that is, over 20% of the country's population.[14] As written into the country's pseudo-constitutional Basic Laws, all citizens have the right to human dignity, liberty, and the freedom to pursue any occupation without discrimination. Equally, all citizens have the right to vote and pursue public office, with Arab parties consistently passing the 3.25% electoral voting threshold to secure seats in the Knesset, the state's legislature. In this sense, Israel's non-Jewish population is afforded the same rights as its Jewish citizens. Yet, despite these protected rights, Israel's Arab population has levelled a number of grievances against the state, contending that Arabs are subject to discrimination. These charges include claims of disproportionate funding for schooling[15] and policing[16] in the national budget which reduces Arabs' quality of life and their ability to thrive in Israeli society. Arabs have also cited the Nation-State Law as an example of exclusion because it bars non-Jews from self-determination in Israel.[17] Within the social and economic spheres, Arab citizens point out that the median Arab income is much lower than the Jewish median income;[18] and in recent years, politicians, including the then prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, used

14 Gavison, "Can Israel Be Both?" 135–137.

15 Nir Hasson, "Arab Students in Jerusalem Get Less than Half the Funding of Jewish Counterparts," *Jerusalem Post*, August 23, 2016, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2016-08-23/ty-article/.premium/arab-students-in-jerusalem-get-less-than-half-the-funding-of-jews/0000017f-f859-d887-a7ff-f8fdad430000 and Ben Zion Gad, "NIS 9 Billion Pledged to Reduce Education Gaps for Arab Israelis," *Jerusalem Post*, October 25, 2021, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/nis-9-billion-pledged-to-reduce-education-gaps-for-arab-israelis-682997.

16 Isabel Kershner, "Violent Crime Spikes among Arabs in Israel as Officials Admit Neglect," *New York Times*, October 2, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/02/world/middleeast/israel-arab-crime-killings-police.html and Aaron Boxerman, "As Unprecedented Billions Planned for Under-Served Arabs, Devil's in the Details," *Times of Israel*, October 8, 2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-unprecedented-billions-planned-for-under-served-arabs-devils-in-the-details/.

17 Emma Green, "Israel's New Law Inflames the Core Tension in Its Identity," *Atlantic*, July 21, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/07/israel-nation-state-law/565712/.

18 Nasreen Haj-Yahya Haddad, Muhammed Khalaily, Arik Rudnitzky, and Ben Fargeon, "Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel: 2021," *Israel Democracy Index*, March 17, 22022, accessed July 20, 2022, https://en.idi.org.il/articles/38540.

fears of a high Arab voter turnout to encourage Jewish Israelis to cast ballots on election day.[19]

The tensions surrounding how much weight should be afforded to Israel's ethnonationalist and democratic identities, what the state's responsibilities are to non-Jews, and even what it means to have a Jewish national identity lead to differing understandings of Israeli identity. For Israel's *ḥaredi* or ultra-Orthodox Jews, it means placing a strong emphasis on trying to use the state's legal mechanisms to enforce and enhance an adherence to Jewish law.[20] For Israel's right-wing religious-nationalist community, value is placed on Israel's Jewish religious identity alongside a strong nationalist ethos that promotes Jewish ethnic and cultural identity,[21] at times to the exclusion of Arab identities or rights within the country,[22] and visions for annexation of the West Bank.[23] It is to neither of these camps that Hanuka belongs. Instead, as a member of Israel's left-wing community, Hanuka's Israeli identity is more

19 Mairav Zonszein, "Binyamin Netanyahu: 'Arab Voters Are Heading to the Polling Stations in Droves," *Guardian*, March 17, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/binyamin-netanyahu-israel-arab-election. As Steve Hendrix and Shira Rubin of the *Washington Post* observed in March 2021, Netanyahu did an about-face ahead of the subsequent election by courting Arab voters. Both his fear of Arab voters and his subsequent turn towards them were self-serving tactics to try to win the election. In both scenarios, Arabs were regarded as pawns. See Steve Hendrix and Shira Rubin, "In Turnabout, Netanyahu Courts Arab Voters He Once Called a Threat," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israel-election-netanyahu-arab-voters/2021/03/18/72bfe4de-85c4-11eb-be4a-24b89f616f2c_story.html.

20 Guy Ben-Porat documents many cases of clashes between the ḥaredi and ḥiloni communities over the question of religion's place in society. For example they have fought over the legal status of pork (and its consumption) as a biblically prohibited consumable, the right to marry outside of religious frameworks, and whether stores can open on the Sabbath. See Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

21 Parties like Yamina and Religious Zionism are representative of this tendency.

22 For example, the right-wing Religious Zionism Party has campaigned on a platform against any territorial concessions to Palestinians and for the annexation of significant parts of the West Bank. Even further to the right, Otzmah Yehudit argues against the formation of a Palestinian state and for cancelling the Oslo Accords. Itamar Ben-Gvir, the party's leader, has suggested that some Arab citizens of Israel be expelled from the country if they are not sufficiently loyal to the state. Both parties also subscribe to Orthodox Jewish beliefs and call for the fusion of Jewish religious and Jewish national identities.

23 For a thorough treatment of the religious right's political position, see Micah Goodman, *Catch-67: The Left, The Right, and the Legacy of the Six-Day War*, trans. Eylon Levy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

often expressed in an adherence to liberal Western values which are yoked to Jewish values (and not necessarily to Jewish religious practices).[24]

Given that right-wing governments have almost exclusively been in power since the early 2000s[25] many left-wing Israelis, including Hanuka, have felt increasingly excluded from the national conversation and feel increasingly at odds with the ways that Israeli identity has been shaped in the public sphere. Hanuka has expressed his own concerns with the direction of his country in a number of cartoons for *The Realist* and also in *Hayehudi Haʿaravi*, and these will be addressed in the chapters about these works; but for now, one example will suffice. In honor of Israel's fifty-ninth birthday in 2007, he was commissioned by a local newspaper to provide an image in response to the prompt: "What happened to us?" For his cartoon, Hanuka appropriated the likeness of Srulik, Israel's national personification (fig. 1.1). Srulik was first illustrated in 1956 by Dosh, the pen name of Kariel Gardosh, a Hungarian Jew who immigrated to Israel in 1948. Srulik was styled after the pioneers who first settled the country and built up the land of Israel. His synonymity with Israeliness was recognized in 1958 when he was chosen as the logo for the celebrations marking ten years of Israel's ten years of independence.

Hanuka illustrates a close-up of Srulik's face showing him bloodied and bruised. He is missing teeth, there is a large welt on his forehead, and the boy has an eye so blackened that he cannot even open it (fig. 1.2). The image bears a clear resemblance to Srulik, with the *blorit* forelock curl and

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24 For what a Jewish state might mean, see Gavison, "Can Israel Be Both?"

25 Israel's government is structured a coalition-based proportional representation democracy with no limits on the number of terms an elected official can serve. Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of the right-wing Likud party, was Israel's prime minister from June 1996 to June 2021; the right-wing Ariel Sharon was prime minister for four years. The left was in power only briefly under Ehud Barak between July 1999 and March 2001. The country also had two national unity governments—November 2005 to March 2009 and June 2021 to June 2022. Results from the March 2021 election show that despite the formation of a unity government, Israeli citizens lean heavily rightward on the political spectrum and/or Orthodoxy in Jewish practice, with those two groups accounting for 60% of the seats awarded in government. Arab parties won 9% of the vote and centrist and left-wing parties the remaining 31%. The formation of a right-wing unity government was more a result of disagreements between some of the parties than any general desire to share power. The dissolution of the coalition in June 2022 is a testament to this, with infighting between the broad range of parties making it impossible to govern. The national government opted to terminate itself before the opposition could attempt to remove it from power.

kovaʿ tembel hat, but this is not Dosh's cute and charming boy. Accompanying the image on Hanuka's *Tropical Toxic* blog is a caption that reads: "almost 60 years later, that old dream looks like a childish fantasy. Between this war and the next, most of the government officials are under some sort of investigation,[26] and the gaps between rich and poor are bigger than ever."[27]

Srulik's identification with Israeli society, culture, and values has made him a rich canvas upon which cartoonists have projected their own understanding of the country. As a symbol of Israeliness, cartoonists who feature Srulik in their work can tap into national myths, subverting and deconstructing them in their depictions of alternate sites of identification with Israeli society. Here, Hanuka's appropriation of the national personification and illustration of the character in crisis implies that symbols can operate metaphorically. By deconstructing Srulik in this fashion, Hanuka is deconstructing the state itself, presenting it in crisis and in need of repair. Hanuka's written statement reveals his belief that at the heart of the crisis is a rotten right-wing core, for it is the right-wing camp which has proven to be less willing to negotiate with Palestinians, which has promoted Israel's capitalist marketplace, and which has seen the greatest number of politicians placed under criminal indictment.[28] The cartoon is thus more than an acknowledgment of problems in Israeli society; it is a clarion call for social, cultural, and political change.

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26 While certainly hyperbolic, given that the majority of the country's politicians were not, in fact, under criminal investigation, Hanuka's aim is to express frustration with the fact that many politicians broke the law while in office or after they left politics. In many cases, they committed crimes as private citizens due to actions they had taken when elected officials. Hanuka's list includes Minister of Health Shlomo Benizri of the religious-Mizraḥi Shas Party, who was convicted in 2008 of accepting bribes following a two-year trial; Tzachi Hanegbi of the right-wing Likud Party, who was convicted of perjury and moral turpitude in 2010 after a four-year trial; and Avraham Hirschson of Likud who was found guilty in 2009 of stealing almost two million shekels from a national union after a two-year trial. In the years since Hanuka's post (2007), the situation has grown even worse, with former prime minister Ehud Olmert sentenced to six years in prison (reduced to eighteen months) for breach of trust in 2012 and Benjamin Netanyahu, who served as prime minister while under investigation and while on trial for breach of trust.

27 Asaf Hanuka, "Israel: Independence Day," *Tropical Toxic* (blog), April 22, 2007, http://tropicaltoxic.blogspot.com/2007/04/israel-independence-day.html?m=0.

28 There are examples of left-wing, secular, and Arab politicians who were also convicted of crimes, but the majority come from right wing and/or religious political parties. For a full list, see "List of Israeli public officials convicted of crimes or misdemeanors," Wikipedia.org, accessed March 3, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Israeli_public_officials_convicted_of_crimes_or_misdemeanors.