

Post Liberal Perspective on Minorities Visibility in Contemporary Visual Culture: The Case of Mizrahi Jews

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Abstract : From as early as their emergence in Europe and the US, postmodern and post-colonial paradigm have formed the backbone of the visual culture field of study. The self-representation project of political minorities is studied, described and explained within the premises and perspectives drawn from these paradigms, addressing the key issues they had raised: modernism's crisis of representation. The struggle for self-representation, agency and multicultural visibility sought to challenge the liberal pretense of universality and equality, hitting at its different blind spots, on issues such as class, gender, race, sex, and nationality. This struggle yielded subversive identity and hybrid performances, including reclaiming, mimicry and masquerading. These performances sought to defy the uniform, universal self, which forms the basis for the liberal, rational, enlightened subject. The argument of this research runs that this politics of representation itself is confined within liberal thought. Alongside post-colonialism and multiculturalism's contribution in undermining oppressive structures of power, generating diversity in cultural visibility, and exposing the failure of liberal colorblindness, this subversion is constituted in the visual field by way of confrontation, flying in the face of the universal law and relying on its ongoing comparison and attribution to this law. Relying on Deleuze and Guattari, this research set out to draw theoretic and empiric attention to an alternative, post-liberal occurrence which has been taking place in the visual field in parallel to the contra-hegemonic phase and as a product of political reality in the aftermath of the crisis of representation. It is no longer a counter-representation; rather, it is a motion of organic minor desire, progressing in the form of flows and generating what Deleuze and Guattari termed deterritorialization of social structures. This discussion shall have its focus on current post-liberal performances of 'Mizrahim' (Jewish Israelis of Arab and Muslim extraction) in the visual field in Israel. In television, video art and photography, these performances challenge the issue of representation and generate concrete peripheral Mizrahiness, realized in the visual organization of the photographic frame. Mizrahiness then transforms from 'confrontational' representation into a 'presence', flooding the visual sphere in our plain sight, in a process of 'becoming'. The Mizrahi desire is exerted on the plains of sound, spoken language, the body and the space where they appear. It removes from these plains the coding and stratification engendered by European dominance and rational, liberal enlightenment. This stratification, adhering to the hegemonic surface, is flooded not by way of resisting false consciousness or employing hybridity, but by way of the Mizrahi identity's own productive, material immanent yearning. The Mizrahi desire reverberates with Mizrahi peripheral 'worlds of meaning', where post-colonial interpretation almost invariably identifies a product of internalized oppression, and a recurrence thereof, rather than a source in itself - an 'offshoot, never a wellspring', as Nissim Mizrahi clarifies in his recent pioneering work. The peripheral Mizrahi performance 'unhook itself', in Deleuze and Guattari words, from the point of subjectification and interpretation and does not correspond with the partialness, absence, and split that mark post-colonial identities.

Keywords : desire, minority, Mizrahi Jews, post-colonialism, post-liberalism, visibility, Deleuze and Guattari

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