The search for unity is a formidable power in domestic politics. On the one hand, citizens want to belong to a community in which they are appreciated and have their needs met. On the other hand, community leaders and politicians seek to foster this environment while forcing the dominant culture on minority groups. Too often, the legitimate needs of citizens are marginalized or eliminated in the name of the common good. As Iris Young (1990, 300) stated, “The ideal of community privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one’s understanding of others from their point of view.”

This deception hinges on the understanding that the term “unity” can be defined in different ways. A heterogeneous unity, where many different cultures are blended, and a homogeneous unity, where a single culture is present to the exclusion of others. Young further noted that current conditions of modern urban societies require an alternative vision. “This alternative vision,” she claims, “must be a politics of difference” (301).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the Israeli Zionist philosophy uses a homogeneous unity as a powerful tool to exclude others as well as silence critics from a dubious moral high ground. I show how the alleged pursuit of a unified Israel has allowed the state, media, and public to neglect acknowledging and solving significant internal conflicts. Those who speak up for marginalized groups are publicly labeled divisive and easily dismissed. Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to the unresolved Yemenite Babies Affair.
The effect of the politics of community is uniquely increased among Israeli Jews. As a whole, Jews have been recognized—not incorrectly—as victims. Jews perceive themselves as an eternally persecuted nation, with the industrial-scale slaughter of the European Jews still within living memory. This identity becomes an extremely powerful defensive force that binds many Israelis together and justifies any sort of aggression in self-defense. This self-centered view, however, when restricted to the European Jew alone rather than all Jews, or all the citizens of Israel, Jews and non-Jews, obscures public recognition of the victimization of anyone else, other Jews as well as Palestinians.

The Zionist notion of unity can be read critically through what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, 48) call “polycentric multiculturalism,” which suggests that economic or political powers should not be “epistemologically privileged.” At times, within an immigrant society such as Israel, the diverse cultures are celebrated; but “polycentric multiculturalism” offers a different perspective than that of the liberal pluralist definition of multiculturalism: “Whereas pluralism is premised on an established hierarchical order of cultures and is grudgingly accretive it benevolently ‘allows’ other voices to add themselves to the mainstream.” Polycentric multiculturalism deconstructs the dominant discourse through shifting power relations. According to Shohat and Stam, minority groups must not be labeled as “interest groups” that should be added on. “Polycentric multiculturalism,” in other words, is “about dispersing power, about empowering the disempowered, about transforming subordinating institutions and discourses” (48–49). Within such a polycentric approach, Shohat’s work has addressed the problem of narrating Arab Jewish history and identity given the hegemonic Eurocentric meta-narrative.

Some critics of Shohat’s work have argued that she misrepresents the thrust of her argument. Meir Amor (2005), for example, claims that Shohat’s approach, as applied to Israeli society, is problematic since it relies on the notion that all Mizrahim share a similar Arab culture, and that this “imagined community” of the Mizrahim is viewed as a “mediating force” between Jews and Palestinians, when for Palestinians the oppressor is Jewish Israeli not Ashkenazi. Therefore, Amor claimed that this approach is “limited in its social and political relevance” (255). A more practical approach, he said, should center on citizenship, or what he calls “the intercultural approach” (2005, 339). It is not clear, however, what is the relationship between citizenship and interculturalism and furthermore what is the difference between interculturalism and multiculturalism, according to Amor. In any event, he calls for implementing citizenship that relies on geographic boundaries, replacing the current legal system, which grants extended rights to Israel’s Jewish citizens, with civil-democratic equal rights to all the citizens of Israel.1 “The challenge of Mizrahi activists today is