

Dr. Galit Saada-Ophir (1971-2008) – An Inspiring Colleague

Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi

After the completion of our conference at the University in Virginia, we were greatly saddened to learn of the tragic loss of one of our own, our colleague and friend Dr. Galit Saada-Ophir, ז"ל. Galit left behind her husband Moshe Ophir and three very little sons. We thought it appropriate to remember her here briefly through a description of the scholarly accomplishments of her short but fruitful life. What follows is based on a tribute written by our colleague Motti Regev that originally appeared in the Hebrew-language journal *Israeli Sociology*. We thank that journal's editor, Professor Haim Hazan, for permission to reprint those words here in a slightly revised form.

The genre of "*musikah mizrahit*" in Israel has captured (and continues to capture) the sociological and anthropological imagination of researchers in Israel and abroad. Galit wrote her MA thesis (under Professor Motti Regev) about the phenomenon of the "Sderot bands" (rock bands originating in that city in southern Israel), and she continued on to research "*musikah mizrahit*," and, in particular, the borderline between that genre and Israeli pop-rock as a whole. This research project resulted in three important articles (one in Hebrew, two others in well-known anthropology journals). In contrast to other researchers, Galit's work on "*musikah mizrahit*" was only a point of departure from which to fashion theoretical tools to assist her in decoding the complexity of *Mizrahi* Jewish identity in Israel. Using the paradigms and concepts of Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said and others, Galit sought to compare how creators and consumers of pop-rock music in the Israeli Jewish communities who trace their roots to Arab and Islamic countries express the unique features of their culture. In the short time since her work has been published, the link that she forged between the concept of a musical "school" in rock and the music itself of the "Sderot bands" and "*musikah mizrahit*" has already come to be seen as a landmark in the anthropological and sociological research of popular music in Israel.

The focal point of Galit's work is the dismantling of the category of "*musikah mizrahit*," revealing the multiple consciousness, the cultural impulses, and the musical practices through which the creators and communities in Israel attempted, on the one hand, to preserve a link with their various Judeo-Arab heritages, and, at the same time, to realize their contemporary and modern links to cosmopolitanism and to mainstream Israeliness. "Borderland pop," as Galit called it in one of her articles, mixes together various cultural contexts. It is stylistically uneven and does not reflect an easy dichotomy between "Easternness" and "Ashkenaziness." In her analyses, Galit revealed the creative diversity in pop-rock that developed among the Arab Jews (*yehudim-aravim*), as she preferred to call them following new trends in *Mizrahi* Israeli scholarship. She also succeeded in locating the social logic that drives this diversity, which stems from this community's need to confront the conflicting cultural impulses within it. In her sophisticated criticism of Israeli culture, she offered a sober anthropological perspective, devoid of arrogance and idle flattery, on the musical production of pop-rock by Israeli Jews stemming from Arab lands.

In 2006 Galit completed her doctorate in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (under Professors Baruch Kimmerling and Tamar Rapoport) on the subject of student activism in the Israeli

university. In 2007-2008 she was a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Munk Centre for International Studies and a visiting scholar in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Thereafter she returned to Israel to begin post-doctoral training at Tel Aviv University.

Galit's research work was wise and expanded the boundaries of our knowledge. It was also, in a certain sense, brave. It grew out of her intellectual passion, genuine curiosity, and deep personal commitment. And this was only supposed to be the beginning.

A Bibliography of Galit Saada Ophir's Work

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