



**Executive Council of
Australian Jewry**

Text of complaint to ABC

Radio National interview of Orly Noy and Sara Saleh on Monday 8 July 2019 at 7:06pm

The interview can be listened to via: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive/a-new-narrative-for-a-peaceful-resolution-to-the-israel-palesti/11289604>

This was an interview that touched on the status and circumstances of Mizrahi ('eastern') Jews in Israel. The presenter was Jonathan Green, and the Executive Producer was Claudette Werden. The interviewees were Orly Noy, an Israeli born in Iran and Sara Saleh, an Australian citizen of Palestinian background. Ms Noy is presently on a tour of Australia promoting "an Arab and Middle Eastern alternative to Zionism".

The interview and the program could fairly be categorised as an "analysis of current events" for the purposes of the ABC's Code of Practice 2019, and the accuracy standard therefore applies. The interview failed to meet that standard. The following is a non-exhaustive list of the factual errors that went unchallenged:

1. Ms Noy described Mizrahi Jews as "the Jewish communities who immigrated to Israel mainly in the early 1950s after the establishment of the State of Israel". In fact most of the Jews who immigrated to Israel in the early 1950s were Holocaust survivors from Europe. Mizrahi Jews are Jews who were born in countries in the Middle East, including Israel. There is some debate about whether this includes Jews who came from North African countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia, but Ms Noy missed this nuance completely.
2. Ms Noy stated that Israel "excludes" its Mizrahi Jewish citizens and also its Arab citizens. She said Mizrahi Jews in Israel "have the sad choice to either hold onto this [Arab] identity" or pay "the price of not being included in the Zionist project". In fact Mizrahi Jews (and Arab citizens of Israel) have exactly the same voting rights, and legal, civil and religious rights, as Jews of European background, making a nonsense of Ms Saleh's spurious claim that "it's apartheid". There have been three Mizrahi Israeli Presidents (Yitzhak Navon, Moshe Katsav and the current President, Reuven Rivlin, a native of Jerusalem). Mizrahi Jews are the majority group in the Jewish population (as Ms Noy acknowledged), and they are therefore prominent in government and politics, the media, academia, culture, business, sport, religion and the military: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Israeli_Mizrahi_and_Sephardi_Jews
3. Ms Noy stated: "you'll see Mizrahis in the more low tech positions and these are the ones that, unlike the European origin Jews, who are sitting, you know, in air conditioned commanding rooms, are sending the Mizrahis to the checkpoints, to the

daily confrontation with the Palestinians”. The following is only a sample of Mizrahi Jews who have held the highest offices and ranks in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF): Gabi Ashkenazi – Former Chief of the IDF General Staff; Eitan Ben Elياهو – Former Major General in the IDF; Gadi Eizenkot - chief of staff of the IDF, who retired in January 2019; David Elazar - Former Chief of the IDF General Staff; Dan Halutz – Former chief of staff of the IDF; Moshe Levi - Former Chief of the IDF General Staff; Shaul Mofaz – Former Israeli Minister of Defense, Former Chief of the IDF General Staff; Yitzhak Mordechai - former general and former Israeli Minister of Defense.

4. One truthful statement made by Ms Noy was that “very few Mizrahis today will even define themselves as Arab Jews. That was a concept introduced by Mizrahi academics and intelligentsia, but the common Mizrahi would do everything within his or her power to distance himself or herself from the Arab identity”. However, she failed to identify the cause, saying only “that is what we have been taught for so many years, that you don’t want to identify yourself with being an Arab”. What is conspicuously missing from Ms Noy’s narrative is how and why some 850,000 Mizrahi Jews left their countries of birth in the Middle East and North Africa in the first place. In short it is because they were subjected to precisely the forms of persecution and discrimination in those countries which Ms Noy falsely alleges about Israel. The oft-repeated claim that Jews lived in safety under Muslim rule, and that their problems actually began with the advent of Zionism, is a myth. Whilst Jewish communities in Arab lands generally fared better than those in Europe, they too faced periodic, state-orchestrated outbreaks of violence and other forms of persecution, and were always treated as second class citizens – they paid additional taxes, had no political rights, and, by law, their testimony in court counted for half the value of that of a non-Jew. From the 1940s onwards, Jews in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen had their property and belongings confiscated, and they were subjected to severe anti-Jewish riots instigated by their respective governments. Private and communal properties owned by Jews were nationalised, bank accounts were frozen, and Jews were dismissed en masse from employment. This policy made no distinction between Zionists and non-Zionists; it did not separate those who hoped to stay in the places where their ancestors had lived for centuries from those who were glad to emigrate. Of the 820,000 Jewish refugees from Arab lands between 1948 and 1972, more than 200,000 found refuge in Europe and North America while 586,000 were resettled in Israel - at great expense to the Israeli government, and in most cases without any compensation from the Arab governments who had confiscated their possessions. In the cases where compensation was paid, it was at well below market value at the time of compensation. Today there are only a few thousand Jews left in Arab countries, and they are even less safe than members of Christian communities. Given that background, Mizrahi Jews are generally more hardline in their attitudes towards their Palestinian and other Arab neighbours than Jews of European background. Mizrahi Jews overwhelmingly vote for right wing and religious parties. Because of their long history of persecution and discrimination in Arab countries, very few of them see themselves in any sense as “Arab Jews” or of Arab nationality.

The ABC Code also states : “A democratic society depends on diverse sources of reliable information and contending opinions”. The interview manifestly failed to meet the standard that it would not “unduly favour one perspective over another.” Indeed, the interviewees agreed with each other “absolutely” (to use their own word), and the presenter did not put any contrary facts or perspectives to the interviewees to respond to. It was a ‘soft’ interview, devoid of “contending opinions”.

The ABC has an obligation to “Present a diversity of perspectives so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented.” May I suggest that, in order to get a different view, you

interview Eman Amasha, an Israeli woman of Druze, Arabic-speaking background. Notwithstanding Ms Noy's allegations about the exclusion of non-Europeans from Israeli society, Ms Amasha is the spokesperson of the Embassy of Israel in Australia.

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