*This book is dedicated with love to my family:*

*To Vered, who supports, encourages, and listens—quite a few ideas in this book grew out of our fruitful conversations.*

*To my daughters Shira and Avigail—you fill my life with light and joy.*

**Preface and Acknowledgements**

The journey of this study began with a little note. When asked what “Mizrahi theatre” is, I jotted down, in short points, a few of the dominant forms of theatre associated with Mizrahi artists. Over time, what I had jotted down on that note became the main points for this book. The note was written in preparation for a panel I participated in that dealt with theatre and Mizrahim held at the *Libi BaMizrah* (My Heart is in the East) Festival (2012). The festival was founded in 2009 by Mizrahi feminists as part of their struggle for just distribution of Israel’s culture budget. With the turn of the millennium and the rise of the Mizrahi middle class, Israel witnessed the burgeoning of a cultural renaissance of third-generation Mizrahi artists. Mizrahi theatre, which germinated in the margins of the field in the last quarter of the twentieth century, is today a prominent and significant presence in the public sphere. In this sense, this book is not a summary of a phenomenon, but rather an attempt to understand it as it comes into being, with the hope that other scholars with join the discussion and discourse.

My interest in Mizrahi identity and theatre, however, emerged many years earlier. I was born in 1975 and raised in Kfar Shalem – a working class neighborhood in the south of Tel Aviv. I love acting, and theatre was always a part of my life. As a teenager, I participated in social youth theatre at the Neve Eliezer community center led by Zmira Ron and Ada Mirsky, and later, as a discharged soldier, I joined the community theatre under the direction of Peter Harris. For me, this was the most significant framework in which I learned about theatre and how to know myself with a critical eye. As part of my intense adolescent engagement with questions of identity – who am I? and what is my role in the world? – Mizrahiness became a foundation for personal development and the understanding that my identity is firmly related to the history of my family and community. My parents immigrated to Israel in 1951. My father, Fuad, was born in Iraq, and my mother, Naomi, was Iranian born of Kurdish descent. Like many other Mizrahim of their generation, my parents were uneducated and soon found themselves routed toward the Israeli working class. Critical insights regarding my parents’ circumstances, as well as my own, became more and more lucid as a student of community theatre at Tel Aviv University. During that time, I received a scholarship from ISEF, a foundation for the advancement of students from development towns and low-income neighborhoods. It was at events organized by ISEF that I met quite a few friends who came from backgrounds similar to mine. Gradually, I became involved in the critical Mizrahi discourse that had already germinated in the 1990s and as a result of the internet and social media revolution, I broadened my acquaintance with Mizrahi activists and intellectuals. This project, then, is not an academic study alone, but rather bears deep personal significance for me.

I would like to thank all the artists, playwrights, directors, actors, and designers who shared their ideas and insights with me and provided me with materials from their personal archives. I am grateful to the members of the research group on ethnicity at Bar Ilan University’s Department of Sociology who helped crystalize some of the ideas in this book. I thank my colleagues at the Department of Literature, Language, and the Arts at the Open University for their support, encouragement, and friendship, which are not to be taken for granted in the academic world.

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An earlier version of Chapter 5 was published in:

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An earlier version of Chapter 7 was published in:

Shem Tov, Naphtaly. “Celebrating Jewish-Moroccan Theatre in Israel: Production, Repertoire, and Reception.” *Contemporary Theatre* Review 29.1 (2019): 56-70.‏