

# FULL PENETRATION

## The Integration of Psychedelic Electronic Dance Music and Culture into the Israeli Mainstream

— FEATURE ARTICLE —

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### ABSTRACT

Although psychedelic electronic dance music and culture (PEDMC) networks exist across the planet, in Israel this subculture has attained a high degree of mainstream national/cultural prominence. Based on an ongoing ethnographic project, this article discusses Israeli (P)EDMC by comparing and contrasting the multi-functional roles that this music culture plays for two generally non-related local populations—secular and orthodox youth. It examines the way these communities utilize trance-dance parties to serve their community and their specific needs, and how, in turn, these uses reflect the current socio-cultural circumstances and conditions particular to each group.

KEYWORDS: psytrance, Israel, youth, secular, religion, *mesibot*, *dosibot*, post-Zionism, paradox

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## INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE (EDMC) networks exist across the world, in Israel its expression has attained a high degree of national and cultural prominence rather than remaining “underground” or as a “subculture”. Electronic music culture (EDM) in general and psytrance (short for psychedelic trance) electronic dance music culture in particular (PEDMC), have notably permeated the Israeli cultural fabric, with participation in psytrance parties growing from an avant-garde subcultural activity to a widespread, although not entirely legitimate, leisure pursuit (Schmidt 2011). Focusing on the consumption of (P)EDMC within contemporary Israel, this article compares and contrasts the manner in which two local populations, secular and religious Israeli youth, utilize trance-dance parties to serve their specific individual and community needs. EDM and its adjoining cultural forms have mutated into a myriad of genres and subgenres. This essay generally associates PEDMC with secular Israeli youth and EDMC with their religious counterparts. The article draws from personal observations gathered during extended periods of (P)EDMC-oriented ethnographic field research undertaken between 1995–2011 both in Israel and abroad. The major finding is that, although these two party scenes differ in scale, focus, form and function, in their own way each is imbued with, paradoxical—contrastive, self-contradictory and ironic—elements that reflect current socio-cultural circumstances and conditions particular to secular and religious Israeli youth respectively.

## TRANCISTIM AND MESIBOT: GENERAL NOTES ON SECULAR PEDMC

SECULAR, or *xiloni* (*xilonim* in plural), Israelis enjoy many styles of EDM—for example, house, techno, minimal, progressive—but bear a specific attachment to the hard-hitting, full-on psytrance genre (140–45 BPM). Israeli psytrance DJs, record labels and party promoters are highly active in the intercontinental PEDMC party movement, while local psytrance parties are considered by participants to be on par—and sometimes even more intense—than their European, Anglo and Asian equivalents. Moreover, *trancistim*, the term Israeli PEDMC affiliates use to refer to themselves, are notorious both for their animated behavior on the dance floor and for their brazen and often audacious drug use. Additionally, globetrotting Israelis have taken over a sizeable portion of the illegal substances trade enveloping psytrance culture and are widely considered, both in and beyond the PEDMC realm, to be reliable and resourceful drug dealers (Haviv 2005). Thus, *trancistim* enthusiasm for key PEDMC attributes—music, dance, drugs and travel—has earned them international prominence, and the global trance community deems Israel a prominent “trance power” (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 182).

The primary manifestation of secular Israeli PEDMC are outdoor trance-dance parties officially called *mesibot acid* (Hebrew for “acid parties”) but normally referred to by *trancistim* simply as *mesibot*. Initially, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was the privileged Ashkenazi middle-classes—the grandchildren of the founders of the country who also serve in the most exclusive army units and continue to hold sway over local socio-cultural

memes (Almog, 2000)—who brought trance parties back to Israel from Goa (India) and Koh Phangan (Thailand) after having been exposed to psychedelics and psychedelic dance culture while on their post-military trips abroad. As the enthusiasm of these initial neophytes spread throughout the country, PEDMC garnered a massive following, with full-on trance becoming the soundtrack for an evolving movement of neo-Zionist Israeli leisurists (Sagiv 2000). Emerging during the same period that Israel was moving away from traditional Zionist ideologies that stress collectivism and towards globally impacted practices that encourage individualism, the hypnotic, beat-centered wordless universalism at the core of psytrance and its associated no-holds-barred gatherings struck an alluring chord among an exceptionally wide representation of the population and made for a synergetic fit with the country's socio-cultural advancement into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Senor and Singer 2009).



FIGURE 1. MOSES ON ACID: PSYTRANCE PARTY, ISRAEL. PHOTO: J. SCHMIDT (2011).

*Mesibot* come in many sizes and social configurations and can happen anywhere, at any time, especially on weekends and holidays. Overall, the majority of *mesibot* are produced by and for local “psytribes”—loosely affiliated groups of *trancistim* who periodically assemble at events organized by certain party crews. Even as they attract a heterogeneous mix of participants from a broad range of age, gender, social, economic, political, ethnic and

linguistic backgrounds, in the main, *mesibot* constituents are young (between the ages of 20 and 45) secular Jewish Israelis with diverse attitudes towards organized religion and institutionalized ritual.

Although Israeli psytribes seem reasonably heterogeneous, for the most part they are composed of Jewish youth and do not include Israeli Arabs (nearly 20% of the overall Israeli population), as these two societies barely intermingle on an economic or civic level, much less a social or leisure one. Preliminary inquiries, however, reveal that electronic dance music is likewise popular among certain Israeli Arab communities. Indeed, given the proximity in which Israeli Jews and Arabs live, it seems plausible that local Arab youth are likewise implicated in the fervor of the Israeli trance nation. Yet, additional research is necessary in order to determine how and for what purpose Israeli Arabs are utilizing (P)EDMC. In any case, the paradoxical nature of Israeli PEDMC “heterogeneity” is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

*Mesibot* are usually unlicensed and staged illegally, as organizers generally fail to comply with the complicated and expensive official registration process required for holding large public events in Israel. As such, psytribes purposefully skirt mainstream advertising channels and instead promote their parties via private email lists and members-only web-based social networks. These groups—some have been operating for over a decade and include several thousand members—normally throw invitation only all night dance events in secluded rural settings, such as isolated desert river-beds, beaches, forests, private villas and hotel resorts.

When staging *mesibot*, *trancistim* commonly disregard a number of basic civic laws, such as laws pertaining to the use of illegal drugs or those forbidding unauthorized assembly on public land. On the other hand, they continue to honor and hold in high regard certain aspects of customary national/Israeli conduct which seem to bear more relevance to the daily lives of secular *trancistim* than the mores stemming from religious/Jewish based sources. For instance, it would be unthinkable to hold a party on Memorial or Holocaust Commemoration Day, but entirely possible to stage a party on Yom Kippur—the annual Jewish Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the year in the Jewish-Hebrew calendar—a day traditionally set aside for repentance, achieved through fasting and intense prayer sessions held during the day in synagogues throughout the country. While many secular Israelis do not attend synagogue services, Yom Kippur is nonetheless deemed a day of religious awe and public behavior is generally subdued, discontinued or altogether banned. *Mesibot* staged on Yom Kippur are thus held out of practicality because police vigilance is low and it is easier for illegal parties to go undetected. At the same time, these parties are also ideologically motivated since they blatantly defy State supported institutionalized religion, which continually inconveniences *xilonim*—clearly apparent on Yom Kippur when, by law, all forms of public entertainment are halted and it is prohibited to drive motorized vehicles on public roads. Accordingly, *mesibot* attendance paradoxically combines transgressive behavior with continued adherence to conventional behavioral norms.

Although more *mesibot* take place in the warm summer rather than during the cold winter, Israeli PEDMC gatherings occur year round. Beyond the weather, *mesibot* are also contingent

upon the erratic state of local geopolitics and the swiftness with which events in the volatile Middle East unfurl. Consequently, the heightening of political tensions—particularly after a terrorist attack, especially on a civilian target, or during military operations in the West Bank or Southern Lebanon—will commonly cast a somber mood over the country, deeming the staging of celebratory leisure events such as *mesibot* inappropriate. Parties are cancelled during these trying times since many *trancistim* are also soldiers or military reservists who are otherwise preoccupied during these tense moments—possibly knowing (or knowing people who know) persons injured or dead from the violence.

Coined by ontological anarchist Hakim Bey (1991), the expression TAZ, short for Temporary Autonomous Zone, has been wielded by a variety of EDM theorists in their efforts to contextualize the psytrance party environment (e.g., St John 2001, 2004, 2010). Akin to Turner's "liminality" (1969), Bakhtin's "carnavalesque" (1941/84) and Goffman's "back spaces" (1963), the behavioral codes and social etiquette within a PEDMC TAZ are unique to their immediate context. This is evident in the manner in which *trancistim* utilize *mesibot* to disengage from their daily lives. Since *mesibot* create their own unique reality, talk of politics, money, gossip and scandal or, in fact, all subjects beyond the immediate situational setting, issues and concerns pertaining to life outside the party framework are avoided. This rule is predominantly observed with regard to conversations on the subject of unending regional tensions and the fraught condition of Israeli homeland security known as *ha'matzav* (literally, 'the situation'). Both are taboo to mention within the *mesibot* TAZ.

Yet pressure from this trying and unrelenting state of affairs is omnipresent and difficult to avoid. Occasionally it even ruptures the self-imposed PEDMC bubble and *mesibot* can become terrorist targets in themselves. In July 2010, for example, a PEDMC enthused couple decided to celebrate their wedding by throwing a non-licensed trance party on Zikim beach, which is near the port city of Ashkelon on the Mediterranean seaside. Being Israel's most southwestern public beach, Zikim is only a few kilometers away from the Gaza Strip, which is fairly visible from its shores. Although they only invited their closest friends and intended to keep the party a secret, somehow the local police got wind of the event and decided to pay a visit. Arriving in plain clothes in a feeble attempt to go undetected, the party's quick-thinking DJ promptly recognized the lawmen and lowering the volume of the music he matter-of-factly announced to the dancing crowd: "Good people, the police are here. Whoever has anything on them [drugs], throw it away or hide it in the sand". His warning, however, arrived too late to help the unfortunate groom who was caught with a small amount of hashish in his possession. Taken to the local precinct and his offense written up, the affronted groom was later discharged and immediately returned to the party that, despite the interruption, persisted until well after sunrise.

The newlyweds' tale, however, did not end there. While relaxing on the beach later that afternoon, the partying wedding group was startled by something even more alarming than a surprise visit from local law enforcement agents: a barrage of *kasam* rockets hailed down on the beach near where they lay sunbathing, fired by Hamas militants from abandoned orchards lining the not-too-distant border between Israel and Gaza. Luckily these rockets

missed their mark and no one was injured (Suisse 2010).

This providential outcome was unfortunately not the case in June 2001 when a Palestinian suicide bomber attacked the Dolphinarium, a crowded (mostly with young Russian-Israelis) Tel-Aviv dance club, killing 21 people and injuring an additional 120 party goers. The incident was so horrific that it did much to integrate and lend legitimacy to Israel's half a million Russian citizens who emigrated en-masse to Israel in the early 1990s from countries in the former Soviet Union and, prior to the Dolphinarium attack, were still considered fresh immigrants with large portions of the public questioning the authenticity of some of these newcomers' claims to their Jewish heritage. Oddly enough, the high number of casualties among these newcomers—who today regularly serve in the army and are highly active within the country's universities and high-tech industries—became an unlikely catalyst for their assimilation into Israeli society.

With incidents like these being a constant threat in present-day Israel, it is entirely understandable why so many young people are plugging into the PEDMC enterprise with expectations of being transported to realities beyond their contentious life conditions. This also explains why *mesibot* are seldom staged in response to pressing political or social issues, with Rave Against the Occupation (2002) and Rave for Legalization [of Marijuana] (2003) being two notable exceptions. The “occupation” in this case refers to the continued control/settlement of Judea and Samaria (also known as the West Bank) by the Israeli military/government. Filmmaker Noam Kaplan's *Blue White Collar Criminal* (2004) is a clever Israeli mockumentary that uses the Rave Against the Occupation protest party, held in the courtyard of the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art in the summer of 2001, to comment on the absurdity that often taints Israeli-Arab relations. Since *trancistim* tend to be apolitical, while at parties they concentrate on the immediate enjoyment derived from the event and, in accordance with *mesibot* etiquette, keep their daily affairs separate from the levity of the party environment.

### TRANCISTIM/MESIBOT: PARADOX AMONG SECULAR ISRAELI YOUTH

INSPIRED by their ancestral comrades-in-arms, the Beats and Hippies of the 1950s and 1960s, the most consistent philosophy prevalent among many global psytrancers is condensed into the acronym PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity and Respect), a mindset which serves as the (un) official guide for customary PEDMC conduct. The local version of this behavioral code is summarized on the website [Isratrance.com](http://Isratrance.com), which promotes itself as “the ultimate source on Israeli trance”, and whose guidelines address potential *mesibot* hindrances by requesting that “No politics. No violence. No disrespect” enters the party zone. Both in Israel and abroad, there appears to be an implicit endorsement of the PLUR standard and *trancistim* seem to recognize that acceptable conduct at *mesibot* entails a culturally liberal and socially tolerant attitude towards others—which, in fact, is the antithesis of Middle-Eastern socio-politics in general and of Israeli public behavior in particular. Although it would be inaccurate to claim that all participants at *mesibot* fully adhere to these lofty principles on either an idealistic or

spiritual level, many are aware of this acronym and, when questioned, support the notion that PEDMC gatherings aim to create a non-threatening pluralistic environment. With that said, closer scrutiny of Israeli trance culture exposes a profound disparity between its egalitarian self-image and the actual behavior of *trancistim*. The following segment, therefore, discusses the inconsistencies in *trancistim* conduct by suggesting how dichotomic idiosyncrasies found within Israel PEDMC may be grouped into a series of contradictory paradoxes.

*Trancistim* behavior contains multiple paradoxes and contradictions. Categorized in a range of dichotomous pairs and fused through conceptual opposition, they are readily located in *trancistim* attitudes and conduct. From a close reading, it appears that many of *trancistim* behavioral contradictions stem from issues, concerns and dilemmas facing post-millennial Israel. In other words, the contrasts at the base of Israeli PEDMC are actually expressions of conflicting attitudes and contradictory value systems located within broader Israeli socio-cultural norms. This ironic pattern contains an additional degree of complexity since *trancistim* tend to relate to their behavior at *mesibot* as purposefully non-conventional and since, by and large, many members of the Israeli public are skeptical of PEDMC activities (Meadan 2001).

Some of the key Israeli PEDMC dichotomies are insider/outsider, global/local, and secular/traditional. Since the underlying motivation for these oppositional categories are dynamic, interconnected and multilayered, these examples do not constitute an exhaustive list, but rather suggest the principal channels through which paradox presents itself within secular Israeli psytrance culture. Thus, the remainder of this section outlines some of the ways in which these antonymous pairs paradoxically manifest within *trancistim* attitudes and practices.

#### INSIDER/OUTSIDER

The insider/outsider dichotomy is a fundamental paradox in Israeli PEDMC and regularly surfaces in *trancistim* performance. Because *mesibot* attendance is by invitation only and parties are purposefully hard to locate, organizers normally manage to keep them a secret. Thus, a division exists between those who are informed of where and when *mesibot* will happen and those who don't, won't, or can't know. Moreover, in their promotional emails, many psytribes instruct members to keep prior knowledge of *mesibot* to themselves as a precaution against attracting undesirable elements.

Although they never clearly state who these undesirable individuals are, and even though *trancistim* usually don't openly discuss this issue, there seems to be a shared recognition of their identity and collaborated acknowledgment of why these so-called undesirables are so unwelcome. During conversations, *trancistim* allude to the notion that these people are generally not connected to PEDMC on an ostensibly idealistic or spiritual level and instead utilize *mesibot* for more hedonistic purposes or attend parties to hunt for sexual partners. For this reason, to guarantee their patrons a top notch setting similar to exclusive nightclubs—one that is both convivial and cohesive—*mesibot* organizers place bouncers, known to *trancistim* as *selectorim*, at the entrance of parties with the task of deterring

interlopers from intruding upon the event and spoiling its mood.

Sometimes undesirables are referred to as *arsim* (punks) or *shimonim*, which makes them distinguishable from *anashim yafim* (nice/beautiful people). *Arse* is an Arabic word that literally means “pimp” and in Israeli slang implies “a thug”; and *shimon* is a name *trancistim* stereotypically use to identify *eidot-hamizrax*, that is, Jews of North African or Middle Eastern descent. In contrast, *anashim yafim* refers to a typical, well behaved, bourgeois *trancist* of European/Ashkenazi descent. Within the psytrance context, the terms *shimonim* and *arsim* designate people whose conduct does not conform to conventional PEDMC modes of behavior and make spectacles of themselves on the dance floor by fighting, damaging property or talking rudely to women, for example.



FIGURE 2. ANASHIM EXUTI'IM. PHOTO: J. SCHMIDT (2011).

While not everyone who misbehaves at *mesibot* is from the *eidot-hamizrax*, *shimonim* by definition belong to this ethnic category. Thus even if someone causing trouble at a PEDMC event is *Ashkenazi*, they will be called a *shimon* or *arse* and thereby affiliated with the *eidot-hamizrax*. Ironically, instead of using the term *yoramim*, the proper slang equivalent of *shimonim* for middle-class *Ashkenazim*, *trancistim* prefer to call themselves *anashim yafim* or *anashim exuti'im* (quality people). This seems to imply that *Ashkenazim*



are the group responsible for ranking Israeli PEDMC's subcategories and that the pejorative classifications, cultural prejudices and social elitism which exists within mainstream Israel are, in fact, unexpectedly reconstructed within this bizarre environment (Almog 2000).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the *anashim yafim/yoram/Ashkenazi* paradigm stands counter to the *arse/shimon/eidot-hamizrax* prototype, or that *trancistim* often claim that part of what contributes to the success of a party is the predominance of *anashim exuti'im* and the noted absence of *shimonim*. Consequently, despite *trancistim* rhetorical adherence to PLUR-driven egalitarianism, it appears that, paradoxically, the social structure at *mesibot* duplicates—rather than confronts or dismisses—many of the deep-seated discriminatory divisions found in the everyday lives of *trancistim*.

## GLOBAL/LOCAL

A NUMBER of the features from the insider/outsider paradox merge with the global/local dichotomy. For example, although Hebrew is the native language of Jewish Israel, the majority of *trancistim* digital communication, much of the slang *trancistim* use in their verbal discourse and most of the samples in Israeli trance music is in English. In general, foreign language use among *trancistim*, along with the fact that *mesibot* are furtive events held secretly in secluded locations, leads to a purposeful separation between PEDMC and conventional society. More specifically, the use of a foreign language, especially English—a language or *lingua franca* associated with academic, international financial and commercial institutions—appears to be a way for *trancistim* to distinguish themselves from both non-*trancistim* and *Shimonim* and therefore is both in opposition and contradictory to the tenet of “unity” allegedly aspired for at PEDMC gatherings.

Since English is the language of advertisement minded capitalism, it also represents international business culture and acts as an indicator for those who attend *mesibot* that they are “globalized Israelis” (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 19). The exclusivity entailed in *trancistim* use of English connects Israeli PEDMC with other worldwide scenes and enables *trancistim* to classify themselves as Israelis who construct their identities “as a local extension of contemporary world culture” (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 19). Additionally, the specific use of English enables a form of escapism by helping *trancistim* legitimize their multiple identities as local Israelis and as worldwide PEDMC adherents. Similarly, Israeli sociologist Uri Ram (2000: 225–6) points out that, “in many cases, if not all, store names [in large retail shopping malls in Israel] appear in English”. Akin to *trancistim* employment of English, Ram relates to the use of foreign languages within the Israeli market place by noting how Israeli shopping malls “offer sterile zones, isolated from the humid and belligerent Middle Eastern environment. They create an illusion of being ‘here’ and feeling ‘there’—as any proper globalist simulation should” (Ram 2000: 226).

It should be made clear that not only do psytrance gatherings separate *trancistim* both physically and mentally from their customary social settings, but *mesibot* in general, and the intense energy derived from the collective hallucinatory experience in particular, offer

participants the impression that what takes place inside these “other worlds” is qualitatively different from the goings-on within their ordinary everyday domains. Hence, even if the parties ironically replicate rather than alleviate societal discord, they nonetheless appear to offer opportunities wherein change can occur, at least superficially. Accordingly, a local PEDMC adage advises *trancistim* (in English, of course) to *trust in trance* as a means for coping with their assumed disenchantment with life in tension-filled Israel.



FIGURE 3. MESIBA IN THE NEGEV DESERT. PHOTO: J. SCHMIDT (2011).

The phrase “trust in trance” first emerged as the title of a groundbreaking 1994 Israeli psytrance compilation and was subsequently the name of a local record label. Trust in Trance Records released a number of key Israeli trance albums, most notably of the group Astral Projection, whose best-selling albums *Dancing Galaxy* (1997) and *Another World* (1999) contain track titles such as “Flying Into A Star”, “Cosmic Ascension”, “Life On Mars”, “Still On Mars”, “Searching For UFOs” and “Visions Of Nasca”, an ancient Incan civilization, which correspond with many of the concepts underlying the global vs. local dichotomy. Thus, in this instance a global subculture (PEDMC) provides remedial support within a local setting (*mesibot*) by contributing to the reputed notion among *trancistim* that “out there” (overseas/the foreign/the transnational) is qualitatively better than “in here”

(Israel/the established/the local). Yet, ultimately, even as *trancistim* escape from their daily lives into presumably more agreeable—far-off and momentarily idyllic—circumstances, paradoxically, their attitudes and practices replicate, rather than improve or challenge, the reality they are attempting to evade.

## SECULAR/TRADITIONAL

ANOTHER fundamental dichotomy, the tension between secular and traditional values, emerges in the way *trancistim* combine their secular (leisure) and traditional (family) cultural spheres. *Mesibot* are mostly held on the (holy) Sabbath (*Shabbat* in Hebrew) or in tandem with annual Jewish or State holidays, something that endows them with an air of quasi-sanctity. In much the same manner that *Shabbat* functions as a process of renewal for Orthodox Jews, *mesibot* enable *trancistim* to remedially disconnect from their quotidian life circumstances. *Mesibot* are therefore viewed as an extension of these celebrations and *trancistim* often dress up for parties and decorate the party venues with a mixture of neo-traditional Jewish/Zionist holiday motifs such as incandescent Chanukah candelabras, dayglo fluorescent Stars of David for Israel Independence Day, multicolored sheaths of wheat signifying *Shavuot*/the Festival of Weeks, and various clichéd strands of new age/neopagan or Far Eastern iconography like Indian Oms, Celtic inspired symbols, fire-breathing dragons and Chinese ideograms.

Both for *xiloni* and traditionally observant Jewish families, in Israel Friday night/Shabbat and holiday dinners are considered important and even obligatory rituals. Since *mesibot* often take place on the heels of these meals, they typically trigger confrontation with what is sometimes perceived as one of the last bastions of traditional Jewish mainstream sociality within contemporary Israel. Taking this conflict into account, party organizers normally schedule *mesibot* from midnight to midday and thereby accommodate the prior involvement of participants with these widely sanctioned nationwide family celebrations. In fact, these meals are such a deep-rooted cultural phenomenon that friends will often bring leftovers (a taste of *Shabbat*) to the party sites and distribute them to the production staff, who may have missed dinner. Or, prior to the beginning of a party, secular crew members may pause from their preparations to reenact this weekly ritual at the party venue by convening for a *Shabbat* dinner, complete with sacramental blessings on the candles, wine and bread, in an impromptu eating space set up alongside the yet-unused dance floor.

The secular/traditional dichotomy is paradoxical since even as *trancistim* replace traditionally sanctioned family dinners with alternative countercultural *mesibot*, their unorthodox performance remains affixed to mainstream behavioral norms. Moreover, as psytrance gatherings are held outside the confines of conventional society, they are both a challenge to established rituals and an apparently tolerated alternative to fading traditions. In Israel this tension is further complicated since these seemingly contradictory behavioral constructs—institutionalized ethno-religious observance and nonconformist hedonistic celebration—are actually directed towards apparently similar aims: both Shabbat/Jewish

holidays and *mesibot* afford their practitioners invaluable realms of relaxation, rejuvenation and communion apart from their frequently hectic quotidian life circumstances.

This dialectic assumes an additional level of intricacy, since one of the by-products of the move from collectivity to individuality in post-Zionist Israel is a growing detachment from religious values. Many secular Israelis—including most *trancistim*—have an ambiguous relationship with organized religion and take issue with the way it operates in Israel. This is because they both define and relate to religious practice as part of Israeli culture, and because Jewish tradition and religious customs are cumbrously intertwined with State politics and policy (Cohen and Susser 2000).



FIGURE 4. CONTEMPORARY ISRAELI TRADITIONALISTS. PHOTO: J. SCHMIDT (2011).

The clash between secular and traditional value systems, however, is not an exclusively PEDMC phenomenon. For instance, Apeh and Tobin (1989) note in their study of fortune telling in Israel that many clients of fortune tellers seek them out in addition to, or as a replacement for, traditional spiritual and religious organizations. This pattern appears indicative of a broader cultural transformation occurring more generally within Israel, which is “today the site of an ongoing and at times violent competition over ‘tradition,’ that is, a set of meaningful and worthwhile guidelines for people’s lives” (Paine 1989: 123). It likewise

appears analogous to Simon Reynolds' claim that youth are turning "to rave culture for the meaning and sense of belonging they once derived from religion" (1998: 288). Likewise, it supports Heelas and Woodhead's (2005) observation that "outer directed religion" is being replaced by "inner directed spirituality" which has led to a "dual process of secularization with regard to religious observance and sacralization with regard to everyday life" (18).<sup>1</sup>

With secular Israeli PEDMC clearly infused with paradox, the second half of the article broadens the discussion of trance culture in Israel by focusing on a separate but parallel EDMC-related youth activity—trance parties for religious Israelis. The reasons why young religious Israelis are drawn to trance-dance gatherings are first discussed with regard to certain socio-cultural processes impacting upon their communities. Afterwards, there is a description of EDMC parties for religious Israelis that compares and contrasts them with trance parties for secular Israelis by relating to the uniquely paradoxical functions these disparate events fulfill for their respective adherents.

### DOSISTIM AND DOSIBOT: EDMC AMID ORTHODOX ISRAELI YOUTH

AS ILLUSTRATED ABOVE, the central paradox among *trancistim* is that, despite appearances to the contrary, their unconventional behavior, attitudes and mannerisms actually reproduce many of the core values and characteristic practices of mainstream *xiloni* Israel. In an equivalent manner, the following explains how the seemingly errant conduct-cum-paradoxical behavior demonstrated by religious Israelis who attend EDMC parties is actually a stop-gap measure primarily intended to facilitate religious directives pertaining to marriage and pre-nuptial inter-gender relationships.

Trance-dance events for religious Israelis (*dati*, *dati'im* in plural) have been taking place for roughly a decade and are known to their patrons as *dosibot*. This term blends *dos*, which is contemporary Hebrew slang for "Orthodox Jew", and the feminine plural suffix *bot*, as in *mesibot*. "*Dos*" is a projection of the word *dat*, the Hebrew word for religion, which some Ashkenazi Jews pronounce with a vowel that sounds like /o/ and they spirantize the "t" which sounds like an "s" as in *das* or *dos*. Among secular Israelis, *dos* is often used as an all-inclusive and somewhat derogatory way of referring to *dati'im*, that is, Orthodox or old-fashioned Jews, while its usage among *dati'im* is one of fondness and intimacy. This usage is comparable with the manner which other social groups entitle themselves to affectionately address members in ways that would otherwise be considered offensive if done by individuals outside their group (for example "nigger", "faggot", "spic", "*shlep*", "chink").

In Israel, to be *dati* or religious—that is, theologically, but also politically and culturally aligned with Orthodox Jewry—largely refers to an individual's concern for and fulfillment of institutionalized *halaxa* (Jewish religious law) as overseen by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. *Dati'im* adhere to a traditionally based system of standardized Orthodox observance and are also referred to as *dati'im leumi'im* (National Religious; *dati leumi* in singular)—the suffix *leumi* (or, national) links their formalized religious orthodoxy with their neo-nationalist politics. In fact, a staunch conviction in the continued significance of the historical Jewish

narrative is embedded within the *dati* identity and motivates a great deal of this sector's socio-political principles, practices and ideologies. Thus, *dati'im leumi'im* are also labeled *t'ziyonim dati'im* (Religious Zionists), a designation that further illustrates the vital nationalist/Zionist component implicit in their theologically directed doctrines and lifestyle.

Recently, social commentators are discussing how *dati* communities are currently undergoing a "relationship crisis" (*mashber zugiyut*) wrought in part by the fact that Orthodox youth are basically raised in mono-gender environments and therefore seldom receive opportunities to fraternize with members of the opposite sex (Engelberg 2009). Among Orthodox communities, public displays of affection between the sexes are socially improper and deemed blatantly immoral; hence, *dati'im* rarely express overtly seductive or sexually aggressive behavior. In order to preserve this state of affairs, Orthodox youth are segregated into mono-gendered educational environments via primary schools, youth movements, Torah academies, and military and national service, and throughout their young-adult lives are discouraged from developing "inappropriate" or sexually charged thoughts and habits.

However, beyond the completion of their education and army/service track—when *dati'im* are in their early twenties—the institutionalized *dati* mechanism breaks down and fails to offer its younger generations workable strategies for navigating the transition between singlehood and matrimony. Young *dati'im* find this period confusing since, for the first time in their lives, they are without the explicit supervision, guidance and support of their community-centered Orthodox frameworks. Moreover, this life phase inevitably occurs within non-religious socio-cultural contexts—for example at universities, in various employment scenarios, in zones of consumerism, leisure and entertainment—whereupon singlehood is a customary social category and *dati'im* must confront a multitude of formidable issues under what are frequently alienating circumstances.

At the same time, the first *mitzvah* (or, divine commandment; *mitzvot* in plural) listed in the Torah is to "be fruitful and multiply," a celestial call for human procreation that implicitly entails marrying at a young age, which according to Orthodox conventions means no later than thirty. This perceived deadline heightens the anxieties of unwed *dati'im*, who feel compelled to conform to this expectation but are obliged to do so within the context of their mainstream Israeli (globally impacted, market driven, post-traditionalist) daily surroundings.

The resulting dissonance—left largely unaddressed by *dati* educators and the religious establishment—has plunged young *dati'im*, particularly females, into a socio-cultural void whereupon they are without sufficient guidelines and/or first-hand experience of how to initiate or enact mating rituals which will correspond to *halaxa* while being compatible with their late-modern, secular-impacted everyday lives. To resolve this awkward condition, many young *dati'im* are literally, if somewhat cautiously, taking matters into their own hands by efficiently enlisting external cultural styles and systems—such as *dosibot* and other Western-modeled unorthodox late-night leisure activities—in an effort to fulfill their anticipated community-specific religious duties.

*Dosistim*—my term for *dati'im* who attend trance-dance parties (*dosist* in singular)—are Orthodox youth whose communal identities are largely informed by their commitment to a religious, rather than a secular, value system and lifestyle. Paradigmatically, *dosistim* are typical *dati'im* both in terms of their level of religious observance as well as their general mid-income socio-economic standing. Since their lives largely revolve around the yearly cycles of religious observance, *dosistim* are neither aware of, interested in, nor involved with PEDMC tenets for which they have no spiritual, intellectual or social need. Moreover, as their ideology-cum-behavior is fashioned from a dual sense of obligation to fulfill their religious and civic responsibilities, *dati'im* lead jam-packed daily routines. In consequence, they lack the time and incentive to add further obligations and/or additional schemes of belief to their already full schedules. *Dosistim* disregard of PEDMC philosophies, principles and practices matches this sector's comparatively hesitant integration of various other globalized mechanisms into their faith-based routines and rituals. Conversely, this pattern compares and contrasts with the ways in which *trancistim* appropriation of PEDMC dogma is an extension of a more general secular-Israeli embracement of global culture.

While my intention is not to paint a monolithic portrait of the perennially upright and sincere *dosist*, frequently this seems to be the situation; *dati'im* are earnest in their aims and rarely attend *dosibot* for longer than it takes them to find an appropriate match. Nevertheless, due to a combination of factors beyond the scope of this article, some *dati'im*—particularly those who flirt with leaving the *dati leumi* fold—appear to enjoy the quasi-autonomy that this phase offers them and, in result, may remain in the marriage market for extended periods. Yet, due to the all-encompassing nature of their connection to their communities, most of these lingerers transition forward and, either through *dosibot* or by some other means, eventually proceed onward with their anticipated life course (marriage/children/family).

### DOSIBOT VS. MESIBOT: PARADOX IN A PARALLEL ISRAELI EDMC SETTING

EVEN AS *dosistim* and *trancistim* similarly engage EDMC in a response to external conditions, their rendering is neither uniform nor entirely analogous. For *trancistim* PEDMC provides a departure from the tension of their daily lives, while *dosistim* employ EDMC as a means for countering their relationship crises. In order to better understand the motives behind these divergent uses, they need be scrutinized with regard to the specific socio-cultural circumstances under which they occur. The following ethnographic-based review of *dosibot* focuses on the common and contrastive features of *dosibot/dosistim* versus *mesibot/trancistim*.

*Dosibot* mostly occur in metropolitan areas in proximity to where the majority of *dosistim* live, work and study. *Dosibot* are often staged in *dati*-oriented public spaces such as neighborhood civic centers, synagogue reception halls and, lately, kosher pubs. A relatively recent phenomenon, kosher pubs primarily cater to *dati* youth and operate much like ordinary secular pubs by offering patrons music, food, alcohol and a favorable environment

in which to congregate. Since they ordinarily cater to *dati* customers, these establishments serve certified kosher food and drink at fair prices and may offer separate seating for men and women. Marketed as restaurants yet *de-facto* functioning within a libidinous late-night leisure culture context, this duplicity goes overlooked in much the same manner that *dati* leadership abides by a “see no evil, hear no evil” policy in their (in)active response to *dosibot*. Operating on the fringes of the Orthodox establishment, kosher pubs provide a framework for semi-tolerated irregular *dati* youth activity and have thus become a favorite *dosibot* staging ground.

As opposed to *mesibot*, *dosibot* are held with the proper permits intact. As such, they are openly advertised via fliers, posters, web-forums and word of mouth. Since *dosibot* organizers promote their events to a very specific segment of the population, they try to appeal to as large a crowd as possible, an approach which runs counter to the selection process implemented by the gatekeepers/organizers of most *mesibot*. While attendance varies from party to party, *dosibot* attract, on average, several hundred participants per event. Due to the dynamic nature of this subculture, it is tough to accurately gauge exactly how many *dati'im* attend *dosibot* on a regular basis; however, an assessment of the key *dosibot* associated web forums suggests that their numbers are well into the thousands and that this phenomenon is growing.

At the same time, because these events are a means to an end—finding a life-partner—*dati'im* tend to grow disinterested in *dosibot* if they realize their objective or if they repeatedly fail in their efforts. While *mesibot* essentially revolve around music and dance, *dosibot* feature a selection of other entertainment segments prior to the straightforward DJ-dance part of the evening. For instance, *dosibot* normally begin with a short lecture pertaining to the contemporary socio-historical-theological significance of the specific holiday being celebrated. This often leads into a collective toast (*l'chaim!*) and various entertainers—magicians, stand-up comedians, live bands/song leaders—may perform on a main stage.

Normally, *dosibot* are hosted by an emcee or a team of emcees who are generally the (Orthodox) male and/or female organizers of the party. Assuming the role of host, they make announcements, joke with the crowd and introduce the evening's various segments. The music, which is loud but not overstated, also contributes to a congenial ambiance by permitting verbal intercourse to occur among participants. Thus, *dosibot* are replete with verbal communication and loquacious *dosistim*, in contrast to wordless *mesibot* and reticent *trancistim*. To be sure, at secular PEDMC events the organizers remain in the background and announcements or introductions are practically non-existent. Moreover, the deafening volume of the music together with the potentially numbing effects of certain psychoactive drugs can sometimes make even the most basic conversation at *mesibot* difficult. As the DJs' sets of nonstop music flow into one another, they effectively eliminate all breaks—silent, music-less moments—during which participants might potentially socialize verbally which, on the contrary, is the very point of *dosibot*.

Similar to *trancistim*, *dosistim* hail from a mixture of *Ashkenazi* and *eidot ha'mizrax* backgrounds. Yet, while *trancistim* come from a variety of socio-economic sectors and live in both urban and rural areas in a range of domestic circumstances, typically, *dosistim* are single,



middle-class (sub)urbanites living with or near their parents. *Dosibot* appear to attract this kind of homogeneous crowd since its uniformity reflects the primary motivation *dati'im* have for attending these gatherings. This demographic consistency affords participants a secure and familiar setting for pursuing their marriage goals. This demographic consistency, at least on the surface, is reversed at *mesibot*, whereupon the intended otherworldliness of these events implicitly evokes an alluring sense of danger and encourages participants' atypical behavior.

Akin to *mesibot*, *dosibot* generally coincide with Jewish/State holidays. Yet, unlike *mesibot*, *dosibot* are typically held on Thursday or Saturday nights and never on Friday nights, which is the beginning of the Jewish day of rest (the Holy Sabbath) and a time when Orthodox Jews refrain from traveling, working and consumerism. *Dosibot* last for approximately six hours (20:30–02:00), or occasionally a bit longer, but never all night and into the early afternoon as is expected at *mesibot*.

Contrary to *mesibot*, where *trancistim* are of all ages, *dosistim* are mainly in their twenties and early thirties. Whereas *mesibot* normally attract more men than women, *dosibot* comprise a higher female-to-male ratio (roughly 60/40). This is likely due to the fact that single *dati* females feel the pressure from the relationship crisis more acutely than their male counterparts. Unlike their Westernized secular female counterparts, single *dati* women—especially those who have reached their thirties—are culturally limited both on a social/stigmatic and a religious/spiritual level, since non-married females are unable to perform a number of crucial *mitzvot* (in particular, those pertaining to menstruation rites and candle lighting rituals). While by the *letter* of the law women may perform these ceremonies without being married, this goes against the *spirit* of the law and is therefore not the accepted practice.

Traditionally, Jewish women are recognized as fully-grown only after they have attained a husband and household. Thus, regardless of the independent lives many single *dati* females may or may not lead while transitioning through this stage, their families and communities continue to regard them as a part of their father's house until they are married. Consequently, women are more desperate than men to wed, since, as sociologist Hagit Bartuv (2004) writes: “within *dati* society, a woman who is not connected to a family unit, disrupts the social order, the sexual order and the religious order and is thus perceived as a threat to social harmony” (29; trans. mine).

*Shmirat einayim* (guarding one's eyes) is an elementary Orthodox edict which forbids men from staring at women and, ideally, *dati'im* should try and limit their interactions with the opposite sex lest these lead to potentially compromising scenarios. Moreover, *dati'im* are instructed to avoid situations that might cause them to disobey the laws of *n'giah* (touching, that is, any physical contact with members of the opposite sex) and thus young men and women are generally discouraged from congregating together. In accordance with these rules and following a common practice at Orthodox synagogues and other religious public events (for example, weddings, *bar-mitzvas*, circumcision rites), *dosibot* routinely

provide men and women with separate areas of assembly. Yet, despite these measures, the gender divisions at *dosibot* are frequently ignored and *dosistim* mix openly, if somewhat diffidently, in all areas of the party.

*Dosibot* elicit a far more sociable ambiance than *mesibot* in the sense that they feature a greater degree of interpersonal communication both among the participants themselves and between the participants and the organizers. One explanation for this is that *dosibot* are held in enclosed settings, while *mesibot* are held outdoors. Hence, *dosistim* assemble in one concentrated area, whereas *trancistim* haphazardly camp with their close friends at various points on the land surrounding the dance floor and, therefore, have less reason or opportunity to make new acquaintances. Moreover, if and when they meet on the dance floor, non-verbal *trancistim* are generally quite high and can be insular and self-absorbed to the point wherein they may even avoid making eye contact with fellow dancers.

*Dati'im* typically arrive at *dosibot* in mono-gendered clusters and strategically use their companions in attempts to meet members of the opposite sex. Since *dosistim* are unaware of (secular) trance party protocol, they may disregard the party's music and dancing segments—the fundamental elements of *mesibot*—and instead spend the evening engrossed in animated small talk with friends and newly found acquaintances. Flirtatious banter of this sort seldom occurs at *mesibot* where *trancistim* may converse with one another, although rarely with so much persistence or with such pragmatically suggestive and/or coquettish undertones. Moreover, these conversations primarily occur over food and drinks—a standard feature of *dosibot* but one that is oftentimes sidelined at *mesibot*, as most *trancistim* consume drugs rather than nourishment and fraternize with their immediate circle of friends rather than engage with both familiar and unfamiliar potential life partners.

Throughout the evening, groups of *dosistim* withdraw to impromptu single-sex areas of the party, such as particular sets of tables or certain parts of the bar. This retreat, however, is not performed in order to conform to *halaxic* directives. Rather, it is intended to allow *dosistim*, primarily females, an opportunity to take a breather from the night's activities and compare notes on prospective matches. As opposed to the precise areas sanctioned off by the *mexitza* (partition between the sexes) in Orthodox synagogues and other customary *dati* functions, these more spontaneous divisions largely serve a functional rather than a dutiful/religious purpose. Being both rational minded as well as accustomed to segregated co-habitation, *dosistim* favor this method of fraternizing because it allows them to remain at ease in these unusual surroundings even as they continue to view and be viewed by potential suitors. This arrangement is a far cry from the concealed socializing perpetrated at *mesibot* where participants withdraw from the main event to obscured locations—VIP areas, private tents, special bathroom stalls—in order to partake in drug-taking and other nefarious activities.

The lighting at *dosibot* is consistently muted, lending them a romantic ambiance. This low lighting enables what might be described as shadow play wherein beneath the cover of near darkness *dosistim* cruise the parties searching *l'hitxaber* (to hook-up), which, within

the context of *dosibot*, implies meeting a potential marriage partner. Indeed, softly lit *dosibot* are especially fitting for shy and sexually reserved *dosistim* since this allows them to pursue their less-than-Orthodox activities without becoming inordinately self-conscious. At the same time, the shadowy atmosphere facilitates the observance of the *marit ayin* prescript (literally, within eyeshot)—an Orthodox ordinance requiring *dati'im* to avoid exhibiting religiously questionable behavior in public for fear they could inadvertently mislead fellow Jews to interpret their actions as *halaxically* permissible.

Even as *dosistim* rarely express feral conduct, *dosibot* possess a far more sexually charged atmosphere than *mesibot* and, at times, curiously resemble Israel's quasi-licitious (and non-PEDMC affiliated) *xiloni* pick-up bars. Growing in popularity and legitimacy in the past ten or so years, Israeli pick-up bars are urban pubs with faint lighting, inexpensive alcohol and a randy atmosphere. The bars are set up with large serving areas surrounded by interlocking bar stools, which allow customers to easily encounter one another. Generally operating throughout the night, these venues are notoriously considered by their *xiloni* patrons to be legitimate hunting grounds for casual and even sometimes onsite sexual encounters (Taub 2009).

One explanation for the similarity between these venues is that Orthodox law explicitly forbids physical relations or any other activity leading to an "(in)voluntary discharge" prior to marriage. As *dosistim* endeavor to comply with this restriction, their search for prospective marriage partners inevitably leads to a buildup of sexual tension. As a result, and contrary to *mesibot* etiquette, they convey their sexuality via flirtatious conversation and suggestive dancing, ironically both expressing *and* repressing their urges simultaneously. Oddly enough, *dati'im* resolve to remain within the bounds of the religious mores of their communities is what ultimately also prompts their sexually suggestive behavior at *dosibot*.

The music at *dosibot* blends a combination of EDMC genres and Israeli pop tunes remixed with electronic beats. Much of this music contains fragments of popular lyrics and/or melodies; *dosistim* may recognize the songs and will often sing along as they dance. This conduct is contrary to *mesibot*, where DJs play unreleased or unrecognized tracks and the music is virtually wordless. *Mesibot* DJs are specialists who stick to their particular genres—such as psy-prog, deep house, minimal techno or Goa—and purposefully play fresh or hard-to-find tracks in a continuing effort to satisfy their music-savvy fans. In contrast, *dosibot* DJs apply a more free style to their music selection by mixing an easily digested hodge-podge of electrified dance tunes for their mostly non-musically versed audiences. As opposed to the wordless and frequently elitist atmosphere engendered by class conscious and taste-sensitive *trancistim*, at these non-PEDMC related events, the dancers' sense of fellowship is manifested not through drugs and/or a shared sense of privileged deviance, but rather via the audience's collective recognition/appreciation of the lyrics/tunes of these well-known Hebrew songs.

Since *dati'im* are only mildly concerned with the particulars of the music they dance to, in contrast to *mesibot*, *dosibot* rarely, if ever, feature famous DJs or special music acts from abroad. Thus, *dosibot* DJs do not possess the same status and cult of personality affixed to many of their celebrated *xiloni* counterparts. Moreover, performers at *mesibot* do not



FIGURE 5. *DOSISTIM* IN ACTION: LANDEN PUB, TEL-AVIV. PHOTO: J. SCHMIDT (2009).

masquerade behind imaginary aliases or neologistic soubriquets, but instead prefer to be identified by their ordinary—and overtly Jewish-Israeli—names (for example, DJ Avi Maimon, DJ Nir, DJ Roy Fliner, DJ Kobi, DJ Menachem). This approach is typical of *dati leumi* aesthetic sensibilities, which are characterized by their matter-of-fact practicality, a straightforwardness that pervades this sector's religious performance, consumption practices and leisure habits, and characterizes their overall sense of style and temperament (Taub 2008).

*Dosistim* do not have one fixed manner of dancing and may separate into gendered clusters or dance in tandem with same-sex partners. Unaccustomed to dancing to this type of music, when attending EDM parties *dosistim* enthusiastically rock-out by performing steps borrowed from popular folk and traditional wedding-style line dances such as the *Hora* and the *Dabke*. These communal dance styles enable *dosistim* to remain less conspicuous, deter *n'giah* and permit unwieldy or shy participants to go undetected. In comparison, *trancistim* introverted manner of dancing is abstract and highly personalized and solo dancers hardly ever face one another or come into deliberate physical contact.

*Dosistim* attire could best be described as *bar-mitzva* chic, which translates into *dati* casual such as jeans and button down/polo shirts for men and dresses and blouses for women. Traditionally and for reasons of modesty, the *halaxa* requires *dati* women to wear dresses rather than trousers. Even so, female *dosistim* seem to make larger efforts at dressing up, frequently wearing colorful *shanti*, cotton garments of Indian origin, which, due to their flowing and modest cut, neatly conform with *dati* dress codes. It is interesting to note that, while *trancistim* also dress in *shanti* clothing, theirs is typically purchased in the

countries where the garments were made and thereby act as an assertion of their subcultural identities by indicating to other *trancistim* that they are well-versed world travelers. In distinction, *dosistim* tend to shop locally and will often buy their *shanti* wear in stores that specifically cater to the needs and tastes of young *dati'im*. Hence, they view this manner of dress as prudently compliant to *halaxic* restrictions rather than as favorably underground or fashionably cosmopolitan.

In general, *dosistim* clothing is neither outlandish nor exceptional both by *dati* and *xiloni* standards and, to the degree that it exists, material investment among *dati'im* is predominantly directed towards embellishing the various *mitzvot* connected with the celebration of Shabbat and other seasonal religious festivals—a virtuous act that is considered a *mitzva* in itself. Additionally, lavish *dati* consumption is curtailed by the ethic of *t'zniyut* (humility, modesty), an Orthodox ideal that stipulates that God-fearing Jews should strive to be modest by leading chaste and self-effacing lives.

The fliers used to advertise *dosibot* retain a narrow visual scope, appropriating their themes from the Jewish-Israeli holidays connected with the parties. Consequently, they are unassuming, contain ordinary looking imagery and are bereft of the outlandish graphics and bizarre artwork typifying *mesibot* fliers. Moreover, *dosibot* adverts are normally written in standard Hebrew fonts, conveying an abundance of information and always clearly listing the proper names and personal phone numbers of the party organizers, something that lends them and the parties they advertise a valid approachability. Like *mesibot* fliers, *dosibot* fliers are cleverly worded, yet invites to religious dance parties are comparatively self-explanatory and welcoming. This candid approach differs from the enigmatic nature of most *mesibot* communiqués—a subcultural art form in itself—whose fantastic illustrations and cryptic English phrasing are only comprehensible to initiated insiders and, even then, are shrouded in nuance and routinely fail to furnish exact details such as the precise location of an event or the actual names of its producers.

Despite their often racy conduct at parties, *dosistim* nomenclature is free of profanity, vulgarity or sexual allusion. Moreover, as their interaction with the *dosibot* milieu is limited, unlike *trancistim*, *dosistim* have little concern for or inclination to develop specialized, context specific, coded vocabularies, and instead converse as they would under normal conditions. This linguistic sincerity is also responsible for the ordinary wording on *dosibot* fliers and their routine use of religious/Jewish terminology. It also explains why, unlike most *mesibot* invites, the majority of *dosibot* fliers are in Hebrew rather than in English.

To be sure, *dosistim* language remains straightforwardly '*dati*' because they believe that the functional aspects of *dosibot* (locating potential life mates) justifies their paradoxical means (behaving out-of-character) for achieving their goals, but need not necessarily impinge or otherwise alter other facets of their personalities, like styles of dress or language use, which remain largely unaffected by their abnormally suggestive conduct at *dosibot*. Reflecting the candid and forthright sensibilities of its users, in contrast to *trancistim*, *dosistim* utilize hyper-practical "strategies of communication" (Aphek and Tobin 1989:46) to converse in an explicit manner—their wording is overt, direct and straightforward, their phrasing coherent

and their overall language use might best be termed sensible. In other words, the objective of the *dosibot* encounter—to attract an appropriate spouse— actually encourages *dosistim* to maintain, emphasize and even over-exaggerate the religious aspects of their linguistic discourse in order to impress their audience within this particular situational context. In consequence, *dosistim* language is replete with Orthodox themes and religious terminology as a selling point to attract prospective partners. Thus, while *dosistim* conduct is paradoxical, both their printed language and verbal discourse remain inordinately *dati* and, in contrast to *trancistim* ironic use of language, is purposefully conforming and free of paradox.



FIGURE 6. GETTING HER NUMBER. PHOTO: J. SCHMIDT (2009).

The vivid images projected by *mesibot* VJs and the psychedelic self-expressive art installations that adorn PEDMC dance floors, contrast with the muted and rather sober visuals found at *dosibot*. Thrifty-minded *dosibot* organizers cut their production costs by skimping on decorations and rarely are parties bedecked with anything more than the most elementary, store-bought decorations, such as balloons, streamers, confetti, tissue-paper garlands. Additionally, since they are normally organized by inexperienced party crews and without commercial sponsorship, *dosibot* are devoid of bannered logos and promotional materials (upcoming party fliers, CDs, stickers and t-shirts, for example) that are regularly on offer

at PEDMC events. Twenty-three year old Netanel, who studies computer science at a technological college in Beer-Sheva and has staged a number of *dosibot* in southern Israel, rationalized this approach by telling me: “Decorations really aren’t necessary. They cost money, take time to put up and don’t really add that much [to the party atmosphere]”.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their potential for generating revenue, *dosibot* are seldom staged in conjunction with financial backers because party producers view these events primarily as a community service rather than a moneymaking enterprise. Thus, they hire relatively unknown and inexpensive DJs, charge low or no entrance fees and sell drinks and snacks at affordable prices. In some ways, this situation is reminiscent of the initial commercial-less PEDMC parties in the early 1990s that were held without ostentation and basically attempted to connect between what was then a limited number of intrepid *trancistim* (Shor 2008). Yet, the absence of mainstream commerciality at *dosibot* is not necessarily ideologically driven in the DiY sense of the term. Rather, since they are fairly novel, perhaps *dosibot* have yet to be capitalized to their full market potential. It is possible that prospective Orthodox sponsors are staying away because they recognize that it would be inappropriate for their companies to publically endorse these problematic events. Or perhaps this lack of commercialization can be linked to the principled disinclination of Orthodox Jews to overexploit material culture at the expense of their fellow man, as the Torah forbids exploitative conduct and expressly prohibits the defrauding or deceiving of Jews and non-Jews alike (e.g., Exodus 26:20; Leviticus 25:14; Deuteronomy 6:18).

In any case, dogma-less *dosibot* seem far less consumer-oriented than ideal-laden *mesibot*. For instance, while gung-ho *trancistim* commonly spend a great deal of money at parties (on drugs, drinks, apparel, transportation and entrance fees), frugal-minded *dosistim* “religiously” avoid frivolous purchases, drink considerably less alcohol and practically never attend parties wearing flashy clothing or touting trendy accessories. Additionally, psychedelics and other illegal and generally expensive mind/body stimulants are neither sold nor normally used at *dosibot*. In contrast, drugs are quite central to *mesibot* culture, both fueling their micro-economies and perpetuating their spiritual aura by producing a collective hallucinatory experience. Hence, in spite of a passing resemblance to utopian notions of PEDMC self-reliance, *dosibot* grassroots can be attributed to *dosistim* characteristically prudent, no-frills, aesthetic tendencies—a common *dati* character trait and one that instills religious dance parties with their distinctive mood and flavor.

In short, although few *dati'im* participate in *dosibot* while still actively enrolled in *Torah* seminaries or other Jewish study programs, many are graduates of these institutions and therefore even if they attend *dosibot*, they continue to conduct their lives in accordance with the ideals and customs of religious Orthodoxy. Hence, the manifestly secular activities related to *dosibot* (mixed dancing, suggestive flirting and risqué conduct) are at odds with the virtuous behavioral standards and restrained social norms upon which *dati'im* were reared. Yet, unlike *xilonim*, *dati'im* attend *dosibot* for a very specific purpose and are therefore uninterested in PEDMC as a cultural form. For this reason, their consumption of EDM is short-lived and devoid of ideological undercurrents, declarative rhetoric and/

or a sense of belonging to an alternative community. This also explains why *dosistim* do not take (illicit) drugs but instead, when they choose to use stimulants, consume caffeinated energy drinks and alcohol, mainly beer and Arak, an inexpensive local liquor made from anise. Nonetheless, as they occur beyond the confines of their customary *dati* habitus, ultimately *dosistim* conduct—characterized by its immoderate gaiety and sexually charged connotations—is wholly inconsistent with their Orthodox upbringings and, despite their reasonably valid intentions, their behavior at *dosibot* is blatantly paradoxical.

### TRANCE-ZION: ISRAEL AS AN EDMC INUNDATED NATION

OVERALL, the differences between *mesibot* and *dosibot* reflect the varied uses that these two EDM scenes serve for their particular adherents. While *mesibot* provide globally enamored *xilonim* with a method for momentarily eluding their intense daily realities, *dosibot* fulfill a clearly defined socio-pragmatic function for unsettled *dati'im* by furnishing them with a viable forum for procuring suitable (Orthodox) marriage partners. Unlike secular *trancistim* whose subcultural identities are constructed from an emphatic and often spiritual association to PEDMC, religious *dosistim* have an ongoing and fulfilling relationship with Judaism and therefore view *dosibot* more as a means-to-an-end rather than as an ideological, philosophical or spiritual pursuit.

It should be made clear that the pressure and stress caused by the contentious Israeli/Middle-Eastern political arena—effectively the underlying factor responsible for the tremendous popularity of EDMC in Israel—equally affects both *xilonim* and *dati'im*. Yet, as opposed to *xilonim*, *dati'im* perceive this condition in an affirmative manner since they consider this struggle as a harbinger for the preordained and fast arriving “messianic moment”. Fortified with ideology and faith, in contrast to many *xilonim* who have appropriated Westernized thought and culture in addition to and/or as a replacement for Zionist agendas that are regarded as outmoded and obsolete, *dati'im* are more upbeat in their interpretation of local current events, viewing their severity as part of the divine path the Jewish nation must follow to achieve its appointed objective.

In conclusion, beyond the roles EDMC plays for *xilonim* and *dati'im*, further studies can investigate the uses of trance among Israel’s many other “traditional versus secular” communities. Besides for *dati'im leumi'im*, some of the traditionalized Israeli social groups who consume trance include the Ultra-Orthodox and the Bedouin. From my brief involvement, Bedouin youth have their own versions of clandestine *mesibot* though it is yet unclear what motivates them and what functions they fulfill for their respective communities. Likewise, a novel phenomenon (experienced first-hand) among the ultra-Orthodox communities is the staging of secreted licentious co-ed dance parties. Curiously geared towards young married couples, these unlikely PEDMC affiliates seem representative of a budding and scantily researched deviant *xaredi* middle-class.

On a larger scale, the Russian immigrant communities hold EDM-centered parties that are known as *rusibot*. These events are imbued with Russian inspired cultural sensibilities,



mannerisms and behavioral codes and generally feature bands, DJs, alcohol and styles of dress imported by emigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union. Initial research suggests that *rusibot* are likewise inundated with paradox as participants—who hail from the gamut of cultures that once made up the Soviet Union and arrived in Israel in the early 1990s as youngsters—(re)create this Russified environment in order to celebrate an imagined shared heritage, that is, a Russia which they never knew and most likely no longer exists.

In another instance, EDMC is extremely popular among Israel's vibrant and outspoken LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) communities and has been instrumental in helping to soften the stigma attached to their sexual orientation. Notably evident is the case of singer Dana International—an internationally celebrated transsexual who represented Israel and won the 1998 Eurovision Song Contest by singing the trance-fused pop hit "Diva"—in the past decade and a half EDMC provided an effective mechanism via which the Israeli LGBT dance scene attained worldwide repute and, in turn, wider acceptance within mainstream Israel.

An examination of the reasons and means by which EDMC is being incorporated into these diverse communities can uncover facets of Israeli society that may have been previously overlooked and/or untouched by cultural researchers. Moreover, a contrastive analysis of how similar global-based alternative/atypical social configurations are interacting with established Israeli cultural tropes will likely help clarify the manner in which this country is contending with its current state of socio-economic-ideological transformation and the roles and functions which popular music and culture are assuming within this dynamic. The present article, therefore, constitutes a humble beginning in the mapping of multifarious local EDMC scenes and the numerous—undoubtedly paradoxical—ways in which this music and culture are in tune with the rhythms of contemporary Israel.

## NOTES

- 1 See also Lynch and Badger (2006).
- 2 Netanel Weiss, interview with the author (Beer-Sheva, Israel), 5 May 2007.

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