

**A Shtetl in Disguise:  
Israeli Bourekas Films and their Origins  
in Classical Yiddish Literature**

by

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## Preface

“Bourekas” is the name for a popular Sephardic<sup>1</sup>-Mizrahi<sup>2</sup> pastry, which originated in Turkey. The phrase “Bourekas film” was apparently coined by the director Boaz Davidson. The first time the signifier “Bourekas” was used in Israeli cinematic discourse, outside of any gastronomic reference, was in an interview Davidson gave to Yael Ontokovsky (1975) owing to the commercial success of *Charlie and a Half* (Charlie Vahezi, 1974), which would become known as Davidson's first Bourekas film. Davidson did not speak yet of “Bourekas films” but of a “Bourekas culture,” and used the phrase to denote what was in his view a “primitive,” vulgar culture of Mizrahi emigrants to Israel. Davidson said:

I objected in the strongest way to “the Bourekas culture” but then I suddenly realized what an idiot I was. We live here in a jungle of Bourekas, in a jungle of ethnicity, we are surrounded by a jungle of accents and languages. (Ontokovsky 1975, 57, my translation)

In *Orientalism* (1978, 30), Edward Said quotes Gramsci, who says that the researcher’s awareness that he himself is a product of an historical process – one that has left infinite intellectual and emotional traces in his consciousness – is necessary as a prerequisite of any serious career as a cultural critic. This study of “Bourekas films”

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<sup>1</sup> Sephardim in this study are the descendants of the Jews deported from Spain and Portugal during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and who kept the Ladino language. In Israel they are considered a subgroup of Mizrahim.

<sup>2</sup> “Mizrahim” literally means “Easterners.” In Israeli discourse it basically refers to Jews of the Middle East, including North Africa, and Jews from the Balkans (Shemer 2005, 8). Please also see my discussion of the subject in the Introduction, particularly on pages 22-33.

is the beginning of such an awareness on my behalf. It's an effort to scan some of the traces that have sunk into my consciousness as a child in Israel.

I was first exposed to the popular comedies and melodramas, which I would only later come to know as “Bourekas films,” when I was about ten years old. I was enchanted by the films. They were hilarious. I was drawn to what Ella Shohat defined later as their “carnavalesque and anarchistic atmosphere” (Shohat 1989, 131).

However it never crossed my mind then that there was supposed to be a connection between my modern, Sephardic-Jewish family, which emigrated from Egypt to Israel in the early 1950s, and the people I laughed at on screen, with their poor material culture and their limited, narrow – both emotionally and intellectually – Jewish pre-modern world. For me as a ten-year old, this reality was one which belonged to some kind of “others,” which I could only vaguely identify as Israeli traditional Jews.

It only dawned on me years later that the authors of the films were aiming to represent me and my family. This awareness led to a great cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, it was quite clear that both the authors of the films and most of their audience saw the reality portrayed in the Bourekas films as a legitimate representation of Mizrahim in Israel. But by the same token I clearly felt that my family, like other Mizrahim that I knew, held a completely different material culture, set of values, norms and codes of behavior, than those attributed to the communities presented in the Bourekas films.

The dissonance became more acute when in college I was exposed to the works of classical Yiddish writers, which described the Jewish shtetls in Eastern Europe. It seemed to me then that there were similarities between the world that came to life in these works and the world shaped in the Bourekas films. It occurred to me

that the world of the Jewish shtetl might have some connection with the world of the Mizrahi neighborhood in Bourekas films.

The dissertation that will follow is an effort to implant this intuition in academic soil. This study on the Bourekas will attempt, first, to define this group, separate it from other groups of Israeli films, and more clearly delineate its features. Secondly, I aim to examine the connection between Bourekas and the literary texts of classical Yiddish literature, and in particular their portrayal of life in the Jewish shtetls of Eastern Europe. I hope that the findings of both avenues of research will eventually lead me to a comprehensive explanation of the Bourekas' enormous popularity and commercial success in Israel.

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# Chapter One:

## Introduction

### I. Methodology

This study is an interdisciplinary one. It is guided by scholarship in fields such as film and video studies, semiology, sociology, cultural anthropology, philosophy, literary theory, and Hebrew and Yiddish literary history and criticism. The dissertation will apply its multidisciplinary approach to define a relatively narrow corpus of Bourekas films, which it will then thematically analyze using a structural, semiotic approach.

In my discussion of the Zionist Israeli sphere I walk in the footsteps of previous post-colonial studies, like those of Shohat (1989,119-179; 2001,140-206), designating a colonialist ideology as a major element of Zionist narrative, and regarding the Israeli-Zionist sphere as a territory colonized by European Ashkenazim, who subordinate both Arabs and the Mizrahim. However, following Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi (2002, 9-28, 288-306) I will integrate into the analysis Bhabha's discussion of the dialectical relationships between colonized and colonizer (Bhabha 1994, 66-93).

I will also adopt into the dissertation's analysis of the Zionist-Israeli sphere the Marxist approach of Althusser (1971, 127-189), which views artistic media as ideological state apparatuses, through which the elite reproduces the means of

production<sup>3</sup>. Integration of this approach into my discussion of Israeli cinematic discourse will allow the dissertation to point to the Ashkenazi elite as the group which manipulates Israeli art and media according to its political, economic, and social needs. Incorporation of the above approaches will lead the dissertation to view the Bourekas as texts that reflect the dialectic relationships between the Ashkenazi elite, as colonizers, and the Mizrahim, as colonized, and as texts embedded with the Ashkenazi conflict of identity, caused by their traumatic encounter with Mizrahim as "others."

### **On the Author in Film**

My discussion will focus on the Bourekas as a cycle of films created by various directors, and will generally employ a structural semiotic approach to film analysis. However, since it at the same time ascribes essential importance to Bourekas directors as the films' auteurs, and highlights the importance of their cultural identity and class awareness to the discourse of their films, it is necessary at this point to briefly explore the theoretical discussion on authorship in films.<sup>4</sup>

The prevailing cultural concept of the author's centrality to the work of art seems to have at least two sources: one is 19th century romanticism and its idealistic vision of the artist. This vision of the artist is reflected in the following words of Gombrich (1972 [1950]), about van Gogh and Cezanne. Gombrich praises their

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<sup>3</sup>To complete the dissertation's integration of the Marxist approach of Althusser into the Israeli realm I will use the agency of Chinski (2002), who presents what could be seen as a Marxist approach to Israeli cultural discourse in her discussion on Israeli art.

<sup>4</sup> An approach to film analysis which mixes structural analysis with auteur theory-based analysis is not new. It was suggested by Wollen (1972) and followed by Catherine Benamou in her later research of Welles's *It's All True: Orson Welles's Pan-American Odyssey* (2007).

artistic genius and personal virtues, and presents them as if they were prophets of modern times:

Both [Cezanne and Van Gogh, r.k.] took the momentous step of deliberately abandoning the aim of painting as an imitation of nature.... Both of them had arrived to this point without wanting to overthrow the old standards of art. They did not pose as revolutionaries; they did not want to shock the complacent critics. Both of them in fact had almost given up hope of anybody paying attention to their pictures – they just worked because they had to. (Gombrich 1972 [1950], 438)

The other source, quite different in spirit, is what Barthes calls "modern positivism," (1977, 143). Barthes argues that one aspect of this positivism is the belief that the individual human being can control, and in fact consciously makes, the source of everything he produces. Hence, modern positivism leads to an image of literature based in a despotic way on an individual – the author – and his personality:

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions; while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire, the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* confiding in us. (Barthes 1977, 143, italics in the original)

Born with the modern age, it seems that film couldn't avoid the question of its author's identity. However, film's author identification, unlike the case of a novel or a painting, is far from obvious or natural. A movie is seen as the fruit of a collaborative effort which needs the input of a multitude of trained professionals to be produced (Goldman 1983, 102). Thus a scholarly effort was needed to establish a consensus about the identity of the author in cinema.

It seems that the most influential answer given to the question to date is the "auteur theory." This approach holds that a film reflects the creative vision of its director, and that he (or she) is the primary "auteur" (French for "author") of the film. What would become known as "auteur theory" was originally established in France, a place which has long had a close connection between cinema and the intelligentsia,

and where, since the Second World War, the activity of the cinematheques gave French cinephiles and film critics of the periodical *Cahiers du Cinema* alike, an unmatched perception of the historical dimension of Hollywood and the careers of its individual directors (Wollen 1972, 553).

Auteur theory draws on the work of two French film critics who published mainly during the 1950s. Alexander Astruc (1968 [1948]) created the notion of the “camera stylo” (French for “camera pen”), which indicated that the camera is like a pen in the hands of the film director, implying through this metaphor that the director is the “writer” of the film, in the same way that the poet is the writer of his poem. Andre Bazin (1967, vol. 2, 47-93) championed directors such as De Sica and Rossellini, implying that it is their personal world view and style which is reflected in their films. Hence their whole corpus of films, interviews and writings, is relevant to a discussion of any one of their films. One can speak, then, of two complementary aspects of auteur theory:

1. An identification of the film's “author” primarily with the director (and sometimes with the producer also).
2. The belief that the extra-textual and intertextual personalities of the author-director are relevant to the interpretation of the film as a work of art.

Astruc’s notion of the camera stylo, using the metaphor of writing to describe filmmaking, seems to support the first aspect:

Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene but a true act of writing. The film-maker, author, writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.... How can one distinguish [while analyzing the filmmaking process, r.k.] between the man who conceives the work and the man who writes it? Could one imagine a Faulkner novel written by someone other than Faulkner? (1968 [1948], 22, my emphasis)

In Andre Bazin’s work one finds both aspects of auteur theory. There is little doubt in Bazin’s writings that the film is the director's creation rather than that of any other team member. This concept returns in the articles gathered in *What is Cinema?*

(1967). For Bazin, the director is the film's auteur also when he meaningfully cooperates with other crew members. In this case, the very act of collaboration is part of a director's tactic, his working style. When Bazin, for example, talks about the long-time cooperation between De Sica, the director, and Zavattini, the script writer, he credits act of collaboration and its effects on the films to De Sica:

above all, the case of de Sica is, up to now, inseparable from his collaboration with Zavattini.... The fact that Zavattini collaborates with others... makes no difference. (Bazin 1967, vol. 2, 63, my emphasis)

As for the second aspect, Bazin's writings often make use of extra-textual data about the director as a tool to analyze and reach a valid interpretation of a film. When analyzing Robert Bresson's film *Le Journal*, for example, Bazin uses the biography of Bresson, his previous films, and his statements in interviews, to legitimate his interpretation. Bazin writes:

And if you still have any doubts [about my interpretation, r.k.], Bresson's own admission will remove them. Forced to throw out a third of this final cut for the exhibitors' copy, he ended, as we know, by declaring with a delicate touch of cynicism, that he was delighted to have had to do so. Actually the only 'visual' he really cared about was the blank screen at the finale. (1967, vol. 1, 128)

However, Bazin's work is not entirely consistent with the hypothesis of the director as the auteur.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes his critiques totally exclude the director, while at other times they seem to use a generic approach.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the conscious assertion of the film director as the only author of the film and the focus on a director's style, biography, and persona becomes consistent only in the work of Truffaut. Combining the pragmatic approach of Bazin with the romantic<sup>7</sup> approach of Astruc, Truffaut's

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<sup>5</sup> Actually, Bazin wrote against the auteur theory in Truffaut's version in his article in *Cahiers Du Cinema*, from April 1957 (Sarris 1971[1962], 122).

<sup>6</sup> While analyzing the work of Chaplin, for example, he focuses on the figure of Charlie, the "little fellow," making him the sole point of view through which he looks at Chaplin's work, describing his character as if this figure invented itself without the help of any director-author (Bazin 1967, vol. 1, 146-153). In a different article he accumulates a generic approach, trying to explain and understand the characteristic he calls "cinema of exploration" (Bazin 1967, vol. 1, 154).

<sup>7</sup> The romantic approach of Truffaut is visible also in the following quote, written about Hitchcock's death, in which he stresses the ever-lasting linkage between the director and his films: "The person dies

influential work as a critic, and as an editor in *Cahiers du Cinema*, stresses that the director is the persona behind the film, for better and for worse. Truffaut's work seems to consciously and entirely adopt both aspects of auteur theory. The first aspect is fiercely highlighted in Truffaut's critiques, through a conscious and a consistent emphasis on the centrality of the director, as the only auteur of a film's discourse. The notion of the centrality of the director to filmmaking seems to lead Truffaut to distinguish between two types of directors: good directors, who affix their personal style on a film through a certain style of shooting, by controlling the formal aspects of the film, and through the emphasis of certain themes. Truffaut calls these directors the "auteurs." By contrast, bad directors are basically scenarists (script writers), for whom the film is done the minute "they hand in their scenario," and for whom the act of directing, the *mise en scene*, means only adding some illustrating pictures to the written script (Truffaut 1976 [1954], 233).

Seemingly to emphasize the essential importance of a director's output to the quality of the film, Truffaut's provocatively phrased and polemical assertions make it difficult to "think of a bad director making good films and almost impossible to think of a good director making a bad one" (Sarris 1968, 33). He writes, for example: "the worst of the films of Hawks [a good director in his eyes, r.k.] is more interesting than the best of Huston [a bad director in his eyes, r.k.]" (Truffaut 1987, 22).

This polemical approach, which drove Truffaut himself later to say it was only good for its time and place (Sarris 1971 [1962], 131), became the focus of anti-auteur critical attacks against auteur theory.<sup>8</sup> However, Truffaut's polemic wouldn't have

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but not the filmmaker, because the films that were made in extraordinary strictness in a great passion and in enormous feelings that were camouflaged by a rare technical mastery, did not disappear but were distributed all over the world" (Truffaut 2004, 9, my translation).

<sup>8</sup> Even Sarris sets out against this approach: "On the whole we accept the cinema of directors although without going to the farthest-out extremes of "la politique"... which makes it difficult to think of a bad

been so distasteful if understood as flowing out of Truffaut's idea of the ideal relationship between a director and his film. I suggest that the statement about the good and the bad director should be read as containing a new notion about film, which is constructed out of two assumptions. A good film is a film by a good director. And a good director is one who holds a vivid and notable presence in his films, who leaves his fingerprints on a film's diegesis. He is a director who penetrates through all the technical, aesthetic, and scripted aspects of filmmaking, tagging it with his personal mark, and – here comes the explanation of the absurd – this is true even when the director's vision is in sharp conflict with other aspects of the film, and leads to digressions<sup>9</sup> (from the point of view of the narrative) – a fact which could turn the film into a "bad" one, from the point of view of other schools of film criticism.

This tendency of Truffaut, to value films solely according to their level of reflection of the director's personality, seems to reach its peak when he romanticizes the relationships between the director and his film, humanizing the film, blurring the borders between film and director, as if one could entirely stand for the other.<sup>10</sup> This approach paves the way for the critical approach of Truffaut's scholarly work such as *Hitchcock*<sup>11</sup> (1967), on the films of Hitchcock,<sup>12</sup> and *Films of My Life* (1987), where

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director making a good film and almost impossible to think of a good director making a bad one" (Sarris, 1971 [1962], 131).

<sup>9</sup> At this point Truffaut is very close to Pasolini, who speaks about the digression from the narrative as the identification mark of the poetical film author, as an element which testifies to his persona (Pasolini 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Truffaut writes: "For some critics there are good films and bad films and I had an idea that there are not good or bad films: there are simply good and bad directors... What is interesting in a career of a good director is that it reflects his thought from his beginning to his more mature phase" (Sarris 1967, 448-449, my emphasis). Discussing Truffaut's contribution to auteur theory, Sarris quotes from the French playwright, Giraudoux: "there are no works, there are only authors." Sarris argues that Truffaut has seized on this paradox as the battle cry of "La politique des auteur" (Sarris 1971 [1962], 126).

<sup>11</sup> It also seems significant that Truffaut has chosen to title a book on films by Hitchcock simply *Hitchcock*, as if the films represents the director and vice versa. This phenomena returns in the title of Truffaut's later book *The Films of My Life* (which reminds us of the more popular articulation: "the women of my life").

<sup>12</sup> A blurring between these two entities, the film and the director, appears in the introduction when Truffaut explains Hitchcock's popularity amongst other filmmakers as drawn out of this very sameness: "If so many filmmakers, from the very talented to the mediocre, meticulously watch Hitchcock films, it

Truffaut writes about his favorite films/directors. These works, using autobiographical material, interviews, and the whole corpus of a certain director as a main perspective into film analysis, also testifies to the wide implementation of the second aspect of the auteur theory in Truffaut's work.

Truffaut indeed was the first to consistently make the director the sole legitimate focal point of a film's analysis, but his writings do not elaborate on the auteur approach (still not a "theory" by that time) in programmatic terms; nor do they constitute a manifesto, not to say a theory. Typically Truffaut's writings are more of a credo by a director who is in love with filmmaking, and is interested in upgrading its cultural status, a statement of a director about the value of his art. It is Andrew Sarris who tries to methodologize Truffaut's approach into a theory of film criticism.

Applying both aspects of the auteur approach, Sarris's early work on the nature of the auteur (1971 [1962]) seems to reflect the first aspect of what he, for the first time, calls the auteur theory. A later work of his (Sarris 1968, 19-37) embraces its second aspect, as it implicitly uses the auteur theory approach to rewrite American film history.<sup>13</sup> Theorizing Truffaut's assertions about directors and their place in filmmaking, Sarris refines Truffaut's polemic dichotomy of good and bad directors, offering a new one: between a director who is an auteur and one who isn't, making an effort to methodologically explain who (and what) is an auteur.

Sarris proposes a structure built out of three concentric circles: technique, style, and inner meaning, which represent different levels of filmmaking quality. These start with the level of craftsmanship (technique) up to the level of a work of art

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is because they feel that in front of them stands an amazing person" (Truffaut 2004, 22, my translation and emphasis).

<sup>13</sup> Sarris uses in this book the auteur theory as a main perspective on the history of American cinema. His justification for doing so is that this perspective emphasizes the individual films (the "trees") rather than the system of production (the "forest") which was emphasized by other approaches, and better explains the films which are non-generic by nature (Sarris 1968, 24).

(which holds "inner meaning"). An auteur, he figures, in opposition to directors who are technicians or stylists, is a director who is an artist, and is able to transfer through film discourse what Sarris dares to call "the élan of his soul" (1971 [1962], 132).

However, Sarris's theorizing effort stays a bit vague, as it uses terms not entirely explained (such as "inner meaning"). Moreover it does not offer a justification or support for the validity of the two aspects of auteur theory: (1) although film production is the work of a team, the director is the only author of the film; and (2) extra-textual data by and on the director is relevant to interpretation of his films. These faults, when added to the polemical and provocative style of Truffaut's writings on the topic, made auteur theory vulnerable to the fierce criticism that surrounded it.

Criticism of auteur theory has been separately pointed at its two aspects. Critique within the film discipline tends to relate to the first aspect, criticizing the auteur theory's assertion of the director (and sometimes the producer) as the sole author of the film. But post-Saussurian critical streams, from outside of the discipline, such as semiology, structuralism, and in a way New Criticism, can be applied to film's auteur discourse, as a critique of auteur theory's use of the extra-textual biographical figure of the director as a point of reference for his film's analysis.

American film critics have claimed that the director cannot be the sole author of the film, since film involves teamwork. It is a collaborative endeavor which needs the input of a multitude of trained professionals, and therefore, the product of the combined effort of trained professionals: the actor, cameraman, director, editor, producer, production designer, and writer (Goldman 1984, 102). Reflecting this anti-auteur approach is the prominent American film critic Pauline Kael. In her review on *Citizen Kane*, she contradicts French auteur critics who argue the film is a personal

achievement of Orson Welles, shedding light on the extensive use the film makes of the distinctive talents of co-writer Herman J. Mankiewicz and cinematographer Gregg Toland:

This particular kind of journalist's sense of what would be a scandal as well as a great subject [that could be felt through the film, r.k.], and the ability to write it, belonged not to Wells but to his now almost forgotten associate: Herman J. Mankiewicz who wrote the script. (Kael 1971, 8)

New Criticism and semiological and structuralist approaches to texts, when applied to film, offer interesting criticism of the second aspect of the auteur theory.<sup>14</sup> Looking at the auteur theory from the perspective of New Criticism, it is surprising (and also could indicate a kind of anachronism in the theoretical thinking about films, relative to that of literature) that the kind of thinking which allowed Bazin to speak of what "Bresson had in mind" (1967, 126) flourished in an age (the 1950s) in which literary critics negated the relevance of the author's extra-textual persona and biography to the interpretation of the work of art, and related only to the abstract figure of the "implied author," whose identification with the biographical writer is strongly denied (Booth 1961, 71-76). For New Criticism, "the world of the text," considered the only solid entity, was all that matters (see especially William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in their essay "The Intentional Fallacy," 1954). This New Criticism advocacy of close reading, while fiercely rejecting extra-textual sources, especially those of which the biographical figure of the creator (writer, poet) is the source, adopted into film critique seems to create a solid ground for criticizing the second aspect of the auteur theory, on its two main characteristics:

1. The hypothesis of an intentional rhetoric invented by the extra-textual biographical figure of the director that is being implemented in the film.

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<sup>14</sup> "Applied" since New Criticism, and also a large part of the relevant structuralist research dealt with literature rather than with film.

2. The use of inte-textual material such as previous works of the same director, his biography, statements and interviews with him, as a point of reference for analyzing his films.

Adopting a structuralist approach into film analysis seems to further remove the film from the biographical figure of director. A structuralist approach to film stresses not only the irrelevance of the extra-textual biographical figure of the director to a particular work, but seems to doubt the idea of a "human-like" particularity of a single text, ascribing the rhetoric of fiction to previously existing narrative structures, such as mythos and mythologies, thus negating any possible connection of the text to any particular persona.

When applied to film critique, this structuralist analysis opens the door to the relevance of previous texts (films or not) of the same culture, which further contradicts the relevance of the biographical figure of the director to his films' analysis. It seems out of context to draw connections between Hitchcock's biography and his films when Hitchcock as a biographical persona is not even slightly involved with them; it seems to make far more sense to see his films instead as implementing already existing narrative structures, in the same way a mason uses already existing plans, bricks, and cement to built a new house. This approach, concerning the functionality of the author in texts, seems to come to its sharp edge with the assertion of Barthes about the "death of the author" (1977, 142-149).

A text cannot be original, claims Barthes; any text is just a new performance of previously existing ones, and therefore it cannot belong to its author. He writes:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the author-god) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. Similar to Bouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, at once sublime and comic and whose profound ridiculousness indicates precisely the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate the gesture that is always anterior never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the one with the others, in such a way as never to rest on

one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*? He ought at least to know that the inner thing he thinks to translate is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explicable through other words, and so on indefinitely. (1977, 146)

However, Barthes indicates that the text, any text, has no particular author, not only because of its unavoidable dependence on previous texts, but due to the nature of writing, since writing is a process through which any individuality is voided: "Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is the natural, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost" (Barthes 1977, 142). Barthes continues by arguing that writing "designates exactly what linguistics... calls a performative, a rare verbal form... in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other propositions) than the act by which it is uttered" (Barthes 1977, 146). To find out, then, who – or rather what – is the author-writer, and what is his/its contribution to the text, suggests Barthes, one should look at ethnographic societies, where

nobody, no persona, was given the ownership on the story but it was given to an agent, a Shaman or a storyteller, from which performance, from his mastering of the narrative code, one can be impressed but not, never, from his genius. (Barthes 1977, 142)

### **The "Cinematic Author" in the Dissertation**

This study will partly adopt the auteur theory. I will consider a film to be the result of such rhetorical measures as the director, consciously or subconsciously, deems necessary during the film's production. The dissertation will initially and principally implement Sarris's version of auteur theory's first aspect, and will value the director's contribution to a film through Sarris's construction of the three circles.

However, I will read Sarris critically.<sup>15</sup> Among the three circles which define, according to Sarris, the nature of influence that directors have on a film's diegesis – technical, aesthetic, and that of inner meaning – I would like to stress the range of effects which is identified by Sarris as belonging to the core circle of "inner meaning," and at the same time to suggest some new contents to this circle, which Sarris vaguely and metaphorically describes as the "élan of the director's soul" (Sarris 1971 [1962], 132).

To carry out this mission I will interlace Sarris' version of auteur theory with an approach that marks the pole furthest from it, concerning the status of the author in texts – Barthes' post-structural concept of the author, expressed in his essay "Death of the Author" (1977, 142-146). Reading Barthes critically, I will argue that although he asserts that writing is a process through which "any individuality of the author is being voided" (1977, 142), he does not entirely negate the relevance of all aspects of a director's subjectivity to the content of the text.

The key sentence of my reading of Barthes would therefore be the following: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (1977, 146). This contention shows that for Barthes the starting point of any text production process is culture. One can assume, thus, that for Barthes after the individuality of the author has been "voided" through the process of writing, culture is the content that replaces it. Hence, it seems that Barthes classifies culture as an independent entity, which stands at the exterior of the writer's self, and at the same time implies that culture is a collective inter-subjective experience that is shared equally by all individuals in a given territory.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> By "critically reading" I mean reading and integrating the texts mentioned into the dissertation while only partly adopting their approaches, and sometimes even arguing with their stances.

<sup>16</sup> We must not forget here that Barthes is French and therefore is a part of a tradition which is characterized by the tendency to force its culture – both in its colonies and in the national sphere, where

Barthes' expression of the separation between the writer's self and the culture permits him to claim a complete absence of the author from the text and to stress, at the same time, the intensive presence of his culture in it. My reading will doubt the validity of this separation between the author and his culture. Interlacing into the discussion Stuart Hall's (1992, 1996) work, which contradicts the existence of a rip between culture and the self, tying the two together through his use of the term "cultural identity." Hall's discussion on culture sees it as residing inside the self, and therefore as an entity which is shaped – along with knowledge, norms, and representations of a dominant discourse – by the family history and ethnic background of the individual.

The dissertation will adopt Barthes' view on the author but will replace Barthes' implied, and in a way, modern, concept of culture, with the post-colonial view of Hall<sup>17</sup>: for us it is indeed culture and not the individual self of the author which is reflected in the text, but this culture does vary from one author to another, depending on his family history and ethnic background.

Continuing along this line, and interlacing into the dissertation's argument Marxist textual analysis, I will suggest that especially when the author belongs to the ruling class, to the local elites, many times his class-consciousness is also mirrored in his text. The result is the possibility that a film can reproduce a ruling class ideology, a process which Althusser identified and specified in his discussion on the ideological state apparatus (1971, 127-189).

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the French government encourages assimilation and acculturation of ethnic and cultural minorities – into the monolithic official French culture (Rex 1997, 207-219).

<sup>17</sup> To strengthen his point on the cultural essence of the text, Barthes gives the example of Bouvard and Pecuchet, as copiers who keep on repeating structures that had already appeared in the culture. However it is obvious that what Bouvard and Pecuchet repeat is French culture, and this is culturally dependent phenomenon and not universal; only a Eurocentric approach could have presented this phenomenon, as Barthes indeed does here, as universal.

Returning to the auteur theory, and squeezing all this into Sarris's structure of three circles, I would like to suggest that the "élan of the director's soul," which makes the inner meaning of a film, is not of a particular, individual subjective nature but instead reflects the director's socio-cultural identity. I will argue that the substance that is reflected in the inner circle of the auteur is not quite the director's individual persona, but mostly the culture he promotes and the structures which keep appearing in it, as well as the ideology of the class he belongs to.

Moreover, the hypothesis of this dissertation is that film is in a way a tool through which the true socio-cultural identity of the director, which is sometimes hidden in his daily life, is exposed. Film thus becomes a mirror for conflicts which the director, and other members of the same culture and class, experience with regards to their culture and class. Accordingly, the dissertation attributes central significance to a director's cultural identity, paying attention also to the mythos and other structures which appear in this culture's history. At this junction my study is close to post-colonial studies, which focuses on ethnic and diasporic cinema, including the work of Martin (1995), Naficy (2001), Bloom (2001), and Shemer (2005). The dissertation will share with them the presumption that film exposes its director's socio-cultural identity.

The dissertation adopts the first aspect of auteur theory only in this narrow meaning. For this study the film is indeed the creation of the director but it does not reflect his individual self. The director, like the storyteller or the shaman of ancient societies mentioned by Barthes (1977, 142), gives up his personality, and lets the structure of his own culture as well as the ideology of his class pass through him into the film. Following the above approach, the study denies the influence of a director's individuality (as an author) on the film text, and focuses instead on the way certain

structures keep on returning in a certain culture through ar (films) and the people who create it (directors).

As a result of this approach, the dissertation is far from adopting the second aspect of auteur theory. It is not interested in the director's biographical persona. A director's biography, his previous films, his style, the narrative of his career, and interviews with him, if they do not carry information on his cultural identity, are all of little relevance to my study.<sup>18</sup> As far as the second aspect of author theory is concerned, the dissertation will espouse the ideas of structuralism about the author which were crystallized in Barthes' notion of the death of the author (1977, 143).<sup>19</sup>

Adopting auteur theory's first aspect, and accepting principally the director to be the author of his film – a concept that is exemplified through the metaphor of the director as the writer of his film (Astruc 1968) – the dissertation uses the term “cinematic author,” drawn from the literary criticism term “implied author” (Booth 1961, 77-97). This term will relate to the aspect of the director, his cultural identity, which is reflected throughout film rhetoric.

## **Structural Approach**

My study adopts a structural approach for a comparative analysis of Bourekas films and Yiddish classical literature, in order to underline structures that are shared

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<sup>18</sup> For example, although Boaz Davidzon has a prominent presence in the Bourekas corpus of the dissertation, represented by three films (*Charlie and a Half*, *Snooker*, and *The Tsan'ani Family*), I am not interested in interviews with him and won't engage in an intertextual analysis of his films. However, I will use the biography of Ephraim Kishon to discuss Kishon's cultural identity.

<sup>19</sup> This will make my approach closer to the structuralist pole than previous works, which adopt a similar approach by engaging auteur theory and a structuralist approach – such as Benamou's research of *It's All True* by Welles (2007), which implements intertextual analysis and is interested in the director's biography and his career narrative.

by them, such as the paradigms they use in presenting a Jewish community. My initial hypothesis is that the Bourekas films reveal a correspondence with writings of classical Yiddish writers, such as Mendele Mochker Sfarim, Shalom Aleichem, and Y.L. Peretz, providing that one reads Yiddish literature through the lens of contemporary Israeli cultural discourse. Using critical studies of Yiddish literature, such as those by Karib (1950, 9-86) on the demeaning representation of the shtetl community and ontology in Mendele Mochker Sfarim's writings, and Miron (2000, 1-49) on the fictional image of the shtetl in classical Yiddish literature, I will first compare aspects of the shtetl space and society as represented in that literature to those of the Mizrahi neighborhood's space and society as represented in Bourekas films.

The study points to the fact that classical Yiddish writers portray the Eastern European Jewish shtetl using representational paradigms that have a strong correspondence with the representational paradigms used by the Ashkenazi directors of Bourekas films to portray the community and ontology of the Israeli Mizrahi neighborhood. The study argues that although the situation of Yiddish culture in the Israeli discourse of the early 1960s was stressful and Yiddish was negated as exilic and anachronistic by the state's cultural institutions, and was marginalized (Fishman 1973, Chinski 2002, Pinsker 2003). On the other hand, Yiddish culture nevertheless survived beneath the surface of the official cultural discourse, and had a hidden but essential role in the construction of the new Hebrew/Israeli identity of Jewish Ashkenazi immigrants (Miron 2004, 9-14). Despite official resistance from the government of Israel in this era, Yiddish found its way to Israeli cinema (Weitzner 2002) and Yiddish literature was composed and published (Pinsker 2007).

A structuralist approach also allows me to go beyond a post-colonial explanation for the function and success of the Bourekas, based on the dialectic relations of the colonizer and the colonized. Integrating works of literary historians (Frieden 1995, Miron 2000) and structuralists such as Barthes (1977) and Foucault (1972), the study will point to the Bourekas as the fruit of a fascinating cultural continuity. These films, it will be discovered, are part of an effort meant to support the progressive, "Sisyphean challenge of westernization" (Chinski 2002, 68) taken on by the Eastern European Jewish elite (who later became the Israeli Ashkenazi elite), and which was started by the Haskalah (the Jewish enlightenment movement) during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Feiner 2002, 274-346).

Adopting structuralist scholarship, especially Barthes' (1977, 79-149), I will regard films as texts. This will allow the dissertation to use similar methods to analyze cinematic texts (the films of the Bourekas) and written fictional texts (stories/novels of Yiddish classical literature), although each medium produces meaning through different processes: literature through language and cinema through the process of signification<sup>20</sup> (Metz 1962, 38). Barthes eschews the view of the text as a self-sufficient, static system and considers narrative texts to be entities in which everything is meaningful:

In differing degrees everything in it [in narrative, r.k.] signifies. This is not a matter of art but of structure; in the realm of discourse what is noted is by definition notable. Even were a detail to appear irretrievably insignificant, resistant to all functionality, it would nonetheless end up with precisely the meaning of absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning, or nothing has. (1977, 89)

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<sup>20</sup> Metz concludes that because cinema has no double articulation and because it is an open system, it has no "*langue*" (Metz 1962, 38). He then has to take up the obvious question: if cinema has no language system how do we understand films? In order to answer this, Metz makes a distinction between meaning and signification; as in human and artificial languages, only the latter involves arbitrary (versus natural), strict, and well-defined relations between the signifier and the signified to form the sign. Cinema therefore has the capability to create meaning and to be understood, but not to signify.

In his *Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narratives* (Barthes 1977, 79-124), Barthes presents a method of narrative analysis which I adopt. Barthes divides the narrative into three levels: the level of functions, the level of actions, and the level of narration. Engaging a thematic analysis of films, I focus on analyzing in film texts the level of functions, in which every function "is clearly a unit of content. It is what it says that makes a statement a functional unit not the manner in which it is said" (1977, 90). Barthes divides the level of functions into two:

1. Distributional (functions): units whose meanings correlate with other units in the narrative (picking up the phone correlates with hanging it up). These are the material that the plot is made of.
2. Integrational (indices): these units find their meaning only in the higher level of the "actants," in the actions of characters (figures), or in the level of narration. These units include data about the characters, about the time and space in which the narrative is embedded, about the narrative's atmosphere, etc. (Barthes 1977, 93).

Since my analysis focuses on the way that the Mizrahi community of the films is presented, I focus on analyzing mainly this last mentioned level of "indices." The dissertation will decode indices when it explains the characters' actions in the films; when it explains the act of finding a partner through a "Shiduch" (matchmaking), for example, as fulfilling a function of presenting the community as disinclined towards romantic love.

Barthes talks also about a sub-group of indices that he calls "informants."

They bring, says Barthes, ready-made knowledge. Informants serve:

to identify, to locate the story in time and space... to embed fiction in the real world... Analyzing informants will allow us to break out from the level of the story to the level of the discourse that the films represent, since they are realist operators and as such possess an undeniable functionality not on the level of the story but on that of the discourse. (1977, 96-97)

I analyze informants when I look, for example, for data on the Mizrahi neighborhood's architecture and ontology, searching for information about the way houses were built (the architecture, the materials), the way the streets looked, etc.

Barthes's verdict – that *everything* in a narrative is functional, in other words, has meaning – will serve the dissertation well in decoding "informants." I will, for example, find meaning also in the *absence* of a certain kind of data on a neighborhood's ontology. Absence of data concerning schools in the Mizrahi neighborhoods of the Bourekas, for example, indicates in my analysis the neglect and isolation of the Mizrahi neighborhood by the authorities. I will treat and analyze the literary texts of the Yiddish writings in the same way.

## **Evolution of Mizrahim as an Ethno-cultural Category**

The whole conception of ethnic groups is so complex and so vague that it might be good to abandon it altogether. (Weber 1978, 389)

Looking at the Bourekas films from the point of view of the ethno-cultural split and the power imbalances in Israel between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, a solid description of both groups as ethno-cultural categories could be useful. However the status of the Mizrahi category in Israeli academic discourse is still quite unclear. I will turn at this point to briefly clarify the status of the Mizrahi category in Israeli academic discourse, reviewing the evolution that took place in its attitude towards Mizrahim as an ethno-cultural category through the years.

It seems that while the initial belief of anthropologists in the importance of shared cultural origins in the formation of an ethnic group has been shaken (Cohen

1978, Chetrit 2004<sup>21</sup>), shared socio-cultural characteristics – some recently acquired, others still in a process of construction – are still believed to be central in its creation (Hall 1992). Accordingly in this study I will consider Mizrahim to be mainly a cultural category of identity. Yet it seems that Israeli academic discourse's recognition of the ethnic and cultural substance of the Mizrahim category has evolved through a long process.

One can start reviewing this evolution by mentioning that Mizrahim weren't always considered (and not by all scholars in Israel) to be an ethnic group. Being naturally presented in Israeli academic discourse through the dichotomy they maintain with Ashkenazim, some academics have argued Mizrahim to be an abstract category that has been artificially formed through this dichotomy, and specifically by emphasizing this group's denunciation and lack of an Ashkenazi cultural identity (Ben Sason 1972). This view was supported by anthropological research done in the 1980s, which found that there were no people in Israel who define themselves as Mizrahim, and which brought sociologists to claim that Mizrahim are a nonexistent ethnicity, a phantom ethnicity (Avruch 1985, 333).

However, disregarding this extreme view, the mainstream discourse of the Israeli academy has shown over time a growing tendency towards accepting Mizrahim as an ethnic group, with particular cultural content. In the early 1950s, Mizrahim were seen officially through what Swirski (1981, 3-75) later called the “modernization approach.” According to the modernization approach, ethnicity was a

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen found out that customs, believed by certain ethnic groups to be ancient, were actually quite new (Cohen 1978, 385). Chetrit (2004), in the introduction to his discussion on the Mizrahim's political struggle, indicates the unimportance of shared past traditions to African-Americans in the U.S.A.: "The traditional approach in the research [of ethnic groups, r.k.] saw in the ethnic group a collective in which members shared cultural origins. However, since the ethnic-class struggles in the USA, the ethnic origins, as with the past traditions, are not anymore an exclusive defining characteristic, and are not even a central characteristic of the ethnic group" (Chetrit 2004, 42, my translation).

pre-modern form of collective expression, a traditional form that will fade when exposed to modernity<sup>22</sup> (Swirski 1981, 4). Mizrahim, accordingly, were viewed by sociologists who shared this approach, such as Eisenshtadt (1948, 1967), Ben David (1952), and Frankenstein (1951, 1957), as a class collective, and through the socio-economic gap it maintained, as such, with the Israeli social-political Ashkenazi elites. The Israeli reality of that time supported this perspective, as a place with a complete match between class and ethnic categories, in which the social-political Ashkenazi elite was made almost entirely of Ashkenazim, while the working class was entirely composed of Mizrahim (Swirski 1981, 3-75). Typically there was no cultural content ascribed by sociologists of the modernization approach to the category of Mizrahim – referred to by this approach as “Edot Hamizrah”<sup>23</sup> (literally, congregations of the east) – and it was used to mark the deficiencies of the class collective it defined, such as: lack of modernity, lack of economical means, and lack of effective education and knowledge.

In the coming years, Mizrahim as a category gained a de facto recognition as an ethnic group by sociologists who criticized the attitude of the modernization approach. Smoocha, for example, literally refers to Mizrahim and Ashkenazim as "ethnic groups" (1970, 24) in his analysis of the structure of Israeli society.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It seems that this observation of Swirski explains the delay of the discussion on ethnicity in Israel to the late '50s, as Avruch observed (Avruch 1985, 228-333).

<sup>23</sup> As Shemer remarks, the group defined nowadays in Israel as Mizrahim has had many names in the past, such as Sephardim, Edot Hamizrah (“congregations of the east”), and sometimes Yahadut Hamizrah (“Jewry of the east”) (Shemer 2005, 4-6).

<sup>24</sup> Actually it seems that Smoocha makes the initial step towards pointing to Mizrahim as an ethnic group rather than a class group, through his use of the term Mizrahim instead of the former "Edot Hamizrah." While Edot Hamizrah ("congregations of the east") indicates all together an ethnic multiplicity and difference, alongside a religious-based homology, the term “Mizrahim,” avoiding multiplicity and religious context, suggests instead, unity on an ethnic basis.

However, Smoocha and his “pluralistic model approach”<sup>25</sup> still basically views Mizrahim through the binary of Ashkenazim-Mizrahim, which naturally emphasizes Mizrahim subordination and the group’s deficiencies. These include "direct discrimination" that was directed towards them "in finding jobs and receiving rewards, compared to Ashkenazim" (1970, 9). Smoocha still sees Mizrahim through what they lack as an "underprivileged group" (1970, 2), rather than through any cultural substance they might share.

Swirski (1981, 3-75), the first scholar to explore the ethnic distribution of labor as a cause of the socioeconomic gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim in Israel, seems to further promote a view of Mizrahim as an ethnic group whose members share a particular cultural content. Although Swirski's work does not attach a particular cultural identity to the Mizrahim category, it proposes the need to develop such a content in the future:

Instead of assuming that the Mizrahi ethnicity will disappear, it seems that we would take into account the possibility that it is in a process of construction. The shared pattern of “livinghood” and economic activity could be accompanied by a growth of an ethnic cultural identity, that will reflect not only the shared elements of the past, but also the common life conditions in Israel today. (Swirski 1981, 73.)<sup>26</sup>

It seems that the first to attach to the Mizrahi category a kind of cultural content were, in fact, anthropologists and historians who held an attitude towards Mizrahim which Shohat refers to as the "love of Israel approach," and which she connects to the political and religious Zionist stream (Shohat 2001, 147).<sup>27</sup> However, adopting a Eurocentric-orientalist perspective, these scholars do not ascribe Mizrahim

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<sup>25</sup> Swirski explains that the school of pluralism to which Smoocha's attitude belongs was developed in the United States as a reaction to the "Functionalist School," which believed that a society is a complex structure in which every part has a different function, and is characterized by a high level of consent and coordination between its different parts. By contrast, in the "Pluralistic Model" approach, society is characterized by competition and conflicts between groups and non-voluntary subordination of all the groups to a powerful leading one.

<sup>26</sup> If not mentioned otherwise, all translations from Hebrew in this subchapter are mine.

<sup>27</sup> For Shohat, this is a discourse of which the modernization approach is a part, and it is a local branch of the Eurocentric and orientalist global discourse (Shohat 2001, 145-150).

with a living constitutive culture, but with a kind of stagnated, exotic Jewish tradition, a folklore which should be rescued so it is not forgotten (Shohat 2001, 148-149).<sup>28</sup>

It seems that this is the ideology behind the periodical *Peamim*,<sup>29</sup> edited by Shaul Shaked. In its first issue "Moreshet Yahdut Hamizrah" (which translates as "the tradition<sup>30</sup> of oriental Jewry," that is, of Mizrahim) Shaked offers this "tradition" as a new discipline, and explains the importance of this new area of study:

The need to know the recent past culture of every community [of Mizrahim, r.k.] is an interim need which rose only lately. This research has an objective urgency since there are aspects of culture (of Mizrahim) which, if they do not achieve description and preservation in our generation, no trace of them will be left. This is true of course for every historical situation, but we deal here with an attempt to describe a culture which is disconnected from its territory and all its subsistence is in the memory. (Shaked 1979, 9)

Moreover, typical of some "love of Israel" researchers are revelations of what could be seen as a racist approach which sees Mizrahi inferiority as essential and biologically inherited, as demonstrated by this declaration of Abraham Shtal: "one can see the sources of the gap [between learning achievements of Mizrahi pupils and Ashkenazi ones, r.k.] in the fact that pupils of African and Asian background are less talented than their European friends" (Shtal 1979, 49).

By contrast, a post-colonial and post-Zionist approach towards Mizrahim is presented in Shohat's work. Shohat basically accepts Swirski's view about the colonialist ethnic division of labor, but inserts into the Mizrahi discourse some new terms and perspectives borrowed from the anti-colonialist discourse, such as orientalism, Eurocentrism and the first world-third world binary:

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<sup>28</sup> It seems that one can view this approach as the religious branch of the Zionist modernization approach: while the modernization approach stressed the "pre-modernity" of Mizrahim in fields such as education and technology, this group stressed their ancient stagnated traditions. Shaked, for example, echoes some of the preconceptions that formed the basis of the modernistic approach, saying that common to all the Jewish communities in the orient was their pre-modern backwardness, or in his words, "stagnation in the attitude towards the adoption of modern technologies" (Shaked 1979, 10, my translation).

<sup>29</sup> A periodical dedicated to "Traditions of the Oriental Jewry," the first issue was published in 1979.

<sup>30</sup> It seems that the use of the signifier "tradition" instead of "culture" reflects a Eurocentric ideology, in which the Europeans have culture, but non-Europeans have only folklore and traditions (Shohat 2001, 15).

As a third world Jewish group, Mizrahim [in Israel r.k.] live in a system which has colonial foundations, like they were a nation inside a nation. The discussion here [in the article "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Stand Point of its Jewish Victims" r.k.] continues the anti-colonialist discourse... and partly constitutes a dialogue with the work of Edward Said. Said criticized the orientalist discourse and showed how that discourse served the European culture in the producing and managing of the orient in the post-enlightment period. The orientalist approach presents the east as a collection of traits based on generalizations about the true or imagined differences between west and east, usually while giving the advantage to the west over the east in the way it justifies the west's privileges and its aggressiveness.... This article focuses on the Mizrahim in Israel and on the process through which one pole in the dichotomy of east-west is presented as rational and developed and superior [European elites, r.k.] while the other is presented as abnormal, backward and inferior [Mizrahim, r.k.]. (2001, 142-143)

Although Shohat avoids elaborating on the history and content of Mizrahi culture, her work seems to emphasize the fact that the Mizrahi category does hold a particular shared cultural-historical substance that was oppressed by Zionist hegemonic discourse:

In differentiating between the bad orient (Arab-Muslim) and the good orient (Arab-Jewish), Israel took upon itself to purify the Mizrahim from their own selves and to redeem them from the original sin of belonging to the orient.... From their book *The History of the Jewish People* Mizrahi pupils don't learn anything meaningful about their Jewish history, which was formed through more than a thousand years in a Muslim civilization. (Shohat 2001, 151)

The work of Ammiel Alcalay (1993) seems to be the first to elaborate on the cultural content of the category of Mizrahim, suggesting it has a particular substance. While making an effort to supply an alternative foundation to Mizrahi discourse, which is at the same time non-Eurocentric and avoids the dichotomies and conflicts of first world versus third world, Alcalay suggests that Mizrahim should be renamed "Levantine Jews." Alcalay indicates that the identity problem of the Levantine Jews flows from the disappearance of their native land as a geopolitical and cultural entity following the colonialist activity. The Levantine Jews, says Alcalay, are tied to a certain territory: their native land is the Levant, which is a historical and cultural entity and therefore they have a history of two thousand years and an ancient culture: the Levantine culture.

Levantine culture, claims Alcalay, is the natural culture of the Middle East.<sup>31</sup>

It is more than Arab culture; it is a multi-layered culture by nature, containing memories of the cultures of ancient Egypt, ancient Israel, and Greece, as well as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Alcalay writes:

The "old" Levantine world coincides with but is not exclusive to Islamic rule. Although its central source of nourishment remains the fertile symbiosis of Arabic, Jewish and romance culture created in the western Caliphate of Spain from the ten to the thirteenth century.... The culture formed there also refers back to its roots in connections and conflicts with Persia, Byzantium, the remnants of the Hellenic world and the ancient Middle East. (Alcalay 1993, 35)

Alcalay is not satisfied with culturally or historically relocating Mizrahim (Levantine Jews) in their native sphere. In his next work (1996) which seems to be the first research on Mizrahi literature (*Keys to the Garden*), while trying to find out what Mizrahi literature is (in this work he gives up the "Levantine Jews" signifier), and what the difference is between it and the official hegemonic Hebrew literature, he indicates some characteristics of what is starting to emerge as the cultural substance of the Mizrahim category.<sup>32</sup> These characteristics include: belonging to the context of the third world more than to the local Hebrew culture; fragmentation and marginalization; feeling of exile in the homeland (Israel); aesthetic innovation; multi-culturalism; and a passion to unite with the great space of the Middle East and give up the current political borders (Alcalay 1996,IX).<sup>33</sup>

In contrast with Alcalay, whose effort is to affix Mizrahi cultural identity in

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<sup>31</sup> Alcalay provides testimonies which he seems to think hint to the fact that if Levantine Jews had run Israeli politics, instead of the Ashkenazim, the conflict with the Arabs would be easier to solve, because of the natural understanding and sympathy between Levantine Jews and Arabs. As an example he cites a letter from Antebi, a Palestinian Jewish Sephardic activist, to Zionist leaders about their misunderstanding the Arabs, and a lecture by Rabbi Ventoura, the chief rabbi of Alexandria, on the mutual destiny of Jews and Muslims (Alcalay 1993, 54-55).

<sup>32</sup> At about the same time (1998) Sami Chetrit edited the first anthology of Mizrahi literature: *One Hundred Years – One Hundred Writers (Mea Shanim – Mea Yozrim)*, published by Kedem (Chetrit 1999a).

<sup>33</sup> For a similar effort to define Mizrahi literature, see my article "New Israeli Literary Republic," which reviews the first books series of Kedem Publishing. In my review of different groups of books, I find some characteristics which are homological to those mentioned by Alcalay, such as marginality, alienation from Zionist discourse, disregarding the Zionist ideology of negation of exile, and Levantine awareness of the geopolitical sphere. However, the article also stresses the critique by Israeli Mizrahi writers on Mizrahi patriarchalism (Kimchi 1999).

the common past of the group, the next evolution in this academic discourse belongs to Shenhav, Hever, and Mutsafi (2002, 9-28, 288-305). They adopt into Mizrahi identity discourse Bhabha's (1994, 66-85) notion of "the other," and a post-colonial outlook on cultural identity that sees it as constructive. Similarly, they view Mizrahi identity as an endless process of construction that is rooted almost entirely in the present Israeli reality:

We view... Mizrahi identity as a site of contraction, as a fluid phenomenon that makes it possible "to be and not to be," which has on one side economic and political characteristics, but on the other side also cultural and independent characteristics. And most important of all: Mizrahiness is not the opposition of Ashkenaziness, but a phenomenon that among other things includes in itself the Ashkenazim through relationships of inclusion and exclusion, of mimicry and assimilation. (Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi 2002, 17)

At the same time Hever (2002) further contributes to the conception of Mizrahi cultural identity by elaborating on Alcalay's note of the special relationships between Mizrahi literature and Zionist discourse. He highlights the tension between Mizrahi literature and Zionist concepts of homeland and exile as expressed by Hebrew hegemonic literature.<sup>34</sup> One of the fixed features of Mizrahi literature, claims Hever, is a description of the emigration to Israel, which lacks the hardship of crossing between two different worlds that is typical of related hegemonic Hebrew literature. In contrast to the dichotomy of the hegemonic literature, in Mizrahi literature, the land of Israel and the land of origin exist in the same world, and the territorial continuity between them is stressed: there is no sea crossing, as in the hegemonic literature, and there is no feeling of passage between different worlds, as in the hegemonic literature. The crossing of borders between exile and the homeland is natural and normal; sometimes they are crossed twice in the same novel.

Homological in a way to Alcalay's and Hever's research on Mizrahi literature is Shemer's recent work on Mizrahi cinema (Shemer 2005). Shemer analyzes a corpus

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<sup>34</sup> See Hever, "Lo Bano Min Hayam" ("We Didn't Come through the Sea") (Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi 2002, 191-212).

of films on Mizrahi topics, almost all by Mizrahi filmmakers, produced from 1990-2005. Like Alcalay did with Mizrahi literature, he tries to find out what Mizrahi cinema is and what sets it apart from the hegemonic Israeli cinema. Shemer discovers that a relatively substantial number of contemporary Mizrahi films share a particular motif of journey that is at the same time physical, psychological, and symbolic, and which sometimes takes the form of an actual journey in space, and other times the form of an abstract metaphorical journey into the past.

This journey, adds Shemer, is constitutive of the film's structure and form (Shemer 2005, 351).<sup>35</sup> Shemer's findings on the characteristics of Mizrahi cinema maintain an interesting homology with Alcalay's description of Mizrahi literature. The journeys (both concrete and abstract) of Mizrahi films, and Alcalay's traits of Mizrahi literature, such as the feeling of exile in one's homeland, the desire to cross geopolitical borders, and an inclination towards multiculturalism, seem to come from the same source, indicating cultural and social unease as a characteristic of Mizrahi cultural identity. The cinematic journeys of Mizrahi filmmakers seem to reflect ideas, ideologies, and feelings similar to those expressed by Mizrahi literature, but given a particular cinematic form and actual motion.

However, more than Mizrahi literature, Mizrahi cinema is still a national (Israeli) cinema. Here it departs also from third world "accented cinema" (Naficy 2001), which consists of films of exile, emigration, and ethnicity made by third world ethnic groups residing in first world countries:

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<sup>35</sup> As examples of films in which an actual journey takes place Shemer cites *Galoot* ("exile") directed by Bentolila (2003), *Ancient Winds* (Benchetrit, 2002), *The South*, (Bar David, 1998), *Taqasim* (Dror, 1999), and *Father Language* (Kimchi, 2006, then a work in progress). As an example of films constituted around a journey into the past, he cites *Bayit* (Ofek, 1994), *Cinema Egypt* (Kimchi, 2001), *Mirrors* (Malessa, 2004), *Maktub Aleik* (Basson, 2005), *A Bit of Luck* (Revach, 1992), and *The Barbecue People* (Ofek and Madmoni, 2003) Shemer 2005, 351.

Accented cinema often revolves around the filmmakers' psychic schism that is encoded on the dialectics of placement/displacement regarding their two homes – the homeland and the new land – and that their journey is constructed as an attempted bridging or reconciliation between the two. Contemporary Mizrahi filmmakers, however, most of whom are native-born Israelis, rarely have qualms about where home is even when they vehemently criticize the national Zionist enterprise and the role it assigned to Mizrahi people and culture. (Shemer 2005, 352)

While Alcalay and Shemer deal with Mizrahi cultural identity through an effort to extract it from Mizrahi artistic products, Chetrit (2004) deals with it directly, tying the evolution of Mizrahi cultural identity to their political struggle for socio-economic equality:

In the discussion about Mizrahim in Israel we identify the dynamic evolution of the identity – from an external definition by countries of origins of the various Mizrahi and Sephardic congregations, then as an inferior collective, and up to a self-definition through a class and cultural solidarity. But as I presented in my introductory questions, I would like to add that the social/class struggle which encourages solidarity, eventually gives birth to self-determination and the self-refashioning of a common culture. (Chetrit 2004, 42, my emphasis)

Chetrit presents a model in which the Mizrahi progress from a state of class ("inferior collective"), into an ethnic group with a particular cultural identity, is driven by advancement in their political struggle and connected to major milestones in it.<sup>36</sup> Chetrit indicates two periods of Mizrahi cultural prosperity which came following major developments in the Mizrahi struggle. The first one came after the organized protest of the Mizrahi folk movement known as Ha'panterim Ha'shhorim, or Panterim (which translates as "the Black Panthers") in the early seventies, a historical event he views as "a collective workshop meant to create a rehabilitation of the oppressed identity [of the Mizrahim, r.k.]" (2004, 181). The second one was the creation of Shas and especially its turn into a large party with a social platform which maintained an atmosphere of conflict with the hegemony, which happened in the 1990s (Chetrit 2004, 297), and the foundation of the *Hakeshet Hamizrahit* ("Eastern Rainbow")<sup>37</sup> association in 1997. While the Panterim protest led to the emergence of prominent

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<sup>36</sup> Chetrit suggests a history of the Mizrahi political struggle which starts in the Yishuv period with the activity of Eliyahu Alishar (2004, 56- 57).

<sup>37</sup> An association of radical liberal Mizrahi intellectuals, artists and activists.

Mizrahi writers, whose writings reflected the life of Mizrahim in their countries of origin, the trauma of emigration to Israel, and the Mizrahim's new life in Israel,<sup>38</sup> the second phase continued the growth of the Mizrahi cultural discourse, which further widened the cultural content of the group. This gave birth also to Mizrahi cultural organizations, such as the first "Mizrahi culture" periodical *Hakivun Mizrah* (founded in 1999), which turned into "a magnet to Mizrahi contemplation and art" (Chetrit 2004, 301).

Considering all of this, within the frame of the dissertation the term "Mizrahi" is taken as a category of cultural identity. My Mizrahi category will contain a cultural substance which has been mainly constructed in Israel (Shenhav, Hever and Mutsafi 2002, 288-306), although on the basis of the shared Levantine and Mizrahi roots and is still in a process of construction. As for the content of this identity, the study indicates the traits which both Mizrahi literature and film seem to share as characterizing Mizrahi cultural identity: alienation from Zionist ideology and narrative concepts, marginality, third-world sensitivity, and passage between discourses and spaces.

The dissertation also adopts the model which Chetrit offers. It regards the 1970s, after the Panterim protest from 1970-73, as a period in which the Mizrahi category contained already some kind of a cultural content. Following Alcalay (1996, V-XII) and Shemer (2005, 173-354), keeping in mind that the category "Ashkenazi" has also a cultural identity aspect and interlacing this data with my view of the director as an author (as classified above), I suggest that film is a text that reflects the cultural identity – be it Mizrahi or Ashkenazi – of the director as an author.

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<sup>38</sup> Chetrit mentions a variety of writers, such as Sami Michael, Erez Biton, Gabriel Ben Simhon, Jaclyn Casanova, Yitzhak Bar Moshe, and Yitzhak Goren-Gurmezano.

The dissertation's analysis of the Bourekas films, as an Ashkenazi cultural phenomenon in which Ashkenazi directors use a presentation of a pseudo-Mizrahi community – and in particular the comparative strategy that the study will adopt to demonstrate this, comparing Bourekas films with non-Bourekas films made in the 1970s by Mizrahi directors – will further elaborate on what Mizrahi cultural identity is (and isn't). By demonstrating the differences between these two groups of films, the dissertation will not only define and describe what Bourekas are, but, in a way, will further widen the discussion on Mizrahi and Ashkenazi cultural identities.

## **Chapter Two:**

# **The Birth of Bourekas: *Sallah* and the Background of Early Israeli Cinema**

### **I. The Ideological Burden of Early Israeli Cinema**

The film *Sallah* (*Sallah Shabati*, 1964) is considered by all relevant critics to be the first Bourekas film and an archetype of this group of films. Discussing its cinematic and ideological innovation, relative to the early Israeli cinema<sup>39</sup> which preceded it, will shed some light on the role that Bourekas films played in Israeli cinematic discourse when they first appeared. In this chapter, while critically reading<sup>40</sup> and analyzing Shohat (1989, 21-179), Gretz (1999), Zimmerman (2001, 173-395), and Burstein (1990, 9-121), ideological aspects of early Israeli cinema will be discussed, and their analysis will be used as a starting point to discuss the innovation of *Sallah*, as heralding a new and distinct group of films.

Louis Althusser (1971, 127-189) argues that in order to secure the relations of production and to maintain its domination, the ruling class of a state acts through what Althusser calls an “ideological state apparatus” to distribute its ideology. In the modern period this apparatus includes, among others, school, family, the media and

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<sup>39</sup> Early Israeli cinema within the borders of this study refers to the Israeli films made up to the early nineteen-sixties, which belong to the groups Shohat calls “Jewish agency films” (from the 1930s and ‘40s), the “national heroic genre” (mainly from the 1950s), and “bourgeois comedies” (early 1960s).

<sup>40</sup> By “critically reading” I mean reading and integrating the texts mentioned into the dissertation while only partly adopting their approaches, and sometimes even arguing with their stances.

the arts. It seems that early Israeli cinema served as a vital part of the State of Israel's ideological apparatus. Between the debut of *Oded the Wanderer* (*Oded Hanoded*, 1933), the first Israeli feature film,<sup>41</sup> and the early 1960s, Jewish filmmakers, first in Palestine (until 1948) and then in Israel, produced no more than two dozen fiction features (Shohat 1989, 20-119 and Schnitzer 1994, 30-62). This small group of films was highly ideological, full of a very conspicuous Zionist dogma.

Moreover, since Israeli cinema was financially and institutionally inferior relative to other artistic media in Israel,<sup>42</sup> film authors had little strength to resist the establishment's pressure for political conformism; as a result, films were used to distribute Zionist ideology more vigorously than any other media or form of art in Israel during the state's early decades (Zimmerman 2001, 394).<sup>43</sup> Released into this conformist cinematic discourse, it is the assertion of this study that *Sallah* deviated from the automatic reflection of the Zionist ethos which typified early Israeli cinema. As will be shown, *Sallah* offered a departure from: (1) the conformity to the Zionist establishment common in early Israeli cinema; (2) the tendency of these early films to reproduce and distribute Zionist tropes through visualizing them; (3) the way early films represented relations between figures and space; and (4) the way early films represented Israeli society's composition.

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<sup>41</sup> *Oded Hanoded* (1933) is considered by Israeli cinema historians to be the first Israeli film, even though it was produced before official independence in 1948 (see Shohat 1989, 20, 27-28).

<sup>42</sup> This is true especially when comparing Israeli cinema to Israeli theatre; the latter has succeeded in becoming an integral part of the Israeli establishment. In 2000, the budgets for Israeli theatre were 20 times more than that of Israeli cinema (Zimmerman 2001, 13).

<sup>43</sup> Summarizing the history of Israeli cinema using what he calls a "multi-systems approach" (which along with the development of the cinema as an art, takes into account its financial and institutional status relative to other media within the same cultural arena), Zimmerman asserts that the Israeli cinema was always in a state of financial and institutional inferiority relative to other artistic media in Israel. This low status, he indicates, enabled the Israeli Zionist establishment to demand from early cinema a conformist reproduction and distribution of Zionist ideology. Early Israeli cinema became then a central apparatus through which the elite Israeli hegemony strived to endow its values to the population and insure the continuation of its rule.

## II. Aspects of Zionist Ideology in Early Israeli Cinema

### Reproducing Zionist Tropes

As an important part of Israel's ideological state apparatus, early Israeli cinema reproduced and distributed ideals that, at the time, dominated the ideology of Zionist institutions. These early films accomplished this primarily through a strategy of reproducing Zionist tropes both through creating an allegorical narrative structures and through visualizing them using camera angles that consisted of extreme long shots and medium long shots.

*Oded the Wanderer* (1933) is considered the first Israeli film. As such it testifies in its ideological resonance to the films that will follow over the next three decades. Like these later films, *Oded the Wanderer* realizes and visualizes a number of Zionist tropes. The tropes are reproduced in two levels of film discourse, through the use of two distinguishable techniques: on the macro level of narrative discourse, reproduction of the tropes is achieved by creating a narrative structure which allegorically represents the tropes; on the micro level, one finds a cinematic sequence which metonymically visualizes the tropes.

On its macro level, the film leads its school-age heroes on a journey to get acquainted with the rural areas of the Land of Israel, and ties this literal journey across the landscape to their emotional and physical coming of age journeys. This narrative seems to be structured on the central Zionist trope of *Yediat Ha'aretz* (becoming familiar with [knowing] the Land of Israel<sup>44</sup>), and attempts to reproduce this trope allegorically.

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<sup>44</sup> A trope which expresses the Zionist need to be reunited physically, spiritually, and erotically with the land of Israel. The verb "Lada'at" (knowing) in Hebrew also means "to have sexual intercourse."

The tropes of "making the desert bloom" and "Hebrew labor," on the other hand, are metonymically reproduced in the film through shots in which young powerful Hebrew men cultivate a deserted land using modern techniques. These two tropes, among others, would be reproduced again and again in the Israeli films in the decades that followed. These include films which focus on Holocaust survivors, such as *My Father's House* (*Beit Avi*, 1946), *Tear of Comfort* (*Dim'at Ha'nehama Ha'gedola*, 1948), and *When Curse Turns into Blessing* (*Kelala Livracha*, 1949), all of which show the heroes engaged with manufacturing labor, and cultivating and farming the land (Gertz 1999).

In *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (*Giv'a 24 Eina Ona*, 1954), a film about Israel's War of Independence, other Zionist tropes are reproduced allegorically through narrative structure. The film's ending scene reproduces the famous line from the poem by the prominent Israeli poet Nathan Alterman, "in their death they permitted our lives" ("Bemotam Zivue Lanue et Hahaim"). The film ends as all four heroes of the film – warriors who received the mission of conquering Hill 24 – are found dead on the hilltop. Before dying they succeed in overtaking the hill, and thus save the whole front of the Israeli army from collapsing. One can find many other similar examples. In each, one sees how early Israeli cinema was ripe with both metonymic invocations and allegorical representations of Zionist tropes, all of which reproduced and distributed Zionist ideology – the ideology of the State of Israel.

### **Conformism to the Zionist Establishment**

Further insight, which testifies to the conformity of early Israeli cinema with the Zionist ethos, lies in Burstein's finding (1990, 9-121) that early cinema's

conformism to both the Zionist ethos and the Israeli establishment is not only a leading principle of narrative structure, that shapes the film's leading images but also constitutes the micro units of the cinematic sequence of these early films. Burstein analyzes Israeli cinema through a study of its use of close-ups, its casting, and primarily by analyzing facial expressions of its figures. His assertion is that while the ideal cinematic face is an active face which serves as a window to the soul,<sup>45</sup> the poker face does not only objectify the figure, reducing it to a stereotype, bluntly representing its status, age and ethnicity, but also reflects an erasure of the figure's subjectivity and a deep conformism with ruling ideology and establishment. So do, says Burstein, faces which are extra expressive and twisted.

Most of the figures of early Israeli cinema, claims Burstein, adopt the poker face. In certain other films – mostly in the bourgeois comedy genre<sup>46</sup> – one finds figures with particularly expressive faces who quickly switch expressions. The result, Burstein argues, is the same: we are ultimately left with a robotic, soulless obedience (Burstein 1990, 61).

### **Echoing the Zionist Ethos through Relations of Figures with Space**

Zionist ideology and aspects of Zionist narrative are sometimes presented in early cinema through the ways their characters relate to the space around them. Shohat (1989, 20-119) and Zimmerman (2001, 253 -345) remark that in early Israeli films of the 1930s and '40s, wide shots of open landscape serve as metonyms for the domination of man over land, and indicate the return of the Jewish nation into history. Gertz (1999) remarks that Shoah survivors' relations with space symbolize their

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<sup>45</sup> Burstein gives as an example the face of Maria Falconetti in the *Passion of Joan D'arc* (1928) by Dreyer.

<sup>46</sup> A genre that appeared in Israeli cinema in the early sixties after the change in the government system to support films. See Burstein (1990, 61), Schnitzer (1994, 17).

psychological state. Free and natural relations with open space indicate both psychological maturity and assimilation into the new Israeli Zionist society, as well as the acquisition of a distinctly Hebrew subjectivity<sup>47</sup> (as opposed to a subjectivity based on Jewish exilic/diasporic culture). On the contrary, a fear of open space indicated immaturity and fixation in the previous Jewish exilic culture and in a diasporic Jewish subjectivity.<sup>48</sup> In early Israeli films which center on Shoah survivors who emigrate to Israel, claims Gertz, one can identify the metaphor of crossing towards control of open space (and specifically, the Land of Israel).

This metaphor constructs a passage from a state of immaturity – a pre-Hebrew state, characterized by fear of open space and generally symbolizing the fear of confronting life – into a state of maturity, seen as a "Hebrew state," and characterized by control over open space, which symbolizes freedom from this fear. Gertz suggests that in most of the films of Israeli cinema's first period, the immigrant figures are moving from a closed space to a place which represents a wide and open universe.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "Hebrew" (*ivrit*) within the borders of this study is being used in the sense of "Hebraic" (*ivri*). In this sense the signifier is used by Zionist discourse to describe the Zionist characteristic of a phenomenon or a person. One such example is the name of the annual Israeli national song contest, "Festival Ha'zemer Ha'ivri." In addition, the archaic and biblical connotations of this term also differentiate these phenomena from the stereotypical characteristics associated with diasporic Jewish culture.

In this study, "subjectivity" is used in the same way Hardt and Negri's *Empire* uses the signifier. In comparison to "identity" – which indicates an already final and constructed set of personal characteristics – "subjectivity" emphasizes the process of the production of a person's identity or sense of self. "Hebrew subjectivity" therefore refers to a set of personal characteristics which constitute a negative analogy to the traditional and stereotypical characteristics of a Jewish diasporic individual; instead of this fixed stereotype, "Hebrew subjectivity" refers to an identity (of an individual) in a continued state of construction, a process which typically includes characteristics such as: courage, industry, physical power, firmness, control, and non-accented Hebrew speech.

<sup>48</sup> Jewish diasporic subjectivity is considered here through the Zionist perspective and its exile-negated discourse, and as early Israeli films saw it: an identity which is structured from the characteristics attributed to Jews in European anti-Semitic discourse. Gertz (1999) asserts that early Israeli films emphasize a Jewish subjectivity built on traits like: fear (of open space), urbanity, aggression, physical weakness, idleness, fraud, and womanizing.

<sup>49</sup> The film *Loyal City* (*Kiryat Ne'emana*) presents several children who are Shoah survivors, among them Max, the hero. In the beginning Max and his friends are very fearful of open spaces. In the first sequence of the film, the children travel inside a bus through the land of Israel, avoiding the landscape outside and fearing every new element which penetrates their bus from outside. In the end, however, the film discourse highlights Max's new ability to walk confidently – and alone – through Israel's countryside, emphasizing his newfound control over the land. Throughout the course of the film, Max

This new control of space is presented by the films as a major characteristic of the new Hebrew subjectivity gained by the characters.

However, this metaphor in early Israeli films is often more complicated than what has been suggested here so far. Gertz suggests that usually within the journey of moving from a state of fear into control over open space, there is an interim phase in which the survivors are sometimes running away into the open space. This is true in the case of Max, a boarding school student in the film *Loyal City* (*Kiryat Ne'eman*, 1952) who runs away from school and into the open space of the school surroundings. This bursting into open space, Gertz notes, does not represent a new control over space, but rather the opposite – a phase of regression in relation to the control of open space, just as a suicide attempt can sometimes reflect an increasing fear of death rather than a decline in it.

### **Representing a Zionist Utopia as Israeli Society – a Distorted Presentation of Israeli Society's Composition**

Generally speaking, early Israeli cinema presented a utopian Israeli Zionist-Hebrew society while focusing on Hebrew Zionist heroes representing Zionist Ashkenazi elites such as Sabras,<sup>50</sup> kibbutz members, and soldiers, and largely ignoring other members of the Jewish-Israeli population of the time.

As a part of the Israeli ideological state apparatus, early cinema confirmed, promoted, and distributed both the hegemonic status of Zionist Ashkenazi elites and its assimilation into Hebrew subjectivity. The first occurred by casting characters representing groups of "others" in insignificant roles in the films, and the second

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replaces his fears of open space, his fears of the universe and particularly of its ontological physical aspects (which equates to a pre-Hebrew condition), with a new (Hebrew) confidence of mastering and knowing the land.

<sup>50</sup> On the figure of the Sabra, see Almog (1997).

through presenting the same characters as pre-Hebrew diasporic Jews. Non-Zionist Shoah survivors refugees from Europe, if central characters in early Israeli cinema, were represented as still struggling with their Jewish diasporic subjectivity, and in need of guidance from a member of the Zionist elites – such as a Sabra or a Kibbutz member – in order to adopt Hebrew subjectivity (Gretz 1999).<sup>51</sup>

Mizrahim are rarely represented in these early films. Only three films of the period have a significant Mizrahi character in them.<sup>52</sup> In all three the Mizrahim are represented as pre-Hebrew diasporic traditional Jews; in two of them (*Dan and Sa'adia* [*Dan Ve Sa'adia*], 1956), and *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer*, 1955), this representation is used to intensify the Hebrew characteristics of the Ashkenazi Zionist elites – the heroes of the films. *With no Homeland* (*Be'ein Moledet*, 1956), the third film in this group, tells the story of the immigration of the Yemenite Jews to Israel. The film represents the Yemenite Jews as diasporic traditional Jews: strong in their feeling of Jewish fate, and suffering from anti-Semitism, hostility, and persecution by the local Yemenite population and authorities, against which they are unfit to protect themselves.

In *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (1954), one of the film's four soldiers heroes is Esther Hadasi, a young Mizrahi (Yemenite) girl from Jerusalem. Characteristics like a non-native Yemenite accent in her Hebrew speech (which is stressed by the perfect native accent of the Sabra Ashkenazi soldier, David), and the fact that Esther comes from Jerusalem, the city that symbolizes in Zionist discourse the traditional pre-

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<sup>51</sup> In films such as: *Loyal City* (1952), *My Father's House* (1947), and *When Curse Turns into Blessing* (1947).

<sup>52</sup> While Mizrahi characters rarely appear in early Israeli cinema as an integral part of Israeli-Hebrew society, Mizrahi actors are usually cast in roles of Arabs in these films. In *They Were Ten* (*Hem Hayu Asara*, 1961), the Arab thief is played by a Mizrahi actor, and in the film *Sinaya* (1956) the Egyptian soldier is a Mizrahi actor. Some early Israeli films employed also non-professional Mizrahi actors as Arab soldiers (Shohat 1989, 79).

Hebrew Jewish aspect of Israeli society, tag Esther as a pre-Hebrew diasporic Jew. Her marginality in the Hebrew Zionist society is stressed by the fact that although Esther is officially one of the four heroes, her role remains less significant relative to the three other protagonists, and her status inferior. Unlike the other three she doesn't receive an episode of her own in the film, a fact which leaves her past and her motivations vague.

In the children film's *Dan and Sa'adia* (1956), the relationships between Dan, the Ashkenazi hero of the film, and Sa'adia, his Mizrahi (Yemenite<sup>53</sup>) friend, again seem to reproduce and promote the status of Zionist Ashkenazi hegemonies and their assimilation into Hebrew subjectivity. While Dan has a Hebrew name and is the leader between the two, Sa'adia has an exilic pre-Hebrew name, and is following and serving Dan fatefully.

### **III. *Sallah* and Its Departure from Early Israeli Cinema**

#### **The Early Nineteen-Sixties and the Appearance of *Sallah***

Early Israeli films, although addressed not only to the relatively small population of Israeli Jews, but also to pro-Zionist audiences abroad were noncommercial. As such they were financed by Zionist institutions such as The Jewish Agency<sup>54</sup> before independence, and mainly by the State of Israel after 1948 (Schweitzer 2003, 26, Shohat 1989, 24).

However, in the early 1960s the Israeli ministry of industry updated the national cinema's support system and started to subsidize film productions according

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<sup>53</sup> It seems that the fact that all three characters are Yemenite Jews is due to the fact the Yemenite Jews were known as faithful [?] and orthodox Jews .

<sup>54</sup> Zionist institutions were the primary foreign distributors of these films, and this monopoly reinforced the genre's Eurocentrism and Zionist ideological fundamentalism mentioned earlier.

to their box office success (Schweitzer 2003, 99).<sup>55</sup> The movie market suddenly depended less on what the government was willing to supply and more on what ticket-buyers would pay to see. Soon, overtly propagandistic films were displaced by a new genre, the bourgeois comedy.<sup>56</sup> This more commercial focus rendered a more diverse Israeli reality, no longer fixated on Zionism's utopian spaces and figures, such as the kibbutz and the *halutz* (the pre-state Zionist pioneer). The bourgeois comedy instead tended to represent urban bourgeois neighborhoods and bourgeois figures. Yet it still reflected the official Zionist ideology, and still hardly represented Israeli Mizrahim. Its human galleries were stocked with Ashkenazi-Hebrew/Israeli characters, highly assimilated into Western, non-Jewish, culture.

Burstein (1990, 91-96) claims that bourgeois comedy films were not essentially different in their level of conformism to Zionist ideology from the previous films, since in the bourgeois comedy actors made particular and highly intensive use of their facial expressions (particularly in films such as *Aldorado* [1963], and *Not a World to Morganstein* [1963]). This recklessness and hyperactivity of the faces, claims Burstein, was just as non-individual and dead as the poker face of the actors in the previous films, and therefore expressed the same ideological conformism.

It was amidst this politically conformist cinematic atmosphere that *Sallah* (1964) was first released. *Sallah's* main character was an "other" – a traditional Mizrahi Jew. The film immediately found commercial success. According to one study (Schweitzer 2003,47), roughly 1.2 million people have seen the movie, making it one of the most successful films ever made worldwide, when taking into account the size of its national market (Schnitzer 1994, 23). Israeli critics, however, responded differently, condemning *Sallah* as the product of its authors' moral corruption and an

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<sup>55</sup> See also Schnitzer (1994, 18).

<sup>56</sup> Films such as: *I Like Mike* (1960), *Only One Lira (Rak Belira)*, 1961), *Not a World to Morganstein (Af Mila Le'morganstein)*, 1963), *Shimhon Family (Mishpachat Shimhon)*, 1964).

ugly example of the declining power of the Israeli socialist system, the Zionist ethos and Zionist utopias such as the kibbutz.<sup>57</sup>

*Sallah* tells the story of a 40-year-old immigrant of the same name. Sallah is a Mizrahi Jew, born in an Islamic country, who arrives in Israel with his wife, mother, and eight children. Upon arrival, they are all transferred to a Ma'abara (a transit camp); the officials inform Sallah that this is only a temporary solution until his housing is ready, but it turns out to be a lie. Sallah and his family will have to stay in the camp for a long time. From this point on, the film describes both Sallah's fight for permanent housing – which is also a fight against the state officials who try to keep him in the transition camp – and the efforts of Sallah's family to adapt to the new country.

In the end, both efforts are successful. After Sallah fails to use the local corrupt politicians to get him a permanent house, he finds a more efficient way: he organizes a boycott in the transit camp to protest *against* moving to permanent housing. To this the authorities react by forcibly transporting the entire transit camp population to permanent housing. The assimilation effort of Sallah's family also seems to conclude with an unexpected success. At the film's end Sallah's eldest daughter is about to marry a young Israeli native (of Ashkenazi origin) kibbutz member, while his eldest son is about to marry an Israeli native (also a Kibbutz member of Ashkenazi origin).

*Sallah* is remarkably different, in many aspects, from the films that preceded it, and marks a significant departure from both early Israeli cinema and the newer breed of the bourgeoisie comedy. While adopting certain cinematic tactics that resemble those of early Israeli cinema films, *Sallah* uses them in a totally different

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<sup>57</sup> The critic from *Al Hamishmar*, for example, complained about the portrayal of state institutions as corrupt. Others objected to the satiric representation of the kibbutz as a non-ideological and immoral environment (Gannoth, 1964).

way, i.e., not in order to reproduce Zionist tropes and ideology but to ridicule them. The result is a film which seems to refuse to conform with central aspects of Zionist ideology and the state establishment, and also digresses from characteristics of the early cinema that were connected with reproducing Zionist ideology.

### ***Sallah's* Departure from Reproducing and Distributing Zionist Tropes**

Like early Israeli cinema, *Sallah* also visualizes Zionist tropes. But instead of simply reproducing these tropes, *Sallah's* cinematic sequence twists them, ridicules them, and through this distorted reproduction ultimately undermines parts of the Zionist ethos.

One of the Zionist tropes which *Sallah* subverts is the trope of "Hebrew labor." When Sallah is sent as a day laborer to help the forestation of a hilly landscape, we see how Sallah evades work and runs away from the planting location as soon as he can. The shots emphasize Sallah's idleness, particularly a long shot of Sallah sitting on the ground, his body slackened as he ineffectively uses his shovel to dig a hole much deeper than needed, all the while humming an Arab tune. Here is one of many instances in the film where an event and a location that could metonymically reproduce a Zionist trope instead undermines it. Although the scene corresponds with the Hebrew labor trope, *Sallah's* portrayal invalidates it instead of reproducing it.

The film undermines Hebrew labor also on the macro level through its narrative events. Sallah invests the bulk of his time in finding a way to make easy money, not by working but through fraud. Sallah takes bribes from the political go-getters during the elections, steals a dog and tries to sell it, and at last tries to "sell" his daughter to the kibbutz, asking the kibbutz secretary to pay a "bride price" as a condition for his consent to her marriage to Zigi, the young kibbutz member.

Sallah is also startlingly different from the adolescent figures of emigrating Shoah survivors in early Israeli films. These young men and women usually start the film with some of Sallah's same troubling characteristics (such as idleness and fraud), but go through a coming of age journey, in which they replace these traits with a new Hebrew diligence and productivity (Gertz 1999, 383). In the case of Sallah, these traits are fixed and do not change in the course of the movie. On the contrary, through its narrative the film hints at the fact that these traits pay off. Sallah's financial issues are solved at the end of the film through a successful fraud, as he cleverly manipulates government officials to move his family by force to a new modern flat, by pretending he will vigorously resist any attempt to move him out of the transition camp.

Furthermore, in *Sallah* even the kibbutz members, utopian figures who at that time represented in the eyes of many the perfect example of the new Zionist Hebrew human being, are presented as people whose behavior severely contradicts the Zionist ideal of labor. While the trope of Hebrew labor reflects the Zionist ideal of self-sufficiency in the labor arena, in the film the kibbutz people consistently try to persuade other people to do their work for them.<sup>58</sup> The kibbutz secretary goes out of his way to persuade the unwilling Sallah to carry his closet to his new office; a kibbutz member who seems to be in charge of some kind of a farming branch (he rides a tractor) begs the kibbutz secretary to hire a day laborer assistant for him, and the young kibbutz members Zigi and Bat Sheva do not really work but instead manage the work of others, giving orders and instructions to day employees. Bath Sheva is in charge of instructing Shimon, Sallah's son, in the dairy barn, and Zigi gives orders to a group of day laborers at the forestry location.

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<sup>58</sup> The Zionist discourse's stereotypical characteristics of the kibbutz at that time included pioneering, farming, a flourishing landscape, social justice, Hebrew labor, modesty, and self-reliance.

Finally, instead of working in productive agriculture, as the Zionist ethos dictates, kibbutz members are occupied with what the anti-Semitic discourse views as typical Jewish activities: they are busy articulating and interpreting the kibbutz laws and regulations (in the kibbutz general meeting); engaged in commercial negotiation (with Sallah, both on his labor value and on his daughter's value); and in counting money in Yiddish (when the secretary counts the money he pays Sallah for his daughter, he speaks in Yiddish). Yiddish is the exilic Jewish language, confiscated by Zionist discourse, which was connected, at that time, with a pre-Hebrew stage of development and with Jewish diasporic subjectivity (this will be explored further in Chapter 5).

Another important Zionist trope that is reproduced and degraded through narrative events in *Sallah* is the notion of "making the desert bloom." One of the central scenes in the film shows a group of new Jewish immigrants busy planting a new pine tree forest in what looks like a deserted piece of land. However over the course of the scene a few events twist this apparently perfect realization of the trope. First, the government official who sent Sallah to do this job makes it sound as if it was a hard labor punishment, rather than a profound Zionist duty; second, through cutting between long shots which depict the other workers plant the trees as asked, and a medium shot of Sallah sitting on the ground, digging slowly a hole which is much deeper than needed in which the tree plant is being swallowed, film sequence emphasizes that Sallah seems to have difficulties adjusting to the job and does his best to abandon the land in its original condition of neglect; third, in the course of the work two couples, both rich Jewish American sponsors, visit the location. The government official who welcomes each couple positions each time a different official sign – with the name of the present couple – and states to each couple

separately that the area is about to become a forest which will carry their name. This act of fraud by government officials helps subvert this "making the desert bloom," making the trope an empty title, a notion invented only to squeeze some more money from rich American Jews.

### ***Sallah's* Departure from Israeli Early Cinema's Relations between Figures and Space Representation**

It seems that *Sallah* adopts another tactic of early Israeli cinema – linking the characters' control over the open space to their level of assimilation into Hebrew subjectivity. But once more, the film subverts this bulwark of Zionist imagery, using the idea to present its figures as pre-Hebrew human beings with only slight hope of changing. *Sallah* is presented both metonymically – by the rhetoric of the cinematic sequence – as well as through narrative events, as a figure who fears the open space.

In one outstanding extreme long shot, the film visualizes *Sallah's* fear of open spaces. Here, two party delegations come to bribe *Sallah* and are searching for an empty space to "close the deal." They put their arms around the shoulders of the confused and disoriented *Sallah*, dragging him, almost against his will, up the hill and out of the transit camp into the open space of the Israeli countryside.

*Sallah's* fear of open space is even more obviously displayed through narrative construction. *Sallah* seems to lead his life in closed and sheltered locations – the transit camp and the kibbutz yard – from which he rarely leaves. The occasions in which *Sallah* leaves these enclosed spaces and crosses to a real open space – when he sets out to work in reforestation – is characterized by *Sallah's* disorientation and ends with his disappointment and retreat. At one point in the film, *Sallah* is given a job in forestry. Unwillingly, he sets out to work in the field – a forest to be. However, in contrast to the other forestry workers, immigrants like him, who seem to adjust to

their new job, Sallah seems disoriented and soon after getting fired he retreats from this open space. The last extreme long shot of the scene shows him from behind, running from the open space back to the sheltered space of the transit camp.

This breakthrough of Sallah into open space seems to have similar meaning, in early Israeli cinema, to the interim phase that Shoah survivors have to go through on their way to controlling their environment. Sallah's breakthrough does not represent a new control over space, but rather the opposite – a phase of regression in relation to the control of open space, and a decline in his ability to control it.

However, there is a sharp difference between the case of Sallah and the Shoah survivors' case. In Sallah's attempts, there is no progress. Unlike the Shoah survivors – who are soon-to-overcome their fears and gain their Hebrew subjectivity – Sallah's regression is permanent. Further emphasizing this difference between Sallah and early cinema characters are their different aspirations. While the aspiration of the pre-Hebrew figures of early Israeli cinema was to cross to the open space and control it (a quest that was usually fulfilled by the film's end), it seems that Sallah's wish – also fulfilled – is an opposite one: to move to a smaller and more sheltered space. Ultimately, Sallah wishes to replace the relatively large space of the transit camp with a small and stuffy flat in a modern housing complex.

Furthermore, in *Sallah* the kibbutz members are also presented as pre-Hebrew through their relationships with space. The kibbutz secretary and accountant are shot mainly indoors: in the kibbutz dining room, in their tiny office, in the kibbutz chicken coop, and even inside a closet. It seems that the indoor locations in which these two leaders of the kibbutz exist become more stuffy and narrower as the film goes on. This encroachment by their physical surroundings occurs just as they move further and further away from Zionist ideology, symbolized by the acts they perform in each

space. In the dining room, the widest space of them all, the two leaders conduct the kibbutz general assembly and discuss kibbutz regulations; in the chicken coop they negotiate with Sallah the purchase of his daughter – an acute digression from Zionist ideology, to say the least; and inside the closet the secretary pays Sallah for his daughter and counts the bills in Yiddish – a language connected to the pre-Hebrew Jewish diasporical subjectivity.

### ***Sallah's* Departure from a Distorted Presentation of Israeli Society's Composition and Its Adoption of a Modern versus Pre-modern Dichotomy**

Early Israeli cinema depicted Israeli society as a utopian Zionist sphere, with an absolute majority of Sabras (Israeli natives) of Ashkenazi origin, and a marginal minority of others. *Sallah*, in sharp contrast, draws a more realistic picture of a migrant society: multiethnic, multicultural, and diverse. *Sallah* presents a gallery of types totally different from the Israeli films that preceded it. There are no soldiers in *Sallah*, only a few Sabras, and most of the figures seem to be immigrants. This includes Sallah himself, his transition camp neighbors (including those who came from Europe), state officials, political party go-getters, his daughter's suitor, the kibbutz secretary, and the kibbutz accountant. Actually, except for the two young kibbutz members, Zigi and Bathsheva, all other figures in the film speak an accented Hebrew that testifies to their immigrant status, hinting at the same time their being pre-Hebrew.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the most radical change in *Sallah*, relative to early Israeli films, is the fact that for the first time in Israeli cinema a Mizrahi character takes the

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<sup>59</sup> This representation seems to follow the reality of Israeli society in the early 1960s, the time in which the film takes place. Publications of the central Israeli statistical bureau assert that in 1948 only 35% of the Israeli Jewish population were Sabras. This percentage declined throughout the 1950s, when about one million more immigrants came to Israel. (See "7.2 Million Israelim" ["7.2. Million Israelis"], *y.net*, 10.09.2007.)

lead as the hero of the film. *Sallah* thus ends a period that was characterized by exclusion of the Mizrahim from cinematic representations of Israeli society.

However, *Sallah* did not radically change the status of Mizrahim in film discourse. The film maintains and reproduces early Israeli cinema's original assertions about the marginality of Mizrahim relative to Ashkenazim. *Sallah* reproduces this hierarchy mainly by presenting Sallah and his family as pre-modern and creating a dichotomy between modern (Ashkenazim) and pre-modern (Mizrahim) figures in the film. The pre-modernity of Sallah and his family is presented through their ignorance and disorientation in the face of modern phenomena – everything from the modern flat and its accessories to the democratic party system to the kibbutz's modern distribution of labor. While visiting his future flat, Sallah seems unaware of what mailboxes are, and is amazed by the miraculous mechanism of the modern water faucets. During election day, Sallah proves his total ignorance of the democratic system when he puts the ballots of all the parties who bribed him in his voting envelope.

The film also highlights the ways that Sallah clings to a pre-modern way of life, by stressing his belief in superstitions and an extreme patriarchal worldview. Sallah consistently avoids speaking to women, bluntly ignoring their official status – which is often higher than his. He completely ignores, for example, the kibbutz accountant although she is his employer, and castigates her whenever she addresses him by reminding her that he doesn't speak to women. His attitude towards the women in his family is no better. Sallah yells at his pregnant wife that she must bring him a son this time, sits on the only armchair at home while leaving the footstool to his worn out, nursing wife, and treats his beautiful daughter, Habuba, as a valuable possession. He forbids her from meeting the poor kibbutz member Zigy, with whom

she is in love, and simultaneously bargains her price with a much older, but wealthier, taxi driver.

At the same time, and beyond the heavy irony it directs towards them, the film clearly emphasizes the modernity of its Ashkenazi Israeli figures. The kibbutz members, for example, are always connected in the film with modern instruments or environments, which metonymically imply their modernity. They are seen in a modern dining room, riding a tractor, and in a modern chicken coop. The urbanite Ashkenazi who courts Habuba, though of the lower middle class, rides a taxi, and even Sallah's old, poor Ashkenazi neighbor owns a symbol of modernity: a mechanical cuckoo clock (of which Sallah is afraid). The Ashkenazi kibbutz members are also socially more modern. They maintain a hyper-modern utopian social structure, and hold a modern attitude towards women, emphasized by the high status of the female accountant on the kibbutz, and by the (initial) refusal of the kibbutz leaders to negotiate with Sallah on his daughter's bride price ("women are not possessions," the kibbutz accountant castigates Sallah).

Furthermore, in *Sallah* different types of Ashkenazim each represent a different level of assimilation to modernity. The kibbutz members, representing Zionist Ashkenazi elites, no doubt, rank at the top of the modernity pyramid, while other Ashkenazim seem to be less modern. For example, the urbanite taxi driver<sup>60</sup> maintains a lower rung on the ladder of modernity. Sallah's Ashkenazi neighbor, who lives in a wooden hut, seems to have no profession (he earns his living from election bribery), and seems to endure a more traditional Jewish way of life (he is seen with Sallah leaving the camp's synagogue), ranks even lower in this modernity pyramid. Nevertheless, these figures are all higher on the pyramid than Sallah and his family.

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<sup>60</sup> He also declares to Habuba that he is about to start taking lessons in order to be a traditional Jewish cantor.

Apart from this cultural dichotomy, which is new in this context, the film also uses tactics that were successfully implemented by early Israeli cinema to indicate the marginality and low status of Mizrahim. Like Esther Hadasi of *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer*, Sallah has no history in the film. Although the film opens with his arrival to Israel, one never learns where he came from and why.

Moreover, one cannot deny that the film includes a remarkably wide range of Ashkenazi figures: kibbutz members from Eastern Europe; Sabras; kibbutz members; lower middle class city people (the taxi driver); bourgeoisie of Central European origins (the couple to whom Sallah tries to sell the dog); newcomers to Israel (Sallah's neighbor); and the go-getter party politicians. But this is in sharp contrast to the dearth of Mizrahi characters. Though Sallah is the main character, he and his family are the film's sole Mizrahim. Furthermore, one learns little else aside from their ethnic status: it is as if their being Mizrahim defines all their other social and personal characteristics, rendering further elaboration unnecessary.<sup>61</sup>

Hence, *Sallah* is innovative relative to early Israeli cinema in its presentation of a more realistic Israeli ethnic and cultural composition, which includes Mizrahim and other immigrants. However, the film maintains and reproduces – using some new strategies alongside the old ones used by early Israeli cinema – the low status and marginality of Mizrahim relative to Ashkenazim, and the hegemonic status of the Zionist Ashkenazi elites, represented by the Kibbutz members that were seen before in early Israeli cinema.

Finally, it should be clear by now that there is no complete ideological conformism in *Sallah*. Burstein (1990, 9-121), for example, sees the expression of this

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<sup>61</sup> It is also interesting to mention that while the actor who plays role of Sallah is an Ashkenazi (Haim Topol), Mizrahi actors are cast only in the film's less important Mizrahi roles, such as Sallah's daughter and sons (played by Geula Noni, Shaiké Levi, and Pupik Arnon).

lack of conformity in the unique facial expressions of *Sallah*'s actors. Compared to the characters in previous Israeli films, Sallah's face is dynamic. One sees his subtle, changing facial expressions, for example, during the negotiation with the kibbutz secretary and accountant regarding his daughter's value. After the kibbutz accountant makes a racist remark about Mizrahim being barbarians, Sallah opens with an angry monologue against Eurocentrism, the transit camp, and the government officials. His face in this scene is of someone who refuses to accept the verdict of others, and as Burstein writes, "on his unshaved twisted face a resentment is being shaped" (Burstein 1990, 94).

#### **IV. *Sallah*'s Reception**

The release of *Sallah* in Israel was a national event. Shohat (1989, 145) describes how Israeli ministers reacted to the film's distribution and politicians felt an urge to comment on the film. *Sallah* was seen as a socio-political satire, which portrayed the Israeli regime as pseudo-socialist and Israeli society as pseudo-ideological. As such, *Sallah* received a hostile reception by Israeli critics, which was at the time a highly political group.<sup>62</sup> The hostility was aimed especially towards the political and sociological criticism of the film and towards what critics saw as the twisted, unfair presentation of Israeli democracy and regime. The critic of the daily newspaper *Al Hamishmar*, for example, was angry about the portrayal of state institutions as corrupt.<sup>63</sup> Others were furious about the satirical presentation of the kibbutz as a non-ideological and immoral environment.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> As Shohat also mentioned, most of the daily newspapers of this era in Israel were actually owned by political parties. And those which were private felt a certain obligation to identify with a certain political party. See Shohat (1989, 149).

<sup>63</sup> Nehama Ganoth, a critic for *Al Hamishmar*, wrote: "How is the Jewish National Fund presented [in the film, r.k.]? As an organization that makes its fortune through deceit, planting forests in the name of

Compared to more recent critiques of *Sallah*, it is interesting to note that contemporary critics seemed to address the film's presentation of Mizrahi ethnic subjectivity in only a marginal way. Moreover, those critics who addressed this issue saw in *Sallah Shabati* a realistic figure who fairly represented the average Mizrahi male; the critics only complaint was that the film showed too little empathy towards this miserable creature.<sup>65</sup>

None of these critics saw in *Sallah* a film that was aiming to address a Mizrahi audience. And unlike later critics, they did not see in it a film that was selling escapism, or was a part of a propaganda effort whose aim was to oppress the Mizrahim (Ne'eman 1979, Dayan 1976, Shohat 1989, 119-179). By the late 1970s *Sallah* would be recognized as the template, and a source of cinematic and thematic inspiration, for a group of Israeli films that came to be called Bourekas films. These turned out to be the most successful group of films in the brief but tumultuous history of Israeli cinema (Gross 1998, 259).

## V. Summary and Conclusion

Seen against the background of early Israeli cinema's ideological conformism to Zionism, *Sallah* seems like a revolutionary film. A catalog of *Sallah*'s achievements make the film appear almost anarchistic: adopting a few early cinema narrative and cinematic tactics but using them subversively to undermine the Zionist ethos; severely criticizing the Zionist establishment for the first time on film; ridiculing central Zionist utopian spaces and figures, such as the kibbutz and the

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the beloved of Jews?" "And the parties? All of them – in the same bag of cheating and treachery" (Gannoth 1964).

<sup>64</sup> See Shohat (1989, 139-150).

<sup>65</sup> See Shohat (1989, 142).

Sabra; and breaking the long years of exclusion of Mizrahim from Israeli cinema, by presenting, for the first time, a leading Mizrahi character.

But although *Sallah* erodes the Zionist utopia presented by early Israeli cinema, and implies that this ideal is far from Israeli reality, the film ultimately is not anarchistic, nor is it anti-Zionist or even a-Zionist. On the contrary, *Sallah*, as will be shown in due course, was ultimately a part of the Israeli ideological state apparatus meant to reproduce and distribute Zionist elites' ideology. *Sallah's* great accomplishment, however, is that it is a herald of a new stage in Zionist discourse, which shifted slightly the desirable image of the Hebrew-Israeli. Analyzing *Sallah* against the background of early Israeli cinema emphasizes that *Sallah's* biggest shift from previous films is its digression from the dichotomy of Jewish (pre-Hebraic, diasporic) versus Hebrew, which previous films used in their portrayal of Jewish Israeli figures.

One of the central utopian aspirations of Zionism was to abolish the diasporic subjectivity of Jewish emigrants coming to Israel, and to replace it with a Hebrew subjectivity built on characteristics such as physical power, courage, manhood, and the ability to control one's surroundings – especially to control the land. Early Israeli cinema, especially films that focused on immigrants, reflected this concept and presented such Hebrew subjectivity as the identity of the Zionist Ashkenazi elite and the desirable identity of every Jewish emigrant to Israel. They also used the characters' level of assimilation into Hebrew subjectivity to portray their status in Israeli society.

*Sallah* – itself a film that focuses on an immigrant – thoroughly digresses from the utopian presentation of Hebrew subjectivity typical of early cinema. The film seems to question the very possibility of its existence as an active identity within

the borders of Israeli society of its time. Unlike previous films that dealt with immigration to Israel, *Sallah* presents its immigrant hero as a person who is at peace with his original Jewish diasporic subjectivity, which he doesn't aspire to replace.

Moreover, the film repeatedly reveals the Hebrew mask of the characters who pretend to have this new subjectivity (including characters, like the kibbutz members, who represent Zionist mythological figures), in order to discover underneath it, the old Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic subjectivity that they still hold.

*Sallah* seems to assert that Hebrew subjectivity is not the real identity of the Zionist elite in Israel, and that the Jewish diasporic subjectivity is still the only real identity of all Jewish immigrants to Israel, including the greater part of Zionist Ashkenazi elites who are immigrants themselves. This negation of Hebrew subjectivity within the Israeli sphere enables *Sallah* to avoid using the dichotomy of Jewish versus Hebrew as a tactic to portray its characters.

However, it seems that what led *Sallah* to doubt Hebrew subjectivity and avoid using this dichotomy, was not any revolutionary impulse of Ephraim Kishon (the film's writer and director), but rather his natural tendency to express his cultural identity, and to view the Zionist sphere of his time through its norms, dichotomies, and conflicts. Kishon, a non-Zionist refugee and Shoah survivor, (who immigrated to Israel from Hungary in 1949) was raised in Budapest, by Jewish parents who were well-assimilated into modern European culture, but he had grandparents that still lived in a remote provincial Jewish shtetl and spoke Yiddish (London 1993, 17). It seems that the conflict between modern diasporic Jewish subjectivity (his parents) and pre-modern diasporic Jewish subjectivity (his grandparents) was embodied in his own life

and central to the content of his Jewish cultural identity.<sup>66</sup> One can speculate, therefore, that the Jewish modern—pre-modern dichotomy in *Sallah* is a reflection of Kishon's notion of a basic conflict within a Jewish community and family.<sup>67</sup>

But *Sallah* – loaded with Kishon's negation of Hebrew subjectivity, and offering a new dichotomy of modern versus pre-modern – wouldn't have been made into a film if these elements did not match the deep interests of the Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony of the time. From the perspective of the Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony, the dichotomy of Jewish versus Hebrew was a perfect means of portrayal, as long as Israeli society was presented in a Zionist utopian way, just as it was presented by early Israeli cinema – a sphere which included very few, if any, Mizrahim. Under these circumstances, it was a cinematic rhetoric that reproduced and distributed the society's hierarchy desired by Zionist elites, emphasizing their pedigree over other groups in Israel. It stressed the supreme status of Sabras of Ashkenazi origins and veteran Zionist Ashkenazi Hebrew speakers, of which the Zionist elite was made, and subordinated non-Zionist Ashkenazi immigrants, who spoke Yiddish and were still struggling with their Jewish diasporic subjectivity, or even Zionist Ashkenazi immigrants who spoke Yiddish.

However, this cinematic rhetoric ceased to be effective when films – now commercially financed through box office returns – could no longer ignore the huge Mizrahi audience (about 40 percent of the population at the time) and were obliged to

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<sup>66</sup> Kishon testifies in his biography to the existence of this conflict in his nuclear family. His parents, he tells his biographer, forbade him to speak even one Yiddish word, since "Yiddish was the language of those other Jews with the birds, those who wear Capotes and in their language and behavior put shame on us modern Hungarians who believe in Moses" (London 1993, 17, my translation).

<sup>67</sup> In his biography Kishon describes how it was profane to speak even one word of Yiddish in the social circles of his family; he also reveals a mixture of shame and guilt that he felt towards his Yiddish-speaking grandparents (London 1993, 17, 20). On a different level this negation of the Hebrew–pre-Hebrew dichotomy in *Sallah* can be credited to the frustration of Kishon, who seemed to have problems identifying with this demand of the elites to Hebrew subjectivity (which he didn't have), and with this subjectivity being a factor in determining one's status. He also struggled with the fact that as an immigrant who spoke Hebrew with a heavy Hungarian accent, this subjectivity personally excluded and degraded him (London 1993).

give a larger place to Mizrahi characters. The problem was that shaping the Mizrahi characters in Israeli films couldn't ignore the fact that in contemporary Israeli society some of the Mizrahim were obviously more "Hebrew" than most of the new non-Zionist Ashkenazi immigrants.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, certain Mizrahim were even more advanced in their assimilation of Hebrew subjectivity than some members of the Zionist elite.<sup>69</sup> Under these new terms, a dichotomy based on assimilation to Hebrew subjectivity couldn't have reproduced the hierarchy desired by Zionist elites. On the contrary, sticking with this former dichotomy could have led to a film in which the Mizrahi figures ranked higher in the cultural hierarchy than members of the Zionist elite and Ashkenazi non-Zionist immigrants. The Eurocentric Zionist hierarchy pyramid would have been negated by such a portrayal.

As a result: a) this dichotomy had to be abolished; or b) the essence of Hebrew subjectivity had to be changed in a way that enabled Ashkenazi Zionists to be represented as more assimilated to it than Mizrahim; or c) a new dichotomy had to be invented, in order to differentiate between the various Israeli Jewish figures in a way that would reproduce the Zionist's desired status hierarchy.

*Sallah* achieves all three goals. By hinting at the fact that Hebrew subjectivity is an imaginable subjectivity that covers for a Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic subjectivity, which secretly resides underneath it, *Sallah* apparently presents Hebrew subjectivity as a phantom subjectivity.

However seen from a different perspective this same act done by *Sallah* stresses a notion which is even more desirable by the Ashkenazi Zionist elite. It

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<sup>68</sup> A group of which Kishon himself was a member of (London 1993, 171).

<sup>69</sup> As Chetrit (2004) points out, many of so called Mizrahim were Palestinian natives for generations before the arrival of the Ashkenazi Zionists (for example, the Sephardim of Jerusalem). Others emigrated to Israel before most of the Ashkenazi Zionist's came (such as part of the Yemenite Jews who came in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and at the time of the film were already Israeli natives for a few generations. An echo of this phenomenon can be found in the fact that in *Sallah*, the Hebrew of the eldest children has less accent in it than the Hebrew of the older kibbutz members.

promotes a belief that Hebrew subjectivity cannot be acquired without having a fundamental layer of Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic subjectivity underneath it, and that at its heart, Hebrew subjectivity is the natural continuation of the Ashkenazi Jewish diasporic subjectivity, and cannot be achieved by people who lack an Ashkenazi cultural background .

On top of this, *Sallah* also replaces the Jewish versus Hebrew dichotomy with a dichotomy of modern versus pre-modern. By characterizing its Jewish Israeli characters according to their level of assimilation to modernity and their relationships with it, *Sallah* reproduced the hierarchy desired by the Zionist elite. Although mocked in the film due to their camouflaged Jewish diasporic subjectivity, kibbutz members and Ashkenazi Sabras, who represents Zionist Ashkenazi elites, are presented in *Sallah* as ultra-modern,<sup>70</sup> whereas Ashkenazi immigrants are less modern, and Mizrahim, like Sallah and his family, are entirely pre-modern.

*Sallah* wasn't the first Israeli film to use the dichotomy of modern versus pre-modern. It was already in use in early Israeli cinema, but there it was used to differentiate between Jews (presented as modern) and Arabs (presented as pre-modern). The source of this dichotomy in early cinema was colonial orientalist discourse, which dictated the portrayal of the Arab as either a noble savage (as in the film *They Were Ten* [1961]), or as an oriental object, an inseparable part of the oriental landscape (as in the film *Oded the Wanderer* [1933]). However, the hero of *Sallah* seems to be only insignificantly inspired by the colonial discourse. This character, created by an author (Kishon) who seemed to embody a Jewish diasporic identity, is no noble savage, nor is he an oriental object. He is very much alive and

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<sup>70</sup> It is true indeed that a sharp and bitter irony exists towards the kibbutz members in the film, but only towards their Hebrew aspects. Despite this irony, their modernity is emphasized.

Jewish, and his portrayal<sup>71</sup> echoes the characteristics of the traditional diasporic Jew, according to prevailing anti-Semitic discourse. His pre-modernity, in other words, is a particularly Jewish one.

To summarize, the most significant elements of *Sallah* when examined against the background of early Israeli cinema are: a particular presentation of diasporic traditional pre-modern Jewish subjectivity, through the representation of a Mizrahi community; the use of a new dichotomy of modern versus pre-modern to portray its characters, and a production of the preferred Zionist status hierarchy while abolishing the old dichotomy of Hebrew versus Jewish diasporic subjectivity; and a new representation of Hebrew subjectivity requiring some elements of Ashkenazi diasporic subjectivity in order to exist.

In his study *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965), Foucault examines the demarcation that has existed in French society – from the medieval to the modern age – between the socio-psychological profile of the preferred and normal human and the profile of a person who is defined as "other" or abnormal. He shows how "others" of a particular type in a certain period (like lepers in the Middle Ages) are replaced by a different type in another period (like mad people in the modern era). He reveals how these new "others" take the place of the old others in the social structure, and adapt their social function – of marking the border between the preferable identity and the abnormal one.

It seems that *Sallah* reflects a homological process of shifting in the characteristics of "others" in the Zionist sphere: the pre-Hebrew diasporic Jew loses his position as the "other," and a new "other" begins to emerge – the pre-modern traditional Mizrahi Jew.

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<sup>71</sup> Much like the portrayal of the Yemenite immigrants in *With No Homeland* but while elaborating and widening the Jewish diasporic characteristics and emphasizing pre-modernity. See the discussion on page 39.

Considering *Sallah* as the archetype of Bourekas films, I will examine in the next chapters how this presentation of the traditional pre-modern Mizrahi Jew appears in all Bourekas films. I believe that further discussion and analysis of the particular Jewish pre-modernity of the Mizrahi community of Bourekas films will lead to the cultural origins of the Bourekas, and in turn to the key to the success of the Bourekas.

## Chapter Three: Defining Bourekas Films

### I. Review of the Critical Literature on the Bourekas

Altman, in his study on film genres (1999, 1-28), claims that American film scholars frequently do not bother to offer a generic definition for a group of films they intuitively comprehend as recognizable (for example, the Western or the musical). This tendency equally applies to Israeli studies of the Bourekas films. The assumption prevailing among scholars is that these films do in fact constitute a recognizable group, a film genre,<sup>72</sup> yet none have sought to define this group or to systematically identify what makes a film "Bourekas."

The first critiques of Bourekas films appeared in the late nineteen-seventies. Schweitzer<sup>73</sup> characterizes the "cultural environment" which produced the Israeli cinematic discourse of that time as a modern ("*modernit*") one (Schweitzer 2003, 106).<sup>74</sup> He argues that Israeli cinema critics of that time were influenced by the

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<sup>72</sup> This study, within difference, and as will be clarified in due course, do not consider Bourekas a film genre.

<sup>73</sup> Schweitzer analyzes films of that period according to Metz's (1968) and Pasolini's (1961) assertions about modern cinema of the sixties (Schweitzer 2003, 119).

<sup>74</sup> This environment consists, according to Schweitzer, of governmental institutions which supported artistic media, and critiques and products of media such as cinema, literature, theatre and the plastic arts.

European modernistic cinema of the 1960s, in which they saw a role model.

Following Schweitzer's diagnosis I will identify the group of critics that started to write on the Bourekas during the 1970s – and which includes Dayan (1976) and Ne'eman (1979), as well as their followers such as Ben Shaul (1999) and Zimmerman (2001) – as critics whose writings reflect both concepts belonging to a modern discourse on art and to modernist cinema critique.

Corresponding with this discourse,<sup>75</sup> the first group of critics who wrote on Bourekas generally involved moral judgments in their writing, emphasizing the Bourekas' "low cinematic qualities" and stressing their authors' (evil) intentions, but paying little attention to – although not completely ignoring – the ethnic aspects of the Bourekas.

The denunciations these critics offered of Bourekas films starting in the mid-1970s seem to be connected directly to the fact that they examined the Bourekas in the light of the modernist, artistic, European cinema of the 1960s, and especially through the model of the French New Wave films which they looked up to as an ideal cinematic model.

In an interview held in 1993, Ne'eman, a central critic of this group, was asked about this period and said, "We searched for a model that we would be able to identify with... we turned to the European cinema, especially to the French New Wave" (Schweitzer 2003, 52<sup>76</sup>).

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<sup>75</sup>Applying a modern approach to art criticism stresses a tendency to see works through their "objective qualities" as good or bad, right or wrong, and to involve moral judgment in the evaluation (Klages 2006, 167). A modern approach will also show a tendency to disregard any ethnic diversities reflected in the work, stressing instead all what humans share in common (Cone 1991, 44). The modernist critique of film adds to this general approach a focus on the importance of the reflexivity in film, as well as emphasis of the author-director's intentions, and how they are reflected in the film (Schweitzer 2003, 119). For example, in his article about modern cinema, "The Poetic Cinema" (1965), which was published in Hebrew translation in 1974 (*Kolnoa 1*, 1974, pp. 58-102), Pasolini stresses the importance of the reflexivity and the subjectivity of the author-director in cinema.

<sup>76</sup> All translations from Hebrew in this chapter (3) are done by me if not mentioned otherwise.

This tendency to judge the Bourekas, a group of mostly non-pretentious folk and commercial melodramas and comedies, against the French New Wave Films seems to have done harm to the Bourekas, making them look particularly unattractive.

Several problems characterize the writings of this first group of critics on the Bourekas. The first problem is that such a critical approach – having a "fixed idea" of how a film should look – is naturally normative and judgmental.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, it can cause the reviewer to overlook what the evaluated film really has to offer, apart from being a poor fit with the model it is being judged against. In the case of this first group of critics, soon the term “Bourekas” was used by them not as a descriptive term but to label any film that seemed to possess esthetic faults (Shohat 1989, 130). Many examples of a judgmental, condemning approach can be found in the writings of most of the critics belonging to this group. Nissim Dayan (1976) writes about the film *Lupo in New York* (1976), which he considers to be a Bourekas film, “*Lupo in New York* is an inferior and worthless product.” He continues, “The plot of *Lupo* is so staggering in its idiocy that you do not believe your eyes,” and “Once again the worn-out scene returns, of a Moroccan police officer who speaks in a funny accent” (1976, 55, my emphasis).<sup>78</sup>

It seems that this pioneer critic gave inspiration to others, who followed and adopted his judgmental tone. Meir Schnitzer (1993) in his comprehensive history, *The*

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<sup>77</sup> "Judgmental," according to *Webster's Dictionary*, can be defined as “Tending to make moral judgments” (1999, 1036). Here judgmental is being used as the opposite of “critical.” The judgmental approach focuses on determining whether the film is “good” or “bad,” based on a preconception of what is good, which is not connected to the film itself but usually to a certain ideology, moral code, or belief about what is right. (In the case of the modern critics, what is “right” is the European artistic cinema of the sixties, such as the films of the French New Wave.) By contrast, the critical approach will be more descriptive (“critique,” according to *Webster's*, is “to review or analyze critically,” [1999, 477]), and will ideally analyze the film through an evaluation of its genre, the cinematic and cultural discourses it is a part of, and its influences and models.

<sup>78</sup> To stress the point about the wrongs that the critical preconceptions of the modern group may have done to Bourekas films, here is the response of the journalist Shuki Galili to *Lupo in New York*: “*Lupo in New York* is one of the most wonderful children films that was ever made... even as a grown up when I saw it again I found it extremely moving” (Galili Shuki, “Lupo In New York” *Reshimot [web portal]*, 14.08.2003).

*Israeli Cinema*, writes with both judgment and irony of “a messy production of ethnic comedies that were called the Bourekas films” (16). In this same judgmental spirit, Zimmerman (2001) writes that the appearance of Bourekas films is an outcome of “a vulgarization that was made in one aspect of the Israeli commercial cinema of the mid-1960s” (391, my emphasis).

The second problem with the Bourekas critique of this first group was that such criticism seemed to involve ideological and irrelevant moral judgments. Apart from accusing the Bourekas of being works of low aesthetic esteem, critics of this group also condemned Bourekas for having low cultural, and moral, values.

Yehudah (Jad) Ne'eman, for example, accuses the Bourekas of manipulation, deceit, and facilitation of the anesthetization of the citizenry’s social criticism. In his article “Degree Zero in the Cinema,” Ne'eman (1979) attacks the producers of the Bourekas, charging that their craft is one of social manipulation and that their sole intent is to flatter their folk spectators by creating stories that belie the social reality, betray a delusional worldview, and depict a false assurance that class mobility and social climbing are fairly accessible in Israel of the time, and are plausible solutions to social and economic hardships.

One can also find a tendency in this Bourekas critique to denounce the films as a mere reflection of capitalistic ideology, while generally ignoring the Bourekas' obvious ethnic aspects.<sup>79</sup> Reflecting the modernization approach’s view of Mizrahim as a class collective,<sup>80</sup> these critics somewhat simplistically see the Bourekas through their reflection of class tensions, and the struggle between opposing social ideologies in Israel of the time. Ne'eman, for example, denigrates the Bourekas as representing a

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<sup>79</sup> Nissim Dayan is the exception in this case, as he relates briefly and metaphorically to the ethnic aspects of *Lupo in New York* and *Sallah* his article, "Return to the Ghetto Culture" (1976). I will discuss this article later on in this chapter.

<sup>80</sup> See the discussion on Mizrahim in the Introduction (Chapter 1).

diminution of true Zionist socialist values and spirit, while pointing to them as a sign of the penetration of a capitalistic atmosphere that worships "implementation" into the originally socialist Zionist arena (1979).<sup>81</sup>

Ne'eman does not claim that the Bourekas are a subversive group of films, but believes that their development as such reflects the changes in the ideology of the Zionist establishment during that time. The Bourekas' deviation from Zionism's original socialist ideology is therefore, in his eyes, evidence of the decadence of the Israeli establishment, which by the mid-1960s had abandoned true Zionist values (Ne'eman 1999, 22).

Nitsan Ben-Shaul shares this idea, saying that the Bourekas films are a prediction of the rise to power of the capitalist right wing liberal party, Ha'likud, in 1977. However, Ben-Shaul refines the judgmental tone that characterizes Ne'eman's analysis, and seems to regard the appearance of Bourekas more as a natural cultural evolution than as an indication of the ideological decadence of the Zionist establishment. He also clearly and prominently indicates that the echoes of liberal values and capitalistic ideology in the Bourekas are only part of a larger phenomenon that characterizes Israeli cinema of the time (Ben-Shaul 1999).

This first group of critics' criticism of the Bourekas also shares an ambiguity and inconsistency as to what characteristics define the Bourekas as a group of films. Ne'eman (1979), for example, describes the Bourekas as films which intend to flatter their folk spectators by creating stories that depict a false assurance that class mobility and social mobility via marriage is possible in Israel, but then includes in his

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<sup>81</sup> In a more recent article, Ne'eman (1999) repeats this idea, although he refines it by saying that Bourekas films are *part* of a phenomenon that expressed the "destabilization of the utopist belief of Zionism" (1999, 19).

Bourekas corpus the film *Snooker*,<sup>82</sup> in which there is no social mobility via marriage, since the marriage of the hero is to a girl from his own neighborhood.

Another strand of ambiguity extends throughout the commentary of Nitsan Ben-Shaul. Ben-Shaul suggests a definition of Bourekas films, which apart from being judgmental and denigrating, appears to leave out Bourekas films that aren't comedies (like *Fortuna*, 1964), and also includes a wide range of other films. The Bourekas films, says Ben-Shaul, "look for genre formulas (and in general, Hollywood formulas) that within a predictable plot construction contrast a limited number of locations, comic situations and stereotypes (poor/rich, man/woman, Mizrahi/Ashkenazi) that chase each other until all ends well. At that point, all the conflicts – economic, sexual, and ethnic – are laid to rest" (Ben-Shaul 1999, 130, my emphasis). It appears that Ben-Shaul immediately realized the potential for error of his generalization. In the same article, he includes Boaz Davidson's *Hetsi-Hetsi* in his Bourekas film corpus, a film that no critic defines as Bourekas due to its thematic and aesthetic opposition to the Bourekas (see Shiran 1978).

The denouncing reproach that these critics have shown toward Bourekas films seems to prevent them from fully explaining the appeal of these films to the Israeli audience. How did this group of films succeed if it is so uniformly awful? Ne'eman (1979) does deal with the drawing power of the Bourekas to the Israeli audience. He claims that the success of Bourekas films draws from the same source as their artistic and moral weaknesses do. According to Ne'eman, the attraction results from the Bourekas' effective manipulation of the mass viewer's feelings. He claims that in the Bourekas the author manages to sell Mizrahi viewers a picture of the world, composed in a fraudulent and deceptive manner that suggests an immediate solution

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<sup>82</sup> Films are cited in the text by name alone. Their full details can be found in the Bibliography.

to their social and economic distress – social mobility via intermarriage – and convinces viewers that this is indeed achievable.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, there are at least two problems with this explanation for the Bourekas' success:

1. To accept Ne'eman's explanation for the success of the Bourekas, one needs to believe that the Mizrahi audience was, at best, naïve and susceptible to persuasion. Recent research, however, suggests that a significant portion of Mizrahim were highly politically aware during this period and not persuaded by attempts within the Zionist discourse to present the Israeli reality as egalitarian and socially fluid. According to Chetrit (2004, 72-160), for example, Mizrahim, starting in the early 1950s, conducted a political struggle against what they saw as their oppression. This struggle reached its peak during the 1970s, the height of the Bourekas, with the organized protest of the Mizrahi folk movement known as Ha'panterim Ha'sshorim (the Black Panthers).<sup>84</sup>
2. Not all of the audiences of the Bourekas were Mizrahim. Bourekas films attracted audiences that were "ethnically diverse" (Gross 1991, 259). A question must then be asked: if the false promise of full assimilation of the Mizrahim into Israeli society was indeed the drawing power of the Bourekas, what attracted the Ashkenazim to the Bourekas?

A slightly different explanation for the Bourekas' success is given by Gross (1991, 258-259). He suggests that the fact that these films supply encouragement to the "faltering layers" of society is not the real magnet which attracts audiences, but

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<sup>83</sup> Ben-Shaul holds a similar position (1999, 128-135).

<sup>84</sup> The Israeli Panterim Ha'sshorim (Black Panther) movement of the 1970s highlighted the discrimination and oppression suffered by Mizrahim in Israel. Since it was a movement that started in the poor Mizrahi neighborhoods of Jerusalem, by uneducated youngsters (Chetrit 2004, 142-143), it indicates that the Mizrahi masses were not persuaded by attempts within the Zionist discourse to represent Israeli reality as egalitarian and socially fluid. See also the discussion of Mizrahim in the Introduction.

rather the attraction is the "folklorist magic... the folk humor, the typical figures, the closing traditions, the food, the prayer, and also the goodness and folk wisdom" (259).

However, what Gross ignores is the fact that the Bourekas audience was assembled from at least two distinct ethnic groups, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, each with different traditions and cultures. Hence, two questions may be asked: whose group's folklore is presented in the Bourekas? And why was it attractive to spectators belonging to the other group? At the same time, Gross' explanation brings into context the relevance of Jewish traditional culture for the Bourekas, a point that will be crucial to our coming discussion on these films.

In spite of the above, modern critics created the foundations of research on the Bourekas, and thus have shaped our initial understanding of this group of films. Their work seems to possess at least two main accomplishments. First, they pointed out the uniqueness of Bourekas in the history of Israeli cinema, and argued for their thematic and aesthetic deviation from the two groups of films that preceded them – the national heroic genre and the bourgeois comedy. Second, they pointed to a link between Bourekas themes and the Zionist ideological arena, viewing the Bourekas as a reflection of its decadence.

The second approach to the Bourekas reflects post-colonial critical discourse, and sees Bourekas films as "texts which echo colonialist stands originally created to justify relationships between the first world and the third world, and which were reproduced within the Zionist discourse to explain the relationships between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim" (Shohat 1989, 120).

Critics whose work employs post-colonial theories, such as Shohat (1989, 119-179), Lubin (1999), and Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi (2002, 288-305),<sup>85</sup> treat Bourekas films with critical seriousness. However, although emphasizing the demeaning orientalist representation of Mizrahi neighborhoods as a feature that all Bourekas share, this approach has not suggested a clear definition of a Bourekas film nor a Bourekas film corpus.

Several features distinguish this approach from the previous one. Post-colonial critique of the Bourekas seems free of value or moral judgments; adopting a view which sees in the Mizrahim an ethnic group (as presented in the Introduction), it stresses the ethnic aspect of the Bourekas instead of class struggle, and it comprehends the Bourekas as echoing the official Zionist ideology, which it regards as both Eurocentric and orientalist.

Shohat's book, *The Israeli Cinema: History and Ideology* (1989), raises some perceptive new points on Bourekas. In contrast to Ne'eman and Ben-Shaul's position, Shohat sees the Bourekas as recapitulating and echoing the *original* Zionist ideology. The Bourekas, she claims, like Zionist narratives, use orientalist discourse to define anew the Mizrahi (non-European) Israelis as inferior to the Ashkenazi (European) Israelis.

In other words, instead of seeing the Bourekas as the first group of critics does – as a discursive tool encouraging social escapism,<sup>86</sup> which seeks to convince viewers that the socioeconomic gap between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim is temporary and subject to change – Shohat sees the Bourekas as orientalist films, with the essential mission to convince the viewers of the inherent ethnic inferiority of the Mizrahim.

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<sup>85</sup> In this book's last article, written by the The Van Leer Institute Forum for Culture and Society Studies in Israel, entitled "Mechanism for Producing Canonical Knowledge about the Mizrahim in Israel" (2002, 288-305).

<sup>86</sup> "Candies for the masses," in Schnitzer's words (1993, 17).

A similar view is echoed in Chetrit (2004), who sees the Bourekas as films of orientalist Zionist propaganda for Mizrahim, which intend to persuade the Mizrahim that they are to blame for their low socioeconomic status in Israel. For Chetrit, Bourekas are "films in which the Mizrahi figures are going from blindness to light thanks to their Ashkenazi brothers" (2004, 134).

Other scholars from this group, Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi, present a slightly different view. They see Bourekas films as texts shaped by the "modernization approach,"<sup>87</sup> which regards Mizrahim as a pre-modern ethnic group that should be modernized by the state and through contacts with Ashkenazim. The Mizrahim, they claim, are viewed through a metaphor of a family. The assertion is that while the first generation of Mizrahi immigrants, the parents, will never achieve modernity, the second generation, their children, will reach modernity through the new knowledge they acquire, and will finally become a part of the homogenous, modern public of Israel.

Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi claim that this concept is cinematically realized through Bourekas films' family narratives, and show that in Bourekas films, such as *Sallah* (1964) and *Fortuna* (1966), the remoteness of the young Mizrahi figures from their parents' "old fashioned traditions" is a precondition to their assimilation into Israeli society. Intermarriage in Bourekas films, according to Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi, is also a powerful instrument in the assimilation process of the younger generation. *Sallah* does not understand Israel, but his children will, after marrying Ashkenazim from the kibbutz (Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi 2002, 301).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> A discourse adopted by state institutions as an ideological/academic rationale for political action in the socioeconomic arena, and which was used intensively from 1950 to 1970 (see also the discussion of Mizrahim in the Introduction).

<sup>88</sup> The emphasis on intermarriage as a solution to the main conflict of the films' Mizrahi figures in Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi's analysis, seems to echo writings of the previous group of critics. Indeed, common to both analyses is the assumption that the Bourekas express elite Zionist ideology

Lubin (2001, 178) also sees an echo of Zionist ideology in Bourekas films, but seems to think that more relevant than the “modernization approach” to the Bourekas is their resonance with the "negation of exile,” which refers to the Zionist discourse’s rejection of all that is considered pre-Zionist and "exilic," in Israeli culture. Lubin claims that all representations of Mizrahim in Israeli cinema (including the Bourekas) are shaped to echo the Zionist demand for all new immigrants to deny their previous, exile-based cultures in order to assimilate into a new Israeli society. The Mizrahim represented in Israeli cinema repeat, through their journey towards modernity, the master Zionist narrative of exile and redemption.

Shohat is the only scholar of this group who attempts to seriously describe the Bourekas as a film group. However, despite the tremendous significance of her work in this context, it still leaves several issues unresolved. First, perhaps because of the diachronic approach of her study, Shohat does not offer a Bourekas film corpus, nor does she clearly define the Bourekas cinematically as a film group.

An example of Shohat's ambiguous comprehension of Bourekas can be found in a relatively late article (1999) of hers on the subject. There, soon after she formulates a kind of generic definition that excludes Bourekas non-comic films,<sup>89</sup> she presents the film *Fortuna* (1964), a non-comic melodrama, as an archetype of Bourekas films (1999, 52). One may conclude from this that Shohat sees the Bourekas as a kind of hybrid film genre, which combines elements from melodrama and

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and that it’s a kind of ideological state apparatus (see Chapter 2). However, while modern critics view what they see as the Bourekas’ false presentation of Israeli reality as a sign of the ideological decadence of the Zionist elite, and as testimony to the diminution of true Zionist values by the Zionist establishment, Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi see the Bourekas as an implementation of the Zionist elite's values of the time. They see these films as an apparatus that serves to reproduce and distribute these values.

<sup>89</sup> Shohat’s definition is as follows: "It is possible to see the Bourekas comic films from the sixties and seventies as allegories about the tension – as well as the reconciliation – between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim” (1999, 52).

comedy, or as a “cycle” occurring during a particular period in Israeli film history. Nevertheless, Shohat does not clarify this issue.

Another difficulty with Shohat's approach to the Bourekas is her insistence that these films serve as pro-European, orientalist propaganda in general, and contain a defamation against Mizrahi Israeli culture in particular. This argument presents Bourekas' popularity among Mizrahi viewers as inexplicable: why would Mizrahim adore films which present them reductively?

Shohat answers this by suggesting that Mizrahim viewers were entranced by the carnival-like depiction of regular life and authority figures in the Bourekas. However, it appears that by accepting this explanation for the success of the Bourekas among Mizrahi viewers, one must believe that the Mizrahim watched these films selectively, seeing only this aspect and ignoring the degrading ones. Shohat does not explain this paradox.

To summarize this review of critical literature on the Bourekas, previous critics from both groups laid down the foundations for Bourekas research. Their main contribution to its development was their suggestion that a particular presentation of the Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family is essential to a Bourekas film. Nevertheless, none of these critics supplied a definitive corpus of Bourekas films, nor did they successfully explain the enormous popularity and commercial success of Bourekas films in Israel.

However, before moving on, I would like to emphasize the unique contribution to the Bourekas research made by Dayan, from the first group of critics, in his article "Return to the Ghetto Culture" (1976), which has importance in shaping this dissertation's approach to the Bourekas. In this article Dayan compares the comedies *Kunilemel in Tel Aviv* (1976) and *Lupo in New York* (1976). Although

Dayan (like other critics<sup>90</sup>) considers *Lupo in New York* to be a Bourekas film, he indicates that both films have mutual sources in the traditional Yiddish theater. In the same article Dayan claims that *Sallah* (1964), like *Lupo in New York* and *Kunilemel in Tel Aviv*, has its source in Eastern European Jewish culture (what he calls the "ghetto culture of Eastern Europe") and hints to the fact that other Bourekas films have the same sources (1976, 54). Dayan also indicates that both the main actors (1976, 56) as well as the directors of the Bourekas films are usually of Ashkenazi origins (1976, 54).

Although all this is remarked upon only briefly within a broader discussion of *Kunilemel in Tel Aviv* and *Lupo in New York*, and is poorly supported by Dayan's evidence, explanations, and examples, to me these remarks indicate the proper direction that Bourekas research should have taken – and indeed the direction that has been taken by this dissertation, as will be clarified in due course.

In the coming section, by relying on perceptions shaped by previous research but using them more consistently, the study will offer a full rendering of the cycle of Bourekas films, and a thematic analysis of this corpus. Such an effort will move us towards a comprehensive definition of a Bourekas film and a valid explanation for the Bourekas' success.

## II. A Bourekas Corpus

The Bourekas film group is comprised of comedies, melodramas (*Fortuna*) and musical films (*Kazablan*); accordingly, this group can hardly be approached as a film genre (Altman 1999, 1-28). However, the fact that the Bourekas offer new themes and a particular new representation of a Mizrahi community, which reflects the ideological and political discourse of their time, and which is shared by all of the

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<sup>90</sup> Shohat calls it "Ashkenazi Bourekas" (1989, 121).

group's films, renders the Bourekas as a film cycle. The proposed corpus of this Bourekas film cycle includes only films that focus on the particular presentation of a Mizrahi neighborhood, community, or family. All of these are films that have been indicated as Bourekas films by previous critics.

Critics from both schools claim that Bourekas films lost their social function starting the middle of the 1970s, and particularly after 1977, when the Likud Party came to power (Ne'eman 1999, Ben-Shaul 1999, Shohat 1989). As a result, I have selected 1977 as the last year for the Bourekas film cycle. 11 films were selected in all, released between *Sallah* in 1964 and 1977. The study offers the following corpus (the film's title is followed by its director and its year of release):

*Sallah (Sallah Shabati)* / Ephraim Kishon, 1964

*Fortuna* / Menachen Golan, 1966

*Aliza Mizrahi* / Menachem Golan, 1967

*Katz and Karasso (Katz ve Karasso)* / Menachem Golan, 1971

*Kazablan* / Menachem Golan, 1973

*Slomoniko* / Alfred Seinhardt, 1972

*Charlie and a Half (Charlie Vahetzi)* / Boaz Davidson, 1974

*Snooker* / Boaz Davidson, 1975

*Rabbi Gamliel (Hacham Gamliel)* / Yoel Zilberberg, 1975

*You Can Work It Out, Slomoniko (Yih'ye Tov Slomoniko)* / Alfred Steinhardt, 1975

*The Tsan'ani Family (Mishpahat Tsan'ani)* / Boaz Davidson, 1976

As indicated, all of the above films have been mentioned by other critics as Bourekas films. Moreover, a substantial group within the corpus contains films that critics see as "Bourekas classics" – films that they believe serve as templates for other

Bourekas films in their respective eras, or best demonstrate the group's essential characteristics. These include:

- *Sallah (Sallah Shabati)* (1964), which Ne'eman (1979), Shnizer (1994), and Dayan (1976) regard as the Bourekas archetype.
- *Fortuna* (1966), which Shohat (1999) describes as a Bourekas archetype because it is full of orientalist motifs.
- *Katz and Karasso (Katz ve Karasso)* (1971), which according to Ne'eman best demonstrates the "social escapism" that he says serves as a central motif for the Bourekas (1979, 21).
- *Kazablan* (1973), Golan's "Mizrahi Rhapsody," which is also seen as a model heavily imitated by later Bourekas films (Shnizer 1993, 17).

In addition, *Charlie and a Half (Charlie Vahetzi)* (1974), *Snooker* (1975), and *The Tsan'ani Family (Mishpahat Tsan'ani)* (1976), are three Bourekas films by Boaz Davidson, whom critics consider the prime Bourekas director (Shohat 1989, Dayan 1976). Davidson apparently coined the term "Bourekas," and he is the one creator to refrain from defending the group against critical attacks (see Shiran 1978, interview with Davidson).

### **III. Thematic Analysis of the Particular Representation of Mizrahim in the Bourekas Corpus**

The Bourekas' most elusive innovation, which is also a feature all critics agree that Bourekas films share, is the particular presentation of the Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family. As a result, it is only natural to search for the thematic characteristics of these films through an analysis of this particular presentation. The coming section will analyze the presentation of Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family in the films of the offered corpus.

## **Alienation and Detachment of the Mizrahi Community and Neighborhood from the Governing Authorities**

Bourekas films portray the Mizrahi neighborhood as a place in which the authorities scarcely appear. Although most of the neighborhoods in these films are inhabited by school children, there are no schools visible in the neighborhood; though the residents are obviously impoverished, there are rarely social workers or welfare agencies around.<sup>91</sup> The detachment of the neighborhood from the authorities also expresses itself in the fact that no one in the neighborhood is employed by the government, which means that no one receives wages from the authorities.<sup>92</sup> The neighborhood in these films is depicted by the cinematic author (the director) as a world of its own, neglected by the authorities and alienated from them.<sup>93</sup>

In the Bourekas, the absence of the police from the Mizrahi neighborhood is especially apparent when we consider the level of crime these films ascribe to the Mizrahi neighborhood. This absence is accentuated by the fact that the neighborhood is largely composed of marginalized and unemployed characters who are on the verge of crime. Under the circumstances, it would make sense for the police to roam the

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<sup>91</sup> Actually, only in *Sallah* does a social worker appear, but this is a kibbutz member who volunteered for this job and is not connected to authorities.

<sup>92</sup> It seems that there are three exceptions to this rule in the Bourekas corpus: *Aliza Mizrahi*, *Fortuna* and *Slomoniko*. But this is only at first glance, since in these films the alienation and the rift between the government as an employer and the Mizrahim stayed the same in only in principal. In *Aliza Mizrahi* the heroine indeed works at a police station. However, Aliza (Edna Fliedel) isn't exactly a police officer (she's the cleaning lady). The study will detail later in this section the manner by which the film accentuates her exclusion and alienation within the establishment and the immediate and natural conflict between her and the policemen (the Ashkenazim). In *Fortuna* the men in the Mizrahi family presented do work in Yam Hamelach Industries (which belonged to the government then), but the rift between the Mizrahi figures and their factory management turns into a real conflict which ends in a long strike. In *Slomoniko*, the hero's (Reuvebn Yotam) governmental place of work – the port in Tel Aviv – is shut down and the hero is fired. Slomoniko himself soon thereafter resigns from his new and depressing governmental working place (the Ashdod port).

<sup>93</sup> Support for the fact that this might be a theatrical characteristic of Bourekas can be gleaned from Shohat, who suggests that the carnival-like portrayal of the elite's representatives in Bourekas films and the alienation of the main characters from them is one of the main appeals the Bourekas films have for the Mizrahi audience (1989, 136).

neighborhood day and night. But actually, and this may seem a little puzzling, the absence of the police is one of the fundamental characteristics of these films.

In *Sallah*, policemen appear only outside of the neighborhood, or as a force that threatens its very existence. In one scene, for example, a policeman is seen guarding the election committee building, whose stone bricks testify to its location outside of the transit camp (the Mizrahi “neighborhood” of this film).<sup>94</sup> The other occasion in the film where policemen appear – this time inside the camp – is when coming to forcefully evacuate the camp’s inhabitants. It is meaningful, in this context, that the police’s only appearance inside the camp marks the end of the latter as a living space for the Mizrahi community.

In *Charlie and a Half*, despite the outright criminal activity of Sasson (Zeev Revach) and his large and faithful bodyguard Gdalya, the police don't appear. It seems as though the police are virtually non-existent as far as the characters are concerned, given that no one even mentions them. The police do actually appear once, but the fact that they appear in the center of town while Charlie (Yehuda Barkan) and Miko “work” (i.e., engage in criminal activity) only stresses the law's neglect of the neighborhood.

In *Snooker*, as well, the daily routine of the leading characters (Gabriel and Hanukkah) includes gambling, fraud, and petty crime, but the police are still absent. Here, too, as in *Sallah* the appearance of policemen outside the neighborhood serves to highlight their absence within it. However, their appearance is somewhat grotesque: we see the policemen at a bank, in the center of town. There, they exhibit great admiration for Salvador (Yosef Shiloah), a former Israeli criminal who became an all-powerful American gangster.

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<sup>94</sup> Since in the transit camp (Ma'abara) there seem to be only wooden huts and tin shacks.

In *Slomoniko* too, the cinematic author depicts a scene in which the police are absent despite the fact that circumstances demand their presence. Though the wife of Slomoniko (the protagonist, Reuven Yotam) explains that the escalating level of crime is the reason for leaving the neighborhood, there are still no policemen in sight. Here too, it seems as though the police are virtually nonexistent in the hero's mind. Slomoniko, who stands against the crooks and felons that threaten his family, considers his solitary struggle against them to be natural.

The disconnection between the neighborhood's inhabitants and the authorities is underlined by the scarcity of their encounters inside the neighborhood sphere. When the authorities' agents do finally appear in the neighborhoods, their alienation and estrangement is very apparent. In *Sallah*, for example, the only time a government official appears inside the transition camp he is being escorted by policemen who protect him from the hostile population. In *Kazablan*, when the lone municipality clerk comes to the neighborhood to prepare the papers for the destruction of the residents' houses, the residents unite against him.

The rift between the Mizrahi public and the authorities in the Bourekas is also emphasized by the portrayal of the authorities' representatives as incompetent and inefficient when interacting with members of the Mizrahi community. In *Sallah*, for example, government officials seem quite helpless as they witness Sallah's lack of professionalism and proud idleness; and the housing ministry clerk seems at a loss when facing the strike that Sallah organizes ("No housing complex! We want the transit camp") against the evacuation of the transit camp's residents.

In *Aliza Mizrahi* the alienation between the female protagonist, a member of the Mizrahi community, and the authorities is depicted by way of emphasizing the differences in the level of competitiveness. The policemen at the station in which

Aliza works are depicted as a bunch of infantile and impotent individuals, whereas Aliza is portrayed as an assertive and manipulative woman, who proves to be more competent as a police officer than the real policemen.

The hostility between the Mizrahi inhabitants of the neighborhood and the authorities leads to an implicit contest between the two sectors. In this struggle, the members of the Mizrahi community are usually the ones who have the last word. Time and again, the authority's officials are tricked by the Mizrahi residents of the neighborhood. In *Sallah*, for example, the housing ministry clerk is fooled by a simple trick that Sallah plays on him and gives Sallah a house. In *Katz and Karasso*, Karasso's son manages to fool Mr. Israeli, a corrupt government official with an excessive sexual appetite: Karasso's son gets the contract from him by taking advantage of his weaknesses and making the most of his dubious character.

### **Ruthless Competition as a Way of Life: The War of All Against All**

The competitive atmosphere is, indeed, an important characteristic of the Mizrahi community's representation in the Bourekas.<sup>95</sup> Though the competitiveness is not exclusively attributed to the Mizrahi characters it is perceived to be one of the key characteristics of this sector, and is a central theme in these films. Unlike the notion implied by earlier critics of the Bourekas films, competition in them isn't limited to a struggle over sources of income and over socio-economic status. The competition is

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<sup>95</sup> We can glean support for this idea from previous critiques: Ne'eman suggests that the Bourekas films present a competitive, capitalistic world that renounces the pseudo-socialistic rhetoric of the elites (Ne'eman 1979, 21). Ben-Shaul develops the idea of competition and formulates the role it plays in the Bourekas when characterizing the Bourekas thematically as dealing with "competitive oppositions between ethnic, class oriented and generational collectives," a theme which is illustrated in the plot by the characters "chasing each other around" (Ben-Shaul 1999, 129).

not only between sectors, classes, or collectives, as it has a more profound meaning in these films: it is competition as a way of life.

The Bourekas recreate a crowded and confined world that seems to offer only limited sources of income. The struggle for survival forces the residents to partake in a ruthless competition over anything that represents affluence, or could produce affluence: money, power, women, men, snooker, cleverness, knowledge, beauty, masculinity, and the talent of manipulating others. These elements are recurrent themes of the competitions presented in the Bourekas films.

In *Katz and Karasso* and *The Tsan'ani Family*, for example, the competition which appears in the film is, indeed, a way of life. This vicious competition surpasses financial boundaries and is clearly much more than a business competition.

In *Katz and Karasso* both family businesses pursue the same insurance deal (insuring the Port of Eilat), which suggests that the opportunities in the business world are limited. Survival demands that the characters engage in an ongoing and ruthless competition which goes against the rules of the game and confuses boundaries between the business and family spheres, as the film shows. In *The Tsan'ani Family*, the financial competition between the Tsan'ani's and the Na'im's shoe shops involves a sexual angle that intensifies the competition. Both Israel Ben-Na'im (Yosef Shiloah) and Tsion Tsan'ani (Gabi Amrani) woo the pretty neighbor (Geula Noni). In both films, the competitive atmosphere is reinforced by an overcrowded and people-laden geographical area. In *The Tsan'ani Family*, the two shoe shops are positioned side by side, and in *Katz and Karasso* the insurance offices of both patriarchs face one another.

The financial and materialistic competition turns into a fierce obsession in *You Can Work It Out, Slomoniko*. It poisons Slomoniko's family life and has a damaging

influence on the sons' relations with their father. The sons are too preoccupied with the competition to notice their father's situation, to see that he is wasting away in his loneliness, devoid of care and dignity.

In some of the films, the conflict which is usually associated with matchmaking or seeking a mate is represented as a competitive urge. This is apparent when two characters compete over the same character, or when one character attempts to improve his or her financial standing through the union of marriage. In *Sallah*, the association between financial competition and matchmaking is quite obvious. Sallah, whose main incentive is the hope of improving his financial situation, tries to sell a stray dog to a bourgeois couple. After failing in this attempt, he proceeds with a second attempt: he tries to sell his daughter to the kibbutz for a hefty sum of money.

In *Fortuna*, there is a clear example of the second kind of conflict. In this film, there is a competition over Fortuna (Ahuva Gorn), a beautiful young girl from Dimona. The rivalry is between Simon, an old man from Marseille to whom Fortuna was promised by her father, and Pierre, a French engineer who came to work in the Dead Sea industries and fell in love with Fortuna. As in *Katz and Karasso* and *The Tsan'ani Family*, here too, the atmosphere of competition becomes more condensed by adding additional elements to the rivalry. As Shohat points out, the cinematic author presents the two men competing over Fortuna as symbols of an eastern culture (Simon) and a western culture (Pierre), according to the Eurocentric conventions. This enhances the atmosphere of competition and symbolically implies a competition between these two cultures (over domination, affluence, etc.).

*Rabbi Gamliel* presents a similar story of competition. In this film, the Ashkenazi engineer Uzi (Dov Freedman, perhaps the Israeli equivalent of the French engineer, Pierre, from *Fortuna*) faces a dilemma. Two women are competing over his

affections. On the one hand, there is the gentle, silent, and sensual Mizrahi woman, Dina (Aviva Gar), and on the other hand, the aggressive, vulgar, yet educated and rich Ashkenazi woman, Ilana (Miri Aloni). The symbolic dimension can be found here too and adds to the competitive atmosphere (this is also a competition between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim). However, in *Fortuna* the competition between East and West is unresolved and ends with Fortuna's death, while in *Rabbi Gamliel* there is a classic rosy Bourekas ending: the engineer chooses Dina, the Mizrahi woman.

In *Snooker*, the competition over the woman is supported by another sphere of competition, which in this case is a competition over an inheritance. The competition over the inheritance is between the twins, Azriel and Gabriel, while the rivalry over Yona (Nitza Shaul), the rabbi's daughter, is between Mushon (Tuvia Tzafir) and Azriel (Yehuda Barkan), Gabriel's shy brother (also Yehuda Barkan). The cinematic author's tendency to construct these smaller units within the cinematic progression (the scenes) according to conflict, solidifies and enhances the competitive atmosphere. This is illustrated at various points in the film. First, one of the most famous scenes in *Snooker* revolves around a competition between Mushon and Gabriel, who are tested on their knowledge of the Jewish scriptures. Second, Charlie and Salvador's famous snooker game also places competition at the film's center. Finally, the fact that Gabriel and Azriel swap identities while courting the rabbi's daughter turns the sequence into one dramatic unit that has at its core a contest between the two brothers over courting skills and masculinity.<sup>96</sup>

*Charlie and a Half* seems to be the film in which Davidson brings the "all against all war" motif to its peak. The strong competitive atmosphere is created by a

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<sup>96</sup> One might be tempted to claim that *Snooker* has the most developed motif of competition, yet it lacks another dimension of competition that is present in other films: the metonymic dimension. In contradiction to Ne'eman's statement regarding the socially manipulative role of the Bourekas and its ethnic context, in *Snooker* there seem to be no Ashkenazim. All the characters are Mizrahim and so the competition stays within the Mizrahi community.

blend of different kinds of competitions that are combined together on different levels of the film. First, there is the traditional competition over a woman – Gila Zohar (Haia Katzir), a beautiful and rich Ashkenazi woman whose father is an importer and exporter. The rivalry over her is between Charlie, a charismatic, charming, and libidinal young man who is poor, Mizrahi, and involved in petty crime and gambling, and Robert, a fat, ugly, and asexual American geek who is cultured, rich, and has a musical education (he's a cellist). This competition is (as is the case in some other films) metonymic to the competition over money, prestige, and financial status. Since Charlie is so poor and ignorant, this second competition is especially crucial: it is the only way Charlie can attach himself to affluence. As in other films, this competition is also metonymic of the implicit competition between the Ashkenazi (Robert) and Mizrahi (Charlie) sectors.

At the same time, there is yet another sphere of competition in the Mizrahi neighborhood depicted in the film. There is a competition between Sasson and Charlie, a fight over the control of the petty crime in the neighborhood and a contest over their manhood. Hence, Sasson and Charlie participate in a car race and put their masculine charms to the test: while Charlie is wooing Gila, Sasson is wooing Lily (Geula Noni), the neighborhood beauty. However, Sasson is jealous of Charlie's unexpected success with Gila.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, there is a secret competition over Charlie's attention between Charlie's "half,"<sup>98</sup> Miko, and Gila Zohar. This competition ends with Gila's triumph, since Miko must leave the country for America as tears roll down his cheeks.

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<sup>97</sup> While Sasson and Gedalia are chasing Charlie in the car, he turns to Gedalia and says: "He [Charlie] gets all the girls."

<sup>98</sup> This signifier apparently refers to the fact that Miko, Charlie's child friend, is half his age and half his size.

The competitive phenomenon appears and reappears in the smaller units of the film, which revolve around it. In one scene, Miko competes with a couple that has come to purchase the same car he intends to buy and rudely chases them away. The sequence of the families' joint dinner is based on yet another competitive opposition: there is a competition between Charlie's and Gila's families over the bride's (Gila's) affection. The two families believe that Gila, who is going to marry Charlie, will have to decide whether to join Charlie's family or to stay with her own family. Throughout the joint dinner, both families try to present the other family in an unflattering, ridiculous light, in an attempt to influence her decision. This angle shows that the teasing and judgmental atmosphere, which persists throughout the evening, is actually the result of the competition between the two families.

### **The Low Level of Configuration of the Mizrahi Neighborhood's Ontological Space: The Mizrahi Neighborhood as a Slum**

In Bourekas films, the Mizrahi neighborhood is portrayed as an entity that suffers from neglect and a low level of configuration.<sup>99</sup> Sarcastic and judgmental remarks by critics indicate that they are displeased with the way the Bourekas present the ontological space of the Mizrahi neighborhood. Jad Ne'eman writes: "The reality [in the Bourekas] is captured in its crudest form" (1979, 20).

Shohat remarks that the shooting locations in the Bourekas films were, in fact, poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Shohat 1989, 135). And Dayan claims that the Mizrahi neighborhood looks like an exilic Jewish "ghetto" (Dayan 1976, 56). Since manipulation of space is a fundamental feature of the cinematic language (*supra*, Method of Cinematic Analysis), it could be difficult to distinguish between the space

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<sup>99</sup> "Configuration" in this context refers to the level of cultural (mainly material culture) and social organization of the neighborhood and community. It is a term that indicates the amount of energy invested in the surroundings beyond the most basic functional level.

as such (i.e., the locations chosen and the set built) and the cinematic treatment of this chosen space. It seems as though previous critics disregard the difference between the neighborhood as is (as a shooting location) and its metonymic presentation by the cinematic sequence. The critics seem to be responding only to the Mizrahi neighborhood's low level of configuration as a shooting location. Although this dissertation will not always distinguish between the two levels mentioned, while discussing the metonymic presentation of the Mizrahi neighborhood in Bourekas films, it will dedicate a special chapter to the method by which Bourekas films' cinematic authors intensify certain effects of the low level of configuration via their cinematic rhetoric.

As the Mizrahi neighborhood is portrayed as a hybrid rural and urban entity, it is worth noting that the neglect and the low level of configuration are present on both the urban and rural sides.

In *Sallah*, the cinematic presentation of the Maabara (Hebrew for “transit camp”) as both a rural and urban entity is especially apparent. On the one hand, the Maabara is near a kibbutz, which gives the impression that it is situated in the countryside. On the other hand, the technique by which the cinematic author designs the ontological space emphasizes the density of the buildings and the lack of open spaces, which seems to suggest an urban slum. The contrasting analogy, between the Maabara's cinematic presentation and the kibbutz's presentation, clarifies the kind of effect the low level of configuration has on the Maabara. The kibbutz is filmed using extreme long shots<sup>100</sup> and the structures in the composition are sparse. This emphasizes the spaciousness and greenery of the rural area,<sup>101</sup> as well as the high

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<sup>100</sup> “Extreme long shots” refer to filming with a very wide angle lens, a technique which is used especially for capturing landscapes.

<sup>101</sup> This impression also serves the humor of the film. In one of the scenes, *Sallah* and the kibbutz's secretary walk into a closet, in order to change money. The closet is placed in the center of an open

level of configuration in this space. The Maabara, on the other hand, is filmed with "closed" dense shots, which leave no room for nature in the margins or the depth of the composition. This design of the space emphasizes the urban nature of the Maabara and points to the underdevelopment, neglect, and low level of configuration of the space.

The streets of the Maabara aren't paved and the inhabitants live in wooden huts and sheds,<sup>102</sup> which are filmed from angles that accentuate how the structures are on top of each other and crowding the street. By these means, the cinematic author stresses the high density, the impoverishment, and the rundown state of the urban facilities.

In a manner that emphasizes both the hybrid nature of the Maabara and intensifies the atmosphere of neglect, animals wander the streets: there are chickens around, and even one white goat. The goat's presence is emphasized by its attachment to one of the Maabara's residents, who strokes it and treats it as one would treat a pet. But this rustic atmosphere and the European rural style of architecture (the Maabara's sheds have slanted roofs that are reminiscent of this style) cannot save the Maabara from its cinematic presentation as a slum.<sup>103</sup>

The Mizrahi urban neighborhood is the typical backdrop of most Bourekas films. The cinematic presentation of this neighborhood is evocative of the presentation of the Maabara in *Sallah*. The three films directed by Davidson take place in an urban Mizrahi neighborhood, and replicate the presentation of the

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space, and so the cinematic sequence serves to highlight the difference between the free, vast expanse around and the two men's preference to lock themselves up in a cupboard.

<sup>102</sup> This fact seems to surpass the cinematic realism. In Arieh Lahola's documentary about the Maabara, *The City of Tents* (1953), a film made by the Israeli film service, the residents don't live in stone houses, but in tents or tin and cloth shacks.

<sup>103</sup> The metonymic presentation of the Maabara in *Sallah* is very similar to that of the small Jewish town in Becker's *Shnei Kunilemel*. On the homology between the set of the Jewish town in *Shnei Kunilemel* and the original Jewish town see Shreek (1966).

neighborhood in *Sallah*, presenting it as a place that is neither rural nor urban.

Davidson emphasizes the impoverishment, the neglect, the density, and the low level of configuration – the characteristics of the Maabara's representation in *Sallah*.

The Mizrahi neighborhood in *Charlie and a Half* is portrayed as an urban-rural entity which suffers from underdevelopment, neglect, and lack of cultivation, despite the fact that analysis of data on the neighborhood's location shows that it is located near the center of town and is not detached from the city's more affluent areas. This neighborhood too, like *Sallah's* Maabara, has unpaved streets, dirt roads and gravel, and chickens that roam around the streets pecking at the dust. No greenery, vegetation, or trees are visible in this area, never mind a bench, an electric pole, fences, or any other street furnishings. It's interesting to notice that, like the Maabara's houses, the houses of this urban neighborhood, part stone and part wood, are all ground-level dwellings, which have slanted roofs that resemble the European rural style of architecture.

A similar presentation, in terms of style and values, reappears in Davidson's film *Snooker*. Davidson chooses to set the film off with a long shot of an old derelict house on a dirt road.<sup>104</sup> The house has a slanted tiled roof (again imitating the European architectural style) and big windows and doors that are closed off with wooden boards. Later on, we find out that the house belongs to the family of Gabriel and Azriel (the protagonists). The way the shot become concrete, its place in the film's sequence, and the fact that this is the protagonists' ancestral inheritance, all serve to circumscribe the house as synecdochic to the rest of the houses in the

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<sup>104</sup> In his book *Cinema and Philosophy* (1993), Unger discusses the significance of the images in cinematic sequences and their manipulative rhetorical power. He claims that one of the most powerful locations, as regards rhetorical influence, is the beginning of a film. According to Unger, a director knows that the audience is concentrating and is more receptive at the film's opening, and therefore more susceptible to influence than at other points of the film. So, the director chooses to place his strongest most significant images in the opening scenes.

neighborhood and to the image of its cultural heritage. It seems as though the cinematic author is trying to convince the audience that the mix of rural and urban, the neglect, the deterioration, the materialist East European culture and the low level of configuration, are all part of the neighborhood's heritage.

A similar design of the Mizrahi neighborhood reappears in *Kazablan*. Here too the streets aren't paved and the municipal neglect is apparent (this neglect is validated by the fact that the neighborhood is going to be torn down). However, Golan's cinematic author takes it one step further than Kishon and Davidson's cinematic authors. An extreme long shot at the beginning of the film reveals that the neighborhood is in ruins, practically destroyed. This shot metonymically labels the neighborhood as a cultural and material entity in a severe state of deterioration. Since the impending destruction of the neighborhood molds the viewer's impression of the neighborhood, it seems that here we are faced with an image of a cultural entity that is facing extinction.

As mentioned in the introduction, we view cinema as a tool of rhetoric that is placed in the hands of the cinematic author, who reconstructs certain spaces through the cinematic sequence, in which signifiers (that function as indices and informants, as explained in the Introduction) carry the function of locating the fictional space in "real" time and space, while indicating the particular, unique nature of this space. So, even if the location filmed is chaotic, ugly, neglected, and distorted, the rhetoric of cinema gives the cinematic author a way of making it appear as harmonious and ordered. In the *Bourekas*, it seems as though the cinematic authors do not make use of the cinematic apparatus to do so. The films' consistently low level of configuration (which seems to have influenced the choice of shooting locations), accompanied by other cinematic apparatuses – including composition, the positioning of the camera

and its movements, lighting, and editing – all serve to complete the neglectful picture offered by the shooting locations.<sup>105</sup> As in photography or painting,<sup>106</sup> so in the cinema, a classic composition is one in which there is harmony between the different elements; harmony, for example, between the main object and the space around it. The choice of the character's zone of action is not capricious, but, in fact, is the result of aesthetic considerations that are aimed at creating a harmonious balance between the various elements that compose the picture.

The compositions created by the cinematic authors in the Bourekas, on the other hand, appear to be random and arbitrary. It seems as though, in these compositions, in these compositions the active character is the only aesthetic object and while all the other esthetic elements in the space design are disregarded. The outcome is a variety of seemingly negligent compositions that are unflattering towards the space they portray, stresses its less appealing aspects and emphasizes the underdevelopment, impoverishment, and decline of the environment in the Mizrahi neighborhood. This presentation sometimes opposes the dramatic requirements of the scene. For example, in *Charlie and a Half* there is a dramatic scene in which Charlie and Miko bully a driver and try to take his money. Davidson chooses to film this scene from the shoulder and pan quickly from one character to the other. This cinematic choice accentuates the presence of the camera and, in so doing, opposes the dramatic requirements of the scene. Furthermore, since the compositions produced by the hand-held camera are arbitrary and not balanced, this emphasizes the ugliness, the

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<sup>105</sup> Ne'eman is probably referring to these sorts of strategies when he writes about the "dramaturgy being replaced with straightforward shooting" (Ne'eman 1997, 21). This comment hints at Ne'eman's opinion that the Bourekas' cinematic choices are characterized by cinematic ignorance and time- and money-saving concerns. This dissertation, however, does not believe either in coincidence or in money being such a crucial consideration in the cinematic author's aesthetic choices.

<sup>106</sup> On composition in photography and painting see *The Psychology of the Arts* (Krytler, 1980).

disharmony, and neglect of the character's zone of action, i.e., the Mizrahi neighborhood.

A similar phenomenon is found in *Snooker*. In some scenes, the twin brothers Azriel and Gabriel meet. In order to make the audience believe that Azriel and Gabriel, who are played by the same actor (Yehuda Barkan), are truly two different people, the cinematic author ought to make careful use of shooting<sup>107</sup> technique. Yet Davidson chooses the simple and cruder option of turning the camera on and off, changing the actor's clothes, and then turning the camera back on again. However, the latter method serves the cinematic author's intentions by producing momentary lack of orientation in the spectator and indicating the chaotic, indigent, decadent, and disoriented character of the world in which the characters function.

Further proof for the argument, which maintains that the cinematic authors are not cinematically incompetent, but are adopting this strategy because it serves their intentions, is revealed in the transformation of the shooting location's appearance. Adopting this strategy gives the cinematic authors tools for turning even the prettiest shooting locations into spaces that have a low level of configuration and are neglected, decadent, and ugly – a presentation that clearly corresponds to the Mizrahi neighborhood's classic image in Bourekas films.

In Golan's film *Katz and Karasso*, for example, the Mizrahi neighborhood is not the shooting location of the film. Instead, there are Katz and Karasso's nice-looking houses (they are relatively well-off), their luxurious offices, and the beach in Eilat. But the language of decline, ugliness and low level of configuration makes its way into the film through the muddled organization of the cinematic sequence, thereby turning the film into a typical Bourekas film from this angle as well. Even the

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<sup>107</sup> “Shooting” refers to breaking a scene up into distinct shots (from different camera angles) that are taken from different perspectives.

most romantic scene in the film – which is taken on the beach of Eilat with the beautiful Moav Mountains in the background – has a low level of configuration and an atmosphere of chaos and neglect. The frame which immortalizes the first kiss between Karasso's son (Yehuda Barkan) and Katz's daughter (Effrat Lavi) includes an enormous rusty tanker in the background. Furthermore, the cinematic author moves quickly from a long shot of the whole bay to a medium shot zooming in<sup>108</sup> on the kissing couple. This camera movement makes the viewer sick to the stomach and arouses repulsion towards the whole scene.

Using a low level of configuration, and signifiers (indices) which function to give an impression of ugliness and decline, is typical of all the Bourekas films discussed. Adopting the strategy of a low level configuration of the cinematic sequence enables all the films in the group, including those which avoid the presentation of the Mizrahi neighborhood (such as *Rabbi Gamliel*, *Fortuna*, or *Aliza Mizrahi*), to metonymically resonate with the chaos, the disorientation, the decline, and the neglect that characterize the spatial aspects of the Mizrahi neighborhood. That is to say, though the shooting locations do not naturally have a low level of configuration and are not neglected, they are fashioned via the cinematic author's rhetoric to appear as if they are.

### **Arranged (Shiduch) Marriages: Instrumental and Materialist Attitudes towards Relationships with Romantic Potential**

Although Bourekas films represent a non-orthodox Jewish community, the Jewish traditional way of bringing together man and woman – the Shiduch, or matchmaking, is highly conspicuous in some of them. In *Rabbi Gamliel* (whose

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<sup>108</sup> “Zooming in” is the action of reducing the width of the lens and changing the angle of the camera, which results in focusing on a certain object within the space of the frame.

subtitle can be translated as "Marriage Games"), for example, the narrative is constructed around a Shiduch to his daughter, Dina (Aviva Ger), which the provincial Rabbi Gamliel (Yossi Banay) tries to impose on the handsome and well-off engineer, Uzi (Dov Freedman). In *Snooker*, the daughter of the neighborhood rabbi, Yona (Nitza Shaul), is offered as a bride through the mediation of her father. At a certain point the father also uses the services of someone whom he thought to be a traditional, professional matchmaker.

Hence, although in many Bourekas films relationships between a young man and a woman is the center of the narrative, an instrumental view of this bond seems to rule. Most Bourekas films present a community which hasn't assimilated the romantic ethos, and for which romance should be subordinated to more basic, material needs. In *Snooker*, for example, the love affair between Azriel (Yehuda Barkan) and Yona (Nitza Shaul) is partly the outcome of a successful realization of a secret plan by Gabriel (Yehuda Barkan), Azriel's twin brother, who in the hopes of making money secretly works behind the scenes to arouse the couple's emotions towards each other. Gabriel pairs the two and maintains their romance in order to win eligibility to collect his father's inheritance money.

In *Katz and Karasso*, romance is subordinated to business affairs. The romantic relationships between Katz's two sons and Karasso's two daughters begins only due to their fathers' business competition, and gets the fathers' blessing only when they realize that the Shiduch will benefit the business. In the same way, Sallah in *Sallah* seems to treat his daughter Habuba's marriages initially as a promising business opportunity; he tries to manipulate both her suitors, the taxi driver and Zigy, to pay the highest dowry possible for her. For him, the romantic needs of Habuba come, if at all, only in second place.

It seems that this kind of instrumental view of the male-female bond is such a part of Bourekas community that individuals who hold a romantic attitude are sometimes denounced and punished. In *Fortuna*, the heroine Fortuna (Ahuva Goren) is in love with the young and handsome Pierre, but her father insists that she will marry his aged French childhood friend, Simon. Both his promise to Simon and the chance of Fortuna and other family members to have a better life in France are far more important in his eyes than Fortuna's emotional needs. When Fortuna rebels, she gets a cruel punishment: she is driven out of the family and their house – an act which leads to her tragic death.

The instrumental view of the male-female bond in the Bourekas is not exclusive to the Mizrahi community. Ashkenazi families in the films seem to hold a similar ethos. In *Kazablan*, the young and handsome Kaza (Yoram Ga'on) has to compete for the hand of Rachel, a pretty Ashkenazi woman, with the older and much less attractive Yanosh, whose material advantages – having a solid profession and being Ashkenazi and therefore belonging to a higher class – make him more desirable to Rachel's father as a son-in-law. In what is probably the most romantic Bourekas film, *Charlie and a Half*, the hero Charlie competes for the heart of the beautiful Ashkenazi woman Gila (Zohar), with Robert, her rich schlemiel (meaning “unlucky”) Shiduch, clearly favored by her parents.

Additionally, in Bourekas films that focus on a "romance" between two young individuals, it seems that an instrumental and materialistic view of the male-female bond influences the film's mode of cinematic presentation. These films (such as *Charlie and a Half* and *Kazablan*) seem to prefer presenting the courting plot through scenes which carry an inherent conflict between a romantic view and an instrumental view of the male-female bond. In *Charlie and a Half*, for example, most of the

meetings between Charlie and Gila are held in the presence of people who represent an instrumental view of the male-female bond: their first meeting in the restaurant is done in the presence of Robert, Gila's Ashkenazi Shiduch; their meeting at the Cesaria golf course is in the presence of Gila's father and mother; and the meeting in Charlie's house occurs in the presence of the two families. In *Kazablan* even the scene in which Kaza proposes to Rachel takes place in the presence of her reluctant parents. In *Sallah* the first meeting between Zigi and Habuba takes place in the forestation area in the presence of Sallah, and the most romantic moment in the film, when Zigi and Habuba sing together, is located in a small forest just a few steps from the transit camp. This short, enchanting moment ends suddenly with the shouting of Sallah calling Habuba to come back home.

Furthermore when Bourekas films display scenes with a romantic potential, sometimes a reductive construction of cinematic sequence is used to twist the potentially romantic moments, making them grotesque. In *Snooker*, Gabriel – as a vital part of his conspiracy to marry off his twin brother Azriel – courts Azriel's girl of choice, Yona, on his behalf. When the time comes he walks with Yona to Jaffa's fishing port in order to propose to her. The romantic setting of Jaffa's ancient port and the force of the coming proposal seem to promise a romantic scene. But Gabriel, not knowing exactly how to behave in this situation, asks for the help of Hanukkah (Ze'ev Revach), his conspiracy mate. Hanukkah, dressed up as a local fisherman, follows the couple and helps Gabriel to propose, secretly whispering into Gabriel's ears the right replies to Yona's queries. This display seems to serve the simultaneous function of stressing the materialistic *raison d'etre* of the meeting, and of course of turning the proposal scene grotesque. In *Katz and Karasso* the film uses a different way to reduce the romantic aspects of poetically romantic occurrences. There, when Ossi (Yehuda

Barkan) and Naomi (Efrat Lavi), Karasso's son and Katz's daughter, kiss for the first time on Eilat Beach, the cinematic author produces a cinematic sequence which highlights rhetoric of deterioration and the low level of configuration of space, both of which turn a moment of romance into a scene of the grotesque.

### **Imposed Togetherness: Crowds, Spies, and Gossip in the Neighborhood**

The Bourekas films are also characterized by the fact that the inhabitants of the Mizrahi neighborhood live in cramped spaces, a condition which encumbers any attempt to secure the individual's private space.<sup>109</sup> The Bourekas give the feeling that the limitation of the private space isn't voluntary, that this limitation pressurizes the residents, and that it is often the source of conflicts and individual discomfort. One of the elements that illustrates this observation in Bourekas films is the ambiguous discrimination between the private space (the house) and the public space (the street) in the Mizrahi neighborhood. This is illustrated by the inhabitants' behavior and modes of communication. Firstly, the neighborhood's inhabitants frequently communicate with each other publicly, either on the street or through an open window. Secondly, random onlookers often appear within the residents' private space at critical moments and react to the personal happenings; in so doing, they are blatantly disregarding the privacy of others.

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<sup>109</sup> Shohat argues that the interior filming of the houses in the Bourekas emphasizes the collectivism and the crowded atmosphere in the Mizrahi neighborhood. Both Shohat and Dayan claim that the Bourekas represent the Mizrahi neighborhood as a "ghetto" (Dayan 1976, 55, Shohat 1989, 135). Though the use of the term "ghetto" refers, in this context, to "a crowded neighborhood," one cannot ignore the additional meaning, which refers to a place where the inhabitants are forced to stay.

In *Sallah*, for instance, when the social worker arrives to question Sallah about his personal life – i.e., discuss private issues that are better kept quiet – the two naturally look for a place where they can have some privacy. However, this private space, which is located behind Sallah's shed, is instantly invaded by the Maabara's residents. Though the conversation becomes more and more personal, and though Sallah is noticeably bothered by the presence of the onlookers, the residents continue listening to the conversation. They watch Sallah overtly and shamelessly, and even react with scornful laughter when Sallah's ignorance is exposed during the conversation. The cinematic author brings the motif of the imposed togetherness and the voyeurism to a climax with the help of a goat. Amongst the characters participating in this peeping gala, there is a white goat that is presented as yet another nosy onlooker, thereby giving the whole scene a farcical atmosphere.

In *The Tsan'ani Family*, the ambiguity of the differentiation between the private and the public is especially apparent. The neighborhood's residents regularly make conversation through the windows, and they also spy on each other from the windows and the verandas. The beautiful neighbor (Geula Noni) spies on Tsion and Israel's houses from her veranda (and they peep on her); and Israel Ben-Na'im peeps at Mrs. Tsan'ani (Levana Finkelstein), on his way back home, through the window of the Tsan'ani's house while she is working in the kitchen.<sup>110</sup>

The obscure delimitation of the home and street spheres in Bourekas films is an allusion to the ambiguous differentiation between the personal and the public, when it comes to sharing information. The general feeling is that one can't keep anything secret, since the inquisitive residents will put their hands on any piece of

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<sup>110</sup> This spying phenomenon becomes a more extreme, vulgar invasion of the individual's space in Davidson's *Eskimo Limon*, a series of films (starting in 1978) in which teenagers incessantly spy on each other having sex.

information, sooner or later, and make it known to all. This phenomenon, as well as that of spying, reaches its culmination in *Rabbi Gamliel*. One of the most significant scenes in the film portrays an intrusive and crude violation of privacy. Two of the Mizrahi neighborhood's residents (as in *Sallah*, we cannot be sure if it is a rural or urban location) spy on a couple having an intimate moment in a car, thereby turning themselves into witnesses of the couple's words of devotion and ongoing commitment.<sup>111</sup> According to the unwritten law of the neighborhood, the two are not satisfied with simply keeping what they saw to themselves, but hurry off to tell the girl's father, Rabbi Gamliel (Yossi Banai), of the "legal wedding ceremony" which took place in the dark car. Needless to say, they manage to get everyone into trouble.

The residents' tendency to take their personal conflicts into the street – thereby bringing them to the public realm of the neighborhood and inflicting them upon the whole community – completes the image of spying on others depicted in Bourekas films, and solidifies the atmosphere of imposed togetherness. In *The Tsan'ani Family*, for example, private conflicts invade the public realm when Mrs. Ben-Na'im sees her husband eagerly wooing the pretty neighbor, and responds by calling her husband, at the top of her voice, to come into the house. This kind of situation – involving the whole neighborhood in personal matters (Ben-Na'im's unfaithfulness and his wife's resentment of it) – recurs throughout the film.

Additionally, the cinematic author makes a point of emphasizing the fact that there are many witnesses to these scenes of jealousy: the neighbors peek out of the windows and verandas, delighting in the event. An almost identical incident appears in *Charlie and a Half*, in the opening sequence of the film. There too, Sasson's wife

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<sup>111</sup> As already discussed, a similar phenomenon reappears in *Snooker* (1975) when Hanukkah, who is supposed to be an expert on women, stands in the disguise of a fisherman beside Gabriel (who is not an especially romantic type, but has to propose to Yona) and whispers in his ear words which are supposed to sweep the bride off her feet and convince her to marry him.

scolds him from the open window after catching him looking at Lily's behind (Miko's sister). In this scene too, the shouting and the scolding are done in the presence of other inhabitants, amongst them Charlie and Miko, who are Sasson's chief rivals.

In *Aliza Mizrahi*, Golan takes the phenomenon of bringing the conflicts into the public realm to a crescendo. While Aharon (Arieh Elias), Aliza's husband (Edna Fliedel), sits idly on the street near their joint house, Aliza shouts out at him from one of the upper floors of the Shalom Building, in Tel Aviv, 30 floors above the ground, accusing him of being a slacker and calling him to get back to work (he works as a guard at the Shalom department store). Corresponding to the preposterousness of Aharon taking a seat on the street, the distance between him and Aliza and the busy public space (a commercial center) in which the scene takes place, both intensify the distorted behavior exhibited; the inclusion of the public in private conflicts pushes Aliza's conduct to the brink of absurdity, and attests to the ambiguous differentiation between the interior and the exterior. The recurrence of this pattern – taking the personal conflicts to the public realm – in the various films, brings to mind the possibility that it fulfills a certain function, that is, that it is useful to those who employ it (besides being a way of letting out anger). It seems as though sharing one's insults with the public compels the community to put pressure on the partner who has lost his way. This seems to be the case in the *Tsan'ani Family*, in *Charlie and a Half*, and in *Aliza Mizrahi*. However, in other cases, the only use the characters seem to make of sharing their personal issues with the public is associated with the soothing effect this process has on one's exhibitionistic impulses.

In *Charlie and a Half*, for example, Sasson tells Zachi (Arieh Elias), Charlie's father, about his infertility problems and asks him how he should carry out the instructions given to him by Flora (Edna Fliedel), Zachi's wife. In *Kazablan*, a similar

phenomenon of sharing the private with the public out of exhibitionistic impulses is also evident. Early on in the film, Kazablan and a bunch of his friends (who witness the whole scene) appear on the street where the neighborhood beauty lives. Kazablan stops under her window and shouts out her name, "Rachel!" Her father wakes up, gets very irritated and starts quarreling with this bunch of men, who have come to flirt with his daughter. Soon enough, the conflict becomes known to all. The neighbors, who have awakened because of the noise, peep out of their apartments and even participate actively in the argument between Kazablan and Rachel's father.<sup>112</sup> There might be some doubt regarding Kazablan's wish to make his argument known to all, but there is no doubt that he has chosen to have this conversation in the presence of his friends.

Another aspect of the exhibitionistic impulse can be found in the residents' "street life," which is a prominent characteristic of the inhabitants' way of life in the Bourekas films. In *Charlie and a Half*, for example, the first sequence depicts a typical morning in the Mizrahi neighborhood and exposes its residents' tendency towards "street life." Lily, who passes through the neighborhood on her way to work, comes across a bunch of elderly people sitting around, sticks in hand; Sasson, who is busy mending his car; Gedalia, who is sitting on a stool in the middle of the street; and Ezra who, roaming around in his pajamas, offers Lily a cup of coffee.

As has been previously insinuated, the cinematic author stresses his fondness for Mizrahi street culture, but in such a way that portrays this culture as bizarre. In *Aliza Mizrahi*, for instance, Aharon, Aliza's husband, sits outside their joint house beside the door and drinks Arak liquor. The fact that their house is located in a hyper-

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<sup>112</sup> There are similar scenes in Kishon's film, *Thealat Balumilch (The Big Dig, 1965)*. However, the neighborhood's inhabitants in Kishon's film are not members of the Mizrahi community.

public space, a commercial center of a metropolis, accentuates the public nature of the act of sitting outside one's house and makes it seem like a rather disagreeable pastime.

Since these Mizrahi characters spy on each other and exhibit themselves and carry on in the street, it is no surprise that they also gossip. Everybody knows everything about everyone in the Mizrahi neighborhood in these films, and many people use this information either to embarrass others or to advance their own interests.

In *Charlie and a Half*, Charlie knows about Sasson's infertility problems because his mother Flora (Edna Fliedel), who is treating Sasson, tells him about it. In *Snooker*, Halfon (Arieh Elias) knows of Salvador the American mobster – he is familiar with his extraordinary talent for snooker and with his toughness in "business" matters. In *Sallah*, the cab driver knows of Shabati's financial difficulties and of his daughter's romance with Ziggy, the kibbutz member. He also knows Sallah disapproves of the relationship and exploits this information to try and secure his consent to a marriage proposal he himself would like to make to Sallah's daughter. In *Rabbi Gamliel*, one of Gamliel's visitors hears of Dina's (Gamliel's daughter) delicate situation and tries to exploit this information to get the rabbi's consent to marry her. In *Slomoniko*, Allegra (Ettie Grots), Slomoniko's wife, knows everything about the neighbors and the places they have moved to. She uses this information to provoke her husband's competitive instincts, in order to encourage him to buy a new house in a different neighborhood.

The threat of employing gossip for the purpose of material success, or for overtaking rivals in the financial competition, is always imminent but seldom put to use. Knowledge of Mr. Israeli's excessive sexual appetite serves both sides fighting over him in *Katz and Karasso*. In *Aliza Mizrahi*, Aliza (Edna Fliedel) knows almost

everything about the chief policeman, as she used to be his nurse when he was a child, and exploits her knowledge to make him employ her. And in *Slomoniko*, the protagonist uses certain information he has about the high earnings of the senior clerks in the Ashdod Port, to assist him in trying to get an apartment loan from the port authority.

### **Idleness, Begging, Fraud, and Petty Crime**

In the Bourekas films, idleness, laziness, and avoiding work that contributes to society, are all manifestly presented as the characteristics of the men and women in the Mizrahi community.<sup>113</sup> It is made quite clear, for instance, that Sallah Shabati does not like to work. Kishon's cinematic author emphasizes this characterization of Sallah by showing that he is more willing to try and make something out of virtually nothing, than to accept a job offered to him by the authorities, which has communal value and contributes to society (working in the Jewish National Fund's forests). Instead of working, he occupies himself with questionable pursuits such as selling stray dogs,<sup>114</sup> or even pimping his daughter for a dowry.<sup>115</sup> And to make some extra money, Sallah takes advantage of his Ashkenazi neighbor's lack of expertise in backgammon, and tricks him out of a large sum of money. Finally, Sallah exposes himself to be a real panderer, when he pledges his loyalty to all the different parties running in the election. Shohat argues that Kishon's cinematic author (Shohat 1991) stresses the fact that idleness is fundamental to Sallah's character, and not a result of the existing

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<sup>113</sup> Ne'eman claims that one of the Bourekas' functions as a popular model (which was created, in his opinion, as a reaction to the films of Zionist realism), has been to protest against the ideal of work – against the socialistic Zionist "labor religion." Ne'eman suggests that the protagonists' idleness, in the Bourekas, represents a popular rebellion against this Zionist utopia (1999, 17).

<sup>114</sup> In one of the most unforgettable scenes in the film, Sallah tries to convince a man who has lost his dog (Gideon Zinger) to buy a stray dog, instead of finding the lost dog.

<sup>115</sup> There is an interesting analogy between Sallah's attempt to sell the dog and his attempt to sell his daughter. In both cases, Sallah tries to profit from the lives of others, and doing so, exhibits blatant ignorance and emotional numbness.

circumstances in the Maabara. She bases this assumption on the fact that Sallah is puzzled when the agency's clerk asks him what his occupation is, thereby giving the impression that he never, not even in his native land, had an occupation.

In Bourekas films made later on, the Mizrahi protagonists still don't seem to have a productive line of work or to engage in an occupation that benefits society. Instead, they just laze around and try to make something from nothing in questionable pursuits. In *Rabbi Gamliel*, the rabbi (Yossi Banai) makes his living from some sort of practical Kabbala (fortune telling that is based on mystical Jewish knowledge), while his daughter Dina (Aviv Gar), who is a grown adult, just serves coffee to her father's clients and has no actual paying job. Her elder brother works in a quarry, but he is no longer a member of the neighborhood. By positioning a contrasting analogy between the brother and the sister and father, the cinematic author insinuates that the brother's outstanding diligence is the reason for his parting with the neighborhood.

In Charlie's neighborhood, too, in *Charlie and a Half*, the characters don't seem to be earning a living from productive work: Zachi, Charlie's father, is a café dweller, who lives at his wife's expense; Flora, his wife, makes her living from reading fortunes from cards (like Rabbi Gamliel's line of business); Charlie, with Miko's help, makes a living from petty fraud and sophisticated begging; and Sasson, Charlie's greatest rival in the neighborhood, is a local gangster, whose source of income remains unknown, but since Sasson is free all hours of the day and night, we can assume he doesn't work. Finally, Gedalia is Sasson's faithful assistant.

Even when the neighborhood's Mizrahi residents do have an official occupation, the cinematic authors make it very clear that they are always happy to avoid doing their job, and that work is unnatural to them. Aliza Mizrahi (Edna Fliedel) works at the police station. It is a very respectable job, no doubt, but instead

of keeping herself busy with her real job, she spends her time gossiping and investigating a mysterious murder case. Her husband Aharon, on the other hand, a well-known loafer, prefers to sit on his veranda with a bottle of Arak liquor than go to work as a guard at the Shalom department store.

The same pattern repeats in *Snooker*. Hanukkah (Zeev Revah), Gabriel's friend, works as a waiter in a café, but doesn't actually seem to devote much of his time to this job. Instead of working, he spends most of his time with Gabriel, the idler, and collaborates with him in fraud schemes. Azriel too, Gabriel's lazy twin, supposedly has a job working at the greengrocer's in the market, but the greengrocer, his boss, complains to Hanukkah about Azriel's laziness, tardiness, and about him being absentminded and inefficient. Eventually, he fires him. To sum up this picture, Halfon (Arieh Elias), the twosome's old friend, is a drunken loafer.<sup>116</sup> And again, in *Charlie and a Half*, though Ezra (Arieh Moscuna) works as a waiter in the Pe'er (Hebrew for "splendor") Restaurant at the Dan Hotel, the cinematic author emphasizes that the job is not natural to him. While the cinematic sequence emphasizes the fact that Ezra is a foreign element in his work place – by presenting Charlie's surprised reaction to Ezra being there, and stressing the fact that Ezra is uncomfortable in his fancy uniform – it also emphasizes, through a contrasting analogy, that Ezra is very much at home in the rundown Mizrahi neighborhood where he lives. He is portrayed roaming contentedly around the neighborhood in his pajamas, and spending time with Sasson, the loafer.

One of the methods the cinematic authors employ, when trying to convince the viewer that some radical assumption is true without destroying the film's credibility,

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<sup>116</sup> Halfon's character is, apparently, developed from the character of Zachi (also played by Arieh Elias), Charlie's father in *Charlie and a Half* (1975), which in turn was developed from Aharon (also Arieh Elias), Aliza's husband in *Aliza Mizrahi* (1969).

is eliminating any evidence that could contradict the radical assumption they advance. Supposedly, this is what the authors in the Bourekas films do in the matter of work: even when certain characters are supposed to be working, the cinematic authors do not depict them doing so. The realm of work remains outside the parameters of the neighborhood. Similarly, when Lili (Geula Noni), the neighborhood's beauty, goes to work at "the factory," in a most untypical scene of the Bourekas, she wears very revealing clothes, like those of a prostitute. Furthermore, the cinematic author makes sure not to show her actually arriving at her workplace. Her provocative appearance on the street helps the cinematic author emphasize the hedonistic, idle atmosphere in the neighborhood, and the carnivalistic nature of the characters. This portrayal serves to depict the neighborhood realm analogously contrasting the work realm: Lili's swaying buttocks provoke Sasson's peeping impulse, Sasson's peeping prompts his intimidating wife, who is watching the event through the window, to tell him off for his lustfulness, to the delight of everyone present.

In *Slomoniko* too, although the protagonist works in the harbor and makes his living out of hard and productive physical labor that contributes to society, the film avoids showing him at work. The cinematic author opens the film with a number of shots from the Ashdod Port, but Slomoniko isn't in this footage. In fact, most of the film takes place in Slomoniko's neighborhood, in Tel Aviv. Slomoniko meets colleagues from work and his wife complains about him working too hard, yet the cinematic author chooses not to give any visual evidence of this work reality, and instead, presents Slomoniko mostly in familial and neighborly interactions.

A similar strategy reappears in *Katz and Karasso*. Although the insurance business is far from being an especially productive line of work, and is a rather questionable pursuit, the cinematic author is very careful not to show the protagonists

at work. Katz and Karasso are busy drinking coffee and educating the younger generation; their elder children are on vacation in Eilat; and their younger children are busy with their secret affair. The same strategy is employed by Golan's cinematic author in *Kazablan*. Kaza (Yehoram Gaon), the protagonist, prances around all day long, with his head up high and a group of admiring companions by his side, and goes around dancing and wooing girls. The cinematic author knows to tell us about Kaza's military bravery, about him being an excellent soldier and a war hero, but he doesn't tell us anything about his workplace.

The cinematic authors emphasize that the neighborhood's many inhabitants who are not working have a range of options. Some are begging or living at the expense of others, like Zachi, Charlie's father, in *Charlie and a Half*, or Halfon, the drunkard from *Snooker*, who lives on Gabriel and Hanukkah's handouts. But many others make a living from occupations that are on the verge of fraud: fortune-telling (Rabbi Gamliel in *Rabbi Gamliel*, and Flora in *Charlie and a Half*); professional begging (Charlie and Miko, in *Charlie and a Half*); petty fraud and practically criminal mediating businesses (Sallah, Charlie in *Charlie and a Half*, and Gabriel and Hanukkah in *Snooker*); and petty crime (Sasson and Gedalia in *Charlie and a Half*).

As mentioned, Sallah's earnings come from questionable business deals (selling his vote to the various parties), and from playing backgammon with a person who doesn't know the rules of the game (his Ashkenazi neighbor), and in so doing, maliciously taking advantage of the latter's ignorance. In *Charlie and a Half*, Charlie and his half (Miko) engage in begging, petty fraud, and blackmail. One of the scenes in the film offers a detailed depiction of the way they earn money: Miko stands in the middle of the road and pretends to be hit by a passing car, which seems to belong to a

wealthy owner, and Charlie comes over, threatens the driver that he will give evidence against him, and then collects the hush money from the terrified driver.

When they are not busy doing this sort of thing, the two try to convince others to join in a game that only they know the rules for (very much like Sallah Shabati). Charlie and his half invite onlookers to join them in a game of "Street Roulette," a game that is known for its tendency to make its initiators very rich, at the expense of the innocent participants. Charlie and Miko add an original improvement to the game played by Sallah Shabati – while big Charlie is keeping the gullible fools busy, little Miko pickpockets them. Sasson (Zeev Revach) doesn't make an honest living either. Although his activities are very obscure, the circumstances indicate that he makes his living from petty crime: Sasson and Gedalia, his partner, don't work; Charlie and the owner of the snack bar seem to be quite scared of them; and they own a private car (while Charlie doesn't). Then again, because Sasson's character is portrayed as quite clumsy, nervous, and dominated by his wife, it doesn't seem probable that he engages in serious criminal activity (burglary, robbery, etc.).

In *Snooker*, the phenomenon of petty fraud reappears and serves as the Mizrahi protagonists' main source of income. Reiterating the pattern set by Sallah Shabati, the protagonists, Gabriel and Hanukkah, take advantage of the naiveté of other individuals in the Mizrahi community and exploit their lack of expertise in the game of snooker to trick them out of their money. In this way, Hanukkah takes advantage of Mushon's innocence and lures him to play with Gabriel, the local snooker champion, by assuring him that he is a "sucker." A fraud scheme, reminiscent of the one portrayed in *Charlie and a Half*, reappears in *Snooker's* opening scene. Hanukkah and Gabriel, who work as a team, trick a wealthy businessman who wants to buy Gabriel's house, destroy it, and build a multi-story building instead. Hanukkah

pretends to be a real-estate agent and is in the process of taking a deposit from the businessman, for his mediating services, when Gabriel appears and pretends to be a crazy man who will stop at nothing. He chases the businessman away, the deposit remains in Hanukkah's hands, and the two of them split the cash. Gabriel and Hanukkah's habit of reaching materialistic goals through fraud and deceit dictates their mode of action when trying to marry off Azriel, the clumsy brother. Gabriel pretends to be Azriel, in order to tempt the rabbi's daughter to consent, and Hanukkah takes the guise of a Jewish orthodox matchmaker, who tries to obtain the father's approval of the marriage.

The crime in the Mizrahi neighborhood, as portrayed in Bourekas films, doesn't appear to be very dangerous or sophisticated; it is mostly very naïve criminal activity. The fraud in these films is characterized similarly, and is not especially sophisticated either. Serious criminal activity, the kind which follows the example of the Italian Mafia, simply doesn't exist in the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas films. The only criminal in the Bourekas films worthy of his title is Salvador (Yosef Shiloah), from *Snooker*. He has the reputation of a serious and dangerous criminal, and gains the respect of the protagonists and the police. However, Salvador doesn't live in the neighborhood, but in the U.S.A. – the country that Shohat identifies as "the promised land" of the Mizrahi neighborhood inhabitants in Bourekas films (Shohat 1989).

### **Superstition in the Mizrahi Neighborhood of Bourekas Films**

"Superstition" adds the final touches to the idleness, fraud, and begging "festivities" in the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas films. Sallah Shabati, for instance, says a blessing over his backgammon dice, out of the superstitious belief

that it will help him get the numbers he wants. Additionally, Sallah spits on the ground from time to time, a habit which is bound to have some sort of mystical significance. In *Charlie and a Half*, Flora, Charlie's mother, tells people's fortunes with the help of coffee and cards; Sasson, the neighborhood's gangster, is a great believer in superstitions, and is one of her regular clients; Charlie's father sits by his wife and interprets the healing instructions she gives the clients (a sort of "Shaman pharmacist").<sup>117</sup> The scene in which Sasson goes to the zoo to pluck a single hair off the giraffe's whiskers – to serve as a talisman for sexual potency – is one of the most amusing scenes in all the Bourekas films.

*Rabbi Gamliel* is a film that is dedicated, at least partially, to superstitious issues. The rabbi practices some sort of practical Kabbala, i.e., he gives people counseling that is based on a mystical reading of the Holy Scriptures. In the beginning of the film we see him predicting the future of a client through reading a certain part of the Hebrew bible.

#### **IV. Thematic Characteristics of Bourekas Films**

The corpus of Bourekas films presented here shares a particular representation of Mizrahi community, neighborhood and family. These shared features confirm that the corpus films do belong to a distinct film cycle and point to a paradigmatic representation of the Mizrahi community as their central thematic characteristic.

In order to better understand the shared characterization of the Mizrahi world presented in these different films, I will summarize this paradigmatic representation. The fundamental characteristic of the Mizrahi neighborhood and community

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<sup>117</sup> In an especially amusing scene at the café, the drunken Zachi explains his wife's ambiguous healing instructions to the nervous and worried Sasson.

representation in Bourekas films is the isolation of that neighborhood. The films present the Mizrahi neighborhood as a closed and detached cosmos, whose only connection with the authorities is characterized by estrangement and little, if any, actual contact. The negative aspects of that minimal connection with the authorities are stressed in Bourekas films. The neighborhood's neglect is emphasized in two different ways. Firstly, it is emphasized by presenting the neighborhood as a place given deficient services by the authorities; this aspect is apparent even when it comes to services that are critical to the community, such as the services of the police, which are virtually nonexistent in the neighborhood, despite the high level of crime. Secondly, the neglect is emphasized through presenting the neighborhood's community as financially disengaged from the authorities. This is illustrated by the fact that the neighborhood's inhabitants do not receive their paychecks from public organization or big financial industries, and are forced to take jobs in the private sector, such as insurance (*Katz and Karasso*); minor trade (*The Tsan'ani Family, Kazablan*); insignificant positions in the business sector (waiting on tables, helping greengrocers – *Snooker, Charlie and a Half*); or occupying themselves with questionable pursuits, such as mediating and pimping, begging or fraud (*Sallah, Charlie and a Half, Snooker, and Rabbi Gamliel*).

It seems as though the neglect and seclusion from which the neighborhood suffers establishes a situation in which there are insufficient means of subsistence. This lack creates, in turn, a social, cultural, and ontological space that endures perpetual drawbacks. Accordingly, the films depict the Mizrahi community's life as characterized by one central element – competition. This wild competition over survival, over physical subsistence, is the second main characteristic of Bourekas Mizrahim paradigmatic presentation; it forces the inhabitants to fight over the limited

sources of affluence. Competition is such a central element of the paradigmatic representation of Mizrahim in the corpus films that it becomes a significant part of the films' rhetoric. As mentioned above, the authors construct each Bourekas film as a dramatic unit which revolves around the conflicts of competition on the different levels of the cinematic sequence.

The constant existential struggle for survival gives birth to the third main characteristic of Mizrahim paradigmatic representation in the corpus films: a reduction of the emotional and spiritual qualities of certain human acts and relationships. Interpersonal human actions that have extra-instrumental significance (such as courting, marriage, falling in love, neighborly and work relations, etc.) are reduced solely to their instrumental function. They are presented as tools that serve individuals in their daily struggle over existence.

Loving or amorous relationships are typically transformed, in these films, into pairings that have an apparent financial purpose. In *Sallah*, for example, Sallah sells his daughter to the kibbutz immediately after attempting to sell a stray dog to a bourgeois couple. In these films, falling in love typically functions as a solution to financial competition, in a manner that overshadows the imminently emotional value of the experience. For example, in *Katz and Karasso*, the fact that the double romance is a logical way out of the destructive financial competition between two competing firms overshadows the fact that the encounter between two pairs of siblings is essentially romantic.

Under the circumstances specified previously – ruthless competition over limited sources of subsistence, crowdedness, and seclusion – a neighbor becomes a rival contender. Since knowing more about your opponent in a competition gives you an advantage, the cinematic authors in the Bourekas films present the neighborly

relations as characterized by spying and mutual violation of each other's private space. So, in *Sallah*, Sallah goes behind his hut with the social worker to have a private conversation, but his neighbors in the Maabara follow them, spy on them, and react to their discussion, thereby turning the intimate conversation into a public event.

On the other hand, an opposing exhibitionistic tendency, which seeks to bring the private into the public realm and share the personal conflicts with the neighbors, is also accentuated in these films. This tendency is presented in the films as a creative, popular way of dealing with the absence of the authorities (there are no police, no courts, and no social workers). The exhibitionism serves a means by which the inhabitants make the public sympathize with or condemn one of the parties, thereby advancing a solution of the conflict. In *Charlie and a Half*, for example, Sasson's wife scolds her husband in front of the whole neighborhood, when she catches him looking at the neighborhood beauty's buttocks (Geula Noni). By doing so, she places the conflict between them on the public neighborhood stage, most likely because she hopes her husband will suffer humiliation and be reprimanded for his behavior, while she may be rewarded with some sympathy.

In this atmosphere of reduced existence the value of work is also reduced to its instrumental aspects. The cinematic authors consistently refrain from presenting the inhabitants as working in jobs in which productivity is involved, but frequently present them acting as middlemen or in contexts of begging, fraud, and petty crime, or in practically dishonest occupations, such as fortune telling.

But it seems that the cinematic authors' position is that such occupations are not reprehensible – as long as people make enough money for their living they should be applauded. This stance is illustrated by the fact that loafers, beggars, or crooks are

prototypically presented as these films protagonists. This is the case in *Sallah*, *Charlie and a Half*, *Snooker*, *Rabbi Gamliel*, *Aliza Mizrahi*, and *Kazablan*.

Reduction to functional aspects also characterizes the material culture of the Mizrahi neighborhood in the Bourekas corpus of films. The penultimate characteristic of these films is that the typical neighborhood of the Bourekas films is represented as physically neglected (and sometimes, as in *Kazablan* or *Snooker*, it is half ruined and in an advanced state of deterioration). Typically, the streets aren't paved, there are no sidewalks, and there is no street furniture or vegetation. In fact, a typical house will look rundown and suffer from exterior neglect. There are animals roaming the dusty streets of the neighborhood, and the general impression given is that of a slum. The reduction of the material culture is also emphasized by the fact that the cinematic rhetoric, as we have seen, involves a low level of configuration of the cinematic sequence.

The final thematic characteristic is that a great effort is made to present the neighborhood as a hybrid entity which is in between a village and a town. So, for example, the architectural style is rural, the houses have yards attached to them, the houses of the inhabitants are, as a rule, single-floor houses with slanted roofs (this is the case in *Snooker*, *Charlie and a Half*, *Sallah*, *Kazablan*, *Aliza Mizrahi*, and also to a degree in *Rabbi Gamliel* and *Slomoniko*), and domesticated animals hang around in public spaces; on the other hand, the neighborhood suffers from crowdedness, lack of vegetation, and few open spaces, elements that are typical of urban environments.

## V. Bourekas Films and the Question of Self-representation

### Representation in Post-colonial Discourse

Post-colonial studies have teased out the different ways in which representation<sup>118</sup> is implicated in power inequalities and the subordination of the “subaltern.” Edward Said, in his analysis of European textual representations of the Orient in *Orientalism* (1978), emphasizes the fact that representations can never be totally realistic: "The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient," he says, "relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such" (Said 1978, 21). Instead, it is made of constructed images, images that need to be interrogated for their ideological content and which reflect the power relations between the West and the Orient (Said 1978, 204).

Gayatri Spivak (1990) notes that representation's unrealistic quality lies in the complicity between "speaking for" and "portraying" (Spivak 1990, 98), which the act of representation involves. Spivak indicates that representation always inherently involves "speaking in the name of" and recommends "persistent critique" to guard against "constructing the 'Other' simply as an object of knowledge" (Spivak 1990, 63). Shohat addresses what she calls the “power of representation,” by which she means that in a certain society the ability of a certain group to represent and be represented is connected to its political power. The problem, claims Shohat, does not rest solely with the fact that often marginalized subaltern groups do not hold the power over representation, it rests also in the fact that representations of these under-

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<sup>118</sup> In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) one can find the following definition of “representation”: "The fact of standing for, or in place of, some other thing or person, esp. with a right or authority to act on their account; substitution of one thing or person for another."

privileged groups are both flawed and few in number. This difficulty makes every representation of subaltern groups highly influential and metonymically representing the whole group (Shohat 1995, 171).

The few representations of subaltern people, continues Shohat, also increase the importance of agency, and of the attending questions: who will produce the images of the subalterns? Who will speak for whom? It is a situation in which the value of self-representation, a representation of a subaltern group by a subaltern individual, is increasing.<sup>119</sup>

### **Representation in Bourekas Films**

Shohat regards Mizrahim as an Israeli subaltern group, and discussing their representations in Israeli cinema she highlights the importance of agency (1989, 119-179). Mizrahim are represented in Israeli cinema, claims Shohat, through the agency of Zionist ideology and Eurocentric "myths which are prevalent in Israel" about those who the Zionist discourse regarded as orientals (Shohat 1989, 119).

Discussing specifically the Bourekas in this context, Shohat sees importance in the fact that "most of the Bourekas films were done by Ashkenazi filmmakers" (1989, 138) and that Ashkenazi actors played the roles of Mizrahi figures in them (1989, 139). Shohat regards this denial of the Mizrahi right for aesthetic self-representation in Bourekas, as homological to the denial of Mizrahi rights for self-representation in other areas in which

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<sup>119</sup> Spivak, on the other hand, seems to minimize the importance of agency. The attempts of the subaltern for self-representation, which they expect to be more truthful, are in vain, she argues, since if a representation falls outside the lines laid down by the official institutional structures of representation, this act of representation is not heard. It is not recognized perhaps because it does not fit in with what is expected of the representation (Harasym [ed.] 1990, 306).

the establishment took upon itself to speak in the name of Mizrahim. Very much like these colonial anthropologists who believe that only they can speak – as if they replaced the parents (*in loco parentis*) – in the name of the ‘primitives’ and the ‘natives’ of the societies they studied. In the same way Ashkenazi politicians, sociologists, scientists, writers and filmmakers, took the right of speaking in the name of Mizrahim. (Shohat 1989, 139, my translation)

Shohat regards this denial of the Mizrah right to self-representation in Bourekas as one of the causes for what she views as the stereotypical and distorted presentation of Mizrahim in the films (1989, 119, 138-139).

Lubin (1999) also points to a possible homology between the nature of Mizrahi representation in the Bourekas and the denial of the Mizrahim’s right to self-representation. Lubin compares the representation of Mizrahim in three films by Mizrahi director Moshe Mizrahi<sup>120</sup> with Mizrahim representation in Bourekas films by Ashkenazi directors. She finds that each group represents Mizrahim quite differently: as opposed to the culturally detached, unrealistic "Mizrahi" culture that appears in Bourekas films, claims Lubin, Mizrahi life in Moshe Mizrahi’s films shows an awareness of the Sephardic cultural past. The films seem to represent a Sephardic folk culture that finds its expression in the characters' intensive use of idioms and epigrams. Additionally, Lubin argues that in contrast with their representation in Bourekas films, the Mizrahi community in Moshe Mizrahi’s films is represented as culturally and ideologically cut off from Zionist experience and history (Lubin 1999, 121).

One more important illustration of the significance of agency in Bourekas films lies in the inner hierarchy of Bourekas films presented by previous critics. A glance at the films that critics from both schools call “Bourekas” reveals that they label films which deny Mizrahim self-representation, as the archetypal models for the entire Bourekas film group. Both in *Sallah*, which all critics agree is the “father of the

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<sup>120</sup> *I Love You, Rosa (Ani Ohev Otach Roza)*, *House on Shlush Street (Habait Berechov Shlush)*, and *Daughters Daughters (Abu al Banat)* (Lubin 1999, 120-128).

Bourekas,” and *Fortuna*, considered by Shohat as an archetypal Bourekas film, a Mizrahi protagonist and a Mizrahi family at the center of the narrative are presented through the agency of Ashkenazi directors, and central Mizrahi figures are played by Ashkenazi actors.

Looking at our Bourekas corpus, one cannot avoid the fact that while a Mizrahi protagonist and community are at the center of their narratives, the directors of all the corpus films are Ashkenazim. Taking into account both the fundamental hypothesis of this study, that the director is the author of the film and, as such, the carrier of the film's cultural agency,<sup>121</sup> and our discussion here of the significance of agency to the textual representations of subaltern groups, it seems that Ashkenazi agency is central to Bourekas films.

Using a post-colonial approach to the Bourekas,<sup>122</sup> I would like to suggest that Ashkenazi agency is a prerequisite of a Bourekas film. Furthermore, a Bourekas film is fundamentally a film characterized by particular paradigmatic representation of Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family, focalized through the agency of a director with an Ashkenazi cultural background. Although engaged with the director's identity, this is by no means an essentialist definition.<sup>123</sup> It does not relate to the

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<sup>121</sup> See the discussion on the author as a cultural agent in the Introduction (Chapter 1).

<sup>122</sup> Shohat, although coming close to this kind of definition, never goes this far. She ignores the option that her own research seems to suggest: that adopting self-representation and the denial of self-representation are effective tools to further investigate the Bourekas films as a group. It seems that this is again due to the fact that her study is a diachronic one, setting itself as historical research, its major effort being to make chronological sense out of Israeli cinema history. Accordingly, it naturally strives for a meaningful presentation of Israeli cinematic evolution rather than for a deep and detailed description of each unit. Ne'eman, like Shohat, seems to highlight the denial of self-representation as a fundamental feature of the Bourekas. Although not familiar with the post-colonial term, he suggests a Bourekas definition that seems to be based on the denial of self-representation: "The Bourekas is an arrogant glance at true culture and tradition. This is an Ashkenazi gaze over the culture of another people" (1979, 21). However, as is the case with Shohat, this insight remains unfocused. Ne'eman avoids using his perspective to further investigate the Bourekas.

<sup>123</sup> Although essentialism in itself is not inherently "bad," as Diana Fuss suggests in her book *Essentially Speaking* (1989): "[I]n and of itself, essentialism is neither good nor bad, progressive nor reactionary, beneficial nor dangerous. The question we should be asking is not 'is this text essentialist (and therefore 'bad')?' but rather, 'if this text is essentialist, what motivates its deployment?'" How does

director's race or ethnic origins but rather to his cultural identity; for this study, "Ashkenazi director" is a person who holds an Ashkenazi cultural identity. Hall (1996) suggests that cultural identity supplies a context from which one speaks.<sup>124</sup> It flows on one hand from the fact that one was born to a certain family with a certain history, but on the other hand from a process of production that never ends in which one adapts himself to the knowledge, norms, and representations of a dominant discourse.

Adopting these concepts to construct the meaning of the phrase "Ashkenazi cultural agency," I leave open the theoretical option that a Bourekas film could be made by a director born to a Mizrahi family (and thus owning the newly constructed Mizrahi cultural identity),<sup>125</sup> whose cultural identity was reconstructed through adopting the knowledge, norms, and representation of the Ashkenazi culture which is dominant in Israeli discourse (Chinski 2002).<sup>126</sup>

Finally, this study will prove in its next chapters that an Ashkenazi agency was crucial to the Bourekas in more than one way. It has not simply caused a distortion in the presentation of Mizrahim through a stereotypical portrayal of them, and an "othering" them as an object of knowledge, as Shohat claims. In addition, the Ashkenazi agency actually was responsible for the construction of the meta-narratives, main conflicts, figures, ethos, and nature of the universe presented in the Bourekas films.

To reinforce these claims, the following discussion will examine and analyze

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the sign 'essence' circulate in various contemporary critical debates? Where, how, and why is it invoked? What are its political and textual effects?" (1989, xi).

<sup>124</sup> Hall's (1990) conceptualization of cultural identities is as follows: "once we avoid essentialist definitions of culture, we may tend to its fluid and evolving nature while still asserting some continuity, relative stability, and intra-ethnic commonalities" (1990, 226-227).

<sup>125</sup> Please see the discussion on Mizrahi cultural identity in the Introduction.

<sup>126</sup> In the same way that black Caribbeans adopt "white masks" in Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967, 127).

other films made within the Bourekas era (1964 to 1977), which focus on a particular representation of Mizrahim but seem to lack Ashkenazi agency, since they were directed by Mizrahi directors. These films will then be compared to Bourekas films.

## **VI. Thematic Analysis of the Particular Presentation of Mizrahim in Films which Embody Self-representation (and Lack Ashkenazi Agency)**

As mentioned earlier, Lubin (1999, 120-128) and Shohat (1989, 167-179) indicated that films focusing on representation of Mizrahi community made by Mizrahi directors – like Moshe Mizrahi's *The House on Shlush Street (Ha'bait Berechov Shlush, 1973)* and Nissim Dayan's *Light of Nowhere (Or Min Ha'efker, 1973)* – and done within the period of the Bourekas cycle, are nevertheless different in many aspects from Bourekas films. This is especially true in their representation of the Mizrahi community, neighborhood, and family.

In addition, I would like to show that films which focus on a representation of Mizrahi community, neighborhood, and family, done by the Mizrahi directors Ze'ev Revach and George Ovidia – seen by previous critics as typical “Bourekas” directors (Shohat 1989, 132; Ben-Shaul 1999, 130; and Schnitzer 1993, 17)<sup>127</sup> – and produced within the Bourekas cycle period, also represent Mizrahi community in a way which differs from the paradigmatic representation of Mizrahi community in Bourekas films.

I will analyze and compare to the Bourekas Revach and Ovidia's first films:<sup>128</sup>

*Ariana* / George Ovidia, 1971

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<sup>127</sup> Ne'eman, who wrote this article when Revach was just becoming a director, refers to Ovidia as a Bourekas filmmaker (Ne'eman 1979, 23).

<sup>128</sup> These are not the only films done by the two (Ovidia made films in Iran before and one earlier film in Israel whose production was still Iranian). But they are the first two Israeli films done by these directors which will serve here as an example of their work. In the case of Revach, who began his career as a director relatively late, *Rak Hayom* is also the only film done by him during the Bourekas period.

*Rak Hayom (Today Only)* / Ze'ev Revach, 1976

There are a number of reasons for choosing these particular films. First, both films were made between 1964 and 1977, which we have already identified as the Bourekas cycle period, and for Ze'ev Revach *Today Only* is his only film done within this period (his other films are later).<sup>129</sup> Secondly, Shohat in her discussion of the Bourekas films mentions both of these films in particular as Bourekas films (and doesn't mention other films by these directors) (Shohat 1989, 132-136).

The main criteria for comparison between the groups involve the nature of cinematic presentation of the Mizrahi community. The remainder of this chapter will examine to what extent the paradigmatic representation of Mizrahim in Bourekas films appears also in these films.

The films discussed are not of any importance to this study on Bourekas for themselves, and will function here mainly as a control group to strengthen the dissertation's hypothesis about the Bourekas being films which employ Ashkenazi agency, while denying the Mizrahi right to self-representation.

### **The Level of Solitude of the Mizrahi Neighborhood and Community and its Relationships with the Governing Authorities**

In *Ariana*, first of all, it must be pointed out that, unlike the situation depicted in the Bourekas, the space dominating the film is not a neighborhood, but the house of

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<sup>129</sup> As mentioned, in order to isolate the element of representation and distinguish it from other variables that might influence the evaluation of the films (such as the year of production), it was decided that the films in the control group must be produced also in the period of Bourekas films cycle, that is, between 1964 and 1977 (see the explanation in the previous chapter). Revach, who joined the industry rather late in the role of director, managed to make only one film before 1977 (*Only Today*, 1976). Ovadia, on the other hand, made about nine films in the specified period, but it seemed fitting to keep to the rule of the first film in this case, too. The problem was that Ovadia's first film, *Lusted* (1968), is only partly an Israeli film, as it featured Iranian actors and included an Iranian crew. For this reason, keeping in mind that the culture reflected by the film is very important to this study's point of view, his second film *Ariana* (1971) was chosen instead, since it is considered his first all-Israeli film.

Ariana's parents – a private space. Secondly, different from the Bourekas, the film supplies a clear location of Ariana's neighborhood in the extra-textual space<sup>130</sup> (we can identify it as a neighborhood in Tel Aviv – Givat Aliya B – after seeing a close-up on a sign hanging on the entrance to the local employment bureau), a fact which connects the neighborhood with the surrounding area, and emphasizes its being a part of the Tel Aviv megalopolis.

The atmosphere of detachment in Bourekas films is reached, amongst various techniques, by outlining the architectural-ontological distinction between the Mizrahi neighborhood and the surrounding area: in *Sallah*, the Maabara is architecturally distinct from the kibbutz; in *Charlie and a Half*, the streets of Charlie's neighborhood seem quite dissimilar to the streets in the nearby city. Moreover, there is an especially obvious difference between the streets of Charlie's neighborhood and the streets of Gila's neighborhood (Charlie's rich Ashkenazi girlfriend).

Contrasting this depiction, in *Ariana* there is no apparent difference between the streets of the neighborhood and the other spaces presented in the films, which points to the territorial uniformity of the neighborhood and the surrounding area.

Unlike the emphasis in Bourekas films on the detachment of the neighborhood, by documenting the long way to and from it, the spectator in *Ariana* is unaware of any distance separating the sewing workshop in which Ariana works from the neighborhood, and so a connection between the neighborhood and the city is accentuated, rather than disassociated.

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<sup>130</sup> Here the dissertation borrows from the literary theory of space. Gabriel Zoran (1997) talks about two fields through which the reader gets his knowledge about the space of a novel: interior (meaning all the knowledge he can receive about the space from what that is actually written in the novel), and exterior (the knowledge about the space he can gather by cross-referencing the information in the text with his knowledge about the actual, extra-textual world). What I mean here by indicating that the film identifies the “extra-textual location” is that it gives enough information about the location to make it possible for the viewer to locate the site of events in the actual world. In the Bourekas, like in classical Yiddish literature (it is impossible to know, for example, where Kabtsiel is in the real world, or where Cassrilevke is), the cinematic sequence never allowed this. The lack of a discernible extra-textual location is one of the strategies that contribute to the feeling of the Mizrahi neighborhood's solitude.

In the Bourekas, the spaces that belong to rich Ashkenazi individuals are marked as located outside the neighborhood, in faraway places that one needs a car to reach. The expensive restaurant in *Charlie and a Half*, for example, is not within walking distance; reaching the house of the Ashkenazi bourgeois couple, to whom Sallah is trying to sell a stray dog, requires a long journey (a fact illustrated in a scene in which Sallah is standing on the road trying to catch a ride). In *Ariana*, on the other hand, the spaces that belong to the rich lack any spatial distinctness. There is no indication, for example, that the spacious house of Arthur Danielli (Avraham Ronai), the wealthy important man, is located outside the neighborhood. On the contrary, the fact that Abud (Arye Elias), Ariana's father, serves as his private greengrocer attests to the proximity of his house and the neighborhood.

These characteristics seem also to reinforce the atmosphere of territorial continuity between the Mizrahi neighborhood and the world around it. Furthermore, *Ariana* points to a certain cultural alliance between the neighborhood and the rich Danielli family, which also underlines the attachment of the neighborhood to its surrounding areas. For example, Danielli celebrates his son's release from the army with a band that plays Arabic music, which was brought over by Abud; and when Ariana (Dasi Harari) and Gadi (Avi Toledano) go out for the first time, they go to a nightclub where there is a belly dancer who is dancing to the tunes of Arabic music.

The feeling of detachment and the seclusion of the neighborhood in the Bourekas films is emphasized by the absence of government departments or institutions from the neighborhood, and by the fact that the neighborhood has no contact with national agencies. In *Ariana*, conversely, we are given the impression that there are government bureaus in the neighborhood.<sup>131</sup> One institution that appears

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<sup>131</sup> Even in *Sallah*, it is clear that the official civil servant's offices are located outside of the Maabara.

early on in the film, as an integral part of the neighborhood, is the employment bureau. In one of the first sequences, Cochava is seen walking out of the bureau and the camera pauses on a sign that reads, "Tel Aviv Employment Bureau, Givat Aliya branch." Since Cochava is on foot, it is only reasonable to assume that the bureau is in the neighborhood. There is also no evidence suggesting that the "School for Fashion Trades," in which Ariana studies, is outside the neighborhood. Regarding the architectural style, both the house and the street look very much part of the neighborhood.

Furthermore, it seems that the community in *Ariana* maintains ongoing, even positive, relations with agencies and institutions, governmental or not. For example, the spectators witness a functional relationship with the government health system when a public ambulance rushes down the street to save Cochava, after Abud calls the emergency services in one of the scenes. Another institution that the neighborhood seems to have harmonious relations with is the Israeli army (IDF). This is illustrated by the emphasis put on the fact that Gadi, Ariana's rich suitor, serves as an officer in the army, and by the focus on the party organized by Abud, Ariana's father, in Gadi's honor, after completing his army service. The positive connection between the army and the community is emphasized through a conversation between Abud and Danielli, in which Abud affirms his appreciation of the IDF and calls out: "Hooray [Kol Hakavod] to the IDF!" But the institution that maintains the most positive relation with Ariana and her family seems to be the court. When the Mizrahi family prosecutes the Danielli family for breaching the marital contract, we find out that the lawyer defending the Danielli family is, in fact, Ariana's real father. The trial also ends up with the judge ruling in favor of Ariana and her family.

In *Only Today*, Ze'ev Revach's film, the Mizrahi living space is also not presented as detached or isolated. There seem to be two Mizrahi living spaces presented in this film: Cohen's (Jack Cohen) neighborhood (the neighborhood of the protagonist's friend) and the market (where all the Mizrahi characters in the film work). The film identifies the extra-textual location of both spaces. The opening shot is a long shot that captures the mostly flat roofs of the houses in Cohen's neighborhood at the front of the frame, and in the background, on the opposite ridge, we see the Old City of Jerusalem. This composition positions Cohen's neighborhood in Jerusalem and emphasizes its being part of the city. The fact that Cohen walks to his working place in the market by foot also identifies the market, the second represented space, as located in Jerusalem.

The most basic familiarity with the extra-textual space would identify the market as the famous "Mach'ne Yehuda Market," which is located in the center of Jerusalem.

Hence, the film – first by singling out the Mizrahi location in extra-textual space, and second, by emphasizing the proximity of the Mizrahi residential spaces to the center of town (the center of the urban space of Jerusalem), and third, by utilizing these two depictions – establish the fact that the Mizrahi living space (the Mizrahi neighborhood) is not isolated at all, but is, in fact, at the very center of the urban entity to which it belongs.

In this film, national institutions – such as hospitals and universities – are involved in the life of the Mizrahi community. Two events point to a good relationship with the hospital: an ambulance comes to the neighborhood to take Hayun's (Avraham Mor) wife to the delivery room, and Cohen goes through a successful operation in the hospital (according to the establishing shot we may

conclude that this is the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem). It seems as though the permission given by the hospital's administration – to let all the market people go into Cohen's room during visiting hours – also attests to a good relationship between the community and the institution.

However, the relationship with the university appears to be more complex. Sasson (Ze'ev Revach), the greengrocer and also the film's protagonist, comes to the university in search of Dahlia (Efrat Lavi) and appears to be quite lost on campus. He carries a large pile of books, which he believes will help him blend into the surroundings and make him seem more like a student, but in fact they only single him out, making him appear out of place in the campus space. This disorientation attests to a certain ignorance of the accepted social conventions in this establishment. Nonetheless, Dahlia is a good student, and the fact that she is the daughter of Cohen, Sasson's close friend from the market, and the fact that she eventually becomes Sasson's girlfriend, suggests a rather positive association between the university and the Mizrahi community.

It is true that no resident works for the establishment in the Mizrahi space depicted in the film, as everyone is a freelancer. But this can clearly be attributed to the fact that the film has chosen a market as the Mizrahi community's living space. A market, by definition, is a place for independent traders, so it is no wonder that there are no individuals bringing in paychecks from the authorities within its parameters.

However, despite this state of affairs, there is one conspicuous character who does receive his paycheck from the authorities – Shmaryahu (Ya'akov Bodo), the municipality inspector. As we discover during the film, Shmaryahu is not a foreign element in the market, he doesn't represent the "others" or the Ahkenazim.<sup>132</sup> Despite

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<sup>132</sup> Unlike the municipality's inspector in *Kazablan*, for example (see previous chapters).

the unpopular nature of his job, and notwithstanding the constant ridicule directed at him by the traders, he seems to be an organic part of the community's social fabric, and partakes in the community's events. Like everyone, he rushes to congratulate Hayun for the birth of his son, and with everyone, he goes to visit Cohen after his surgery, and even brings a gift along. Nobody tries to distance him from these events, and no one is offensive towards him. On the contrary, the people in the community accept him as an integral, and not entirely negative, part of their lives.

### **The Level of Competition in the Mizrahi Neighborhood**

The neighborhood space in *Ariana* is not clearly defined, and so, the presentation of the neighborhood is characterized by great spatial indistinctness. Unlike the classic Bourekas films, the focus of attention is not the neighborhood, but the house where Ariana lives with her mother Zuhara (Tova Fardo) and her father Abud. The Mizrahi community depicted in the film, therefore, consists of Ariana's immediate family, and the individuals in it do not compete financially. When we encounter other neighborhood inhabitants, there is no evidence of an implied financial competition between them and Ariana's family, or even amongst themselves. For example, Abud is a greengrocer and no other greengrocers seem to inhabit the neighborhood.

Financial competition with the Ashkenazim is yet another central characteristic of the Mizrahi neighborhood in the Bourekas films that is absent from this film. Unlike the Bourekas in *Ariana* the rich are not categorized as unquestionably Ashkenazi. Though one may assume that the wealthy character in the film, Arthur Danielli (Avraham Ronai), is of Ashkenazi origin, there are a number of apparent facts that serve to impede the identification of the character as such:

- 1) The character's name. Arthur Danielli is not a name characteristic of a certain ethnic origin. It is certainly not a classic Ashkenazi name. It could be of Mizrahi origin, or perhaps a Hebraized name.
- 2) The fact that when Arthur asks Abud to arrange his son's party, he does not seem to be especially taken aback by Abud bringing a band that plays Arabic music.
- 3) The fact that his son Gadi, on his first date with Ariana, chooses to go to a belly dancing performance, which is danced to the tunes of Arabic music.
- 4) The fact that the actor/singer Avi Toledano plays the part of Gadi, Arthur's son, an actor whose ethnic origin (Moroccan) was common knowledge at the time of the film's release.

Additionally, the ambiguity regarding Danielli's ethnic origin is accentuated by the fact that, unlike the Bourekas films, it is not entirely clear that the rich Danielli family lives in a space that is detached from the neighborhood in which the poor Abud resides. The fact that Abud is Mizrahi, the fact that he is a cart-owning greengrocer, and the fact that he serves as Danielli's personal greengrocer, suggest that the Danielli family lives near Abud's house, perhaps even in the same neighborhood.

Because of this ambiguity, it is quite difficult to discuss any form of financial competition between the Ashkenazim and the Mizrahim in *Ariana*. It may be possible to discuss the financial relations between the rich and the poor, but these too, should be examined as exploitive rather than competitive relations. It is unclear, for instance, if Abud is paid for arranging Gadi's party; it is more likely that he organizes it because he fears that Danielli might terminate their financial relations if he refuses.

Similarly, Ariana, who works as a seamstress in a workshop, is fired without any notice, since it was decided that she had been slacking at her workplace. Another exploitive financial relationship is presented through the affair portrayed in the film's prologue. Cochava, Ariana's biological mother, has an affair with Mr. Sharir, a respectable attorney. After she becomes pregnant, Cochava suggests that it might be the time to tie the knot, but Mr. Sharir refuses and pulls out a stack of bills, which he offers her as compensation.

Sexual competition does exist in *Ariana*, but here, unlike the sexual competition depicted in the Bourekas films, the competition is between two women over a man. Ariana competes with the Polish heiress that Mr. Danielli had chosen for his son Gadi, and in the end manages to win Gadi over. Again, unlike the Bourekas films, the marriage between Gadi and Ariana does not allegorically echo reconciliation and a sharing atmosphere between the Mizrahim and the Ashkenazim. This is primarily due to the fact that the groom's ethnic identity is ambiguous, for the reasons mentioned above, and because the bride too is neither of Mizrahi or Ashkenazi origin but of mixed descent (from a genetic perspective). Ariana was born to a Mizrahi mother and raised in a Mizrahi family, but as the viewers are well aware, and as Ariana herself discovers at the end of the film, her father is actually Ashkenazi.

In *Only Today* the central Mizrahi space is the marketplace. A marketplace is, by definition, a competitive place, above all, since there is an ongoing competition between merchants over clients. Surprisingly enough, unlike the portrayal in the Bourekas films, there does not seem to be any competition between the merchants in *Only Today*. Unlike the recurring paradigm in a number of Bourekas films, each of the traders in the market pursues a different commercial enterprise and so has no apparent reason for competing with others. So for example, Mr. Cohen trades in

cleaning supplies, Mr. Hayun is a tailor, Mr. Dabach (Gabi Amrani) is a carpenter, and Sasson, the protagonist, is a greengrocer. There is some personal tension between Sasson and Mr. Dabach (the carpenter), which is apparent in their mutual teasing, but that too ends quickly enough with the two clinking glasses and exchanging compliments.

Since there is no basis for competition, the traders in the market collaborate. They help each other steer clear of Shmaryahu, the inspector, and share each other's joys and pleasures. When Sasson has had enough of Stella (Mary Suriano), his Ashkenazi mistress, he moves her over to Yehezkel (Sefi Rivlin), the owner of the market café: "Tell her," Sasson says to Yehezkel, in an insinuation of their different levels of masculinity, "that the tomato season is over and it's time for the cucumber season now!" (The word "tomato" in Hebrew stems from the word meaning flirtation, "agavim.")

The lack of competition and the physical closeness unites the traders, turning them into a cheerful bunch. They spend time together outside working hours: they meet every lunch break to chat and solve quizzes; they rush to assist Hayun and his wife when she goes into labor; and they all come to visit Cohen in the hospital while he recovers from his kidney operation.

Hence, it seems that unlike the situation in Bourekas films, the narrative of *Only Today* is not constructed around competition. *Only Today's* narrative is instead constructed around the process of coming of age of the male hero of the film: Sasson, who at the beginning of the film is engaged with juvenile love affairs with women out of his class, age, and ethnic group, comes in the end to be engaged to a girl who is of his class, age, and ethnic group, and who he will probably marry.

However, the road of Sasson to this point of adulthood passes through sexual competition. This competition is apparently – as it is in *Kazablan*, *Charlie and a Half*, *Fortuna*, and *Rabbi Gamliel* – a sexual competition that has an allegorical aspect, since it involves two male figures who each represent either the Mizrahi sector or the Ashkenazi sector. The two examples of the sexual competition in *Only Today* are:

- The competition between Sasson, the Mizrahi, and the Ashkenazi doctor (Gid'on Zinger) over Stella, the latter's wife;
- The competition between Sasson, the Mizrahi, and Alex (Ilan Dar), the Ashkenazi, over Dahlia's affections, the latter's girlfriend/fiancée.

Sasson meets Stella, the Ashkenazi wife of a doctor, when she comes to the market to buy tomatoes. She invites Sasson over to her house, where her husband's clinic is also situated, and lures him to come into bed with her. Their affair lasts quite a long time, long enough for Sasson to arrange that Cohen, a kidney patient, gets a free appointment with Stella's husband, followed by an operation at the hospital performed by the husband. There is an apparent sexual competition in this film between Sasson and the doctor. This competition is underlined by the fact that the husband is in the house when the couple meets for their intimate rendezvous. In one of the scenes, there is even an encounter between Sasson and the cuckolded husband – the doctor reaches the entrance to his wife's room just as Sasson comes out. He notices Sasson but suspects nothing, and even greets him absentmindedly.

Nonetheless, *Only Today* presents a subtler version of sexual competition. This is not the vulgar and visible competition between Robert, the Ashkenazi, and Charlie, the Mizrahi, in *Charlie and a Half*, nor is it the almost violent competition between the uncle from Marseille and the French engineer over Fortuna in *Fortuna*; and neither is it the indecent competition between Kazablan, the Mizrahi, and Yanosh,

the Ashkenazi, in *Kazablan*. First and foremost, it is a competition that one party (the husband) is completely unaware of; second, the competition seems to be less weighty, since the husband is depicted as apathetic to his wife and, in fact, ignores her sexuality completely. Preoccupied with his work, the husband (Gideon Zinger) does not notice that he is not satisfying his wife's great sexual appetite; in fact, he doesn't even seem to imagine that she has any sexual appetite whatsoever. The husband is depicted as a non-sexual, dry character who is motivated mainly by money, and prefers making it to having any sexual pleasure. So, when Stella calls him on the phone and invites him to join her in the bedroom, he lies and says that he is in the middle of a medical examination when, in fact, he is in the middle of collecting the money owed to him by a client.

The competition between Sasson, the Mizrahi, and Alex, the Ashkenazi, over Dahlia's affections is, again, a competition that one side (Alex) is mostly unaware of, which dismisses him as a genuine competitor. Additionally, Alex is not really interested in winning the competition – he doesn't want Dahlia to be his girlfriend and uses various excuses to avoid her. In fact, the relationship between Sasson and Dahlia begins when Sasson courts Dahlia in Alex's name, to cover for Alex's lack of interest in her.

Juxtaposing the sexual competition presented in *Only Today* with the sexual competition presented in the Bourekas films suggests that the allegorical message varies, in each case, according to the concrete situations depicted. The films that deny self-representation depict a *real* competition of men of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi origins over a woman, which is concluded in the triumph of the Mizrahi over the Ashkenazi. In doing so, they suggest that the Mizrahi men have an advantage over the Ashkenazi men in this field. In *Only Today*, the unreal competition (or unequal, since it is not

known to the Ashkenazi man, or since he doesn't care), suggests the opposite. The film suggests a situation in which the Ashkenazi men have a clear advantage over the Mizrahi men, a situation in which the Mizrahi men don't stand a chance, unless their Ashkenazi competitor is unaware of the competition itself (the doctor), or not interested for one reason or another (Alex).

While the sexual behavior in the film differs from that portrayed in the films that deny self-representation, it is somewhat reminiscent of the sexual behavior presented in other self-representation films. As in *Father of the Girls*, by Moshe Mizrahi, here too the narrative follows the coming of age conflict of two grown men – Sasson and Cohen – and highlights certain Oedipal elements in their behavior. From Sasson's point of view it seems significant that, like Yossef in *Father of the Girls*, he becomes engaged to the daughter of his best friend who is like a father figure to him (Cohen). As for Cohen, he tries to keep his daughter, Dahlia, from marrying Alex. The possible Oedipal significance of such behavior is reinforced by the fact that Cohen encourages the relationship between Dahlia and Sasson, his close, younger friend from the market, who is like a son to him.

### **Non-instrumental, Romantic Attitudes towards Male-Female Relationships and Marriages**

Looking at the Mizrahi family through the agency of the melodramatic *Ariana*, one gets the impression that the romantic view of male-female relationships is highly conspicuous in it. The film presents two Mizrahi women, Cochava and Ariana, mother and daughter, who are willing to follow their hearts to the verge of self-destruction. Cochava, although abandoned by her lover, insists on giving birth to their love child (Ariana); and Ariana, who inherits her mother's destiny, gets pregnant by her fiancé and then is abandoned by him, but won't give up her love child as well. Not

like in the Bourekas, where this kind of impulsive, passionate romantic behavior by youngsters draws criticism and sometime even sanctions from the family (for example in *Sallah*, in *Katz and Karasso*, or even in the melodramatic *Fortuna*), here the family stands firm behind Ariana and proves that it shares her values and romantic world view. And indeed it seems that Ariana has assimilated the romantic ethos so deeply that she is willing to go as far as the state court to sue her abandoning fiancé. Officially she charges him with violating the marriage promise but it seems obvious that the fuel that feeds this lawsuit is her offense at the fact that he has broken his love promise to her.

In the Bourekas, we see again and again the cinematic author undermining the romantic feelings of the heroes through his cinematic rhetoric, which forces a reductive presentation of scenes with romantic potential, adding a grotesque flavor to them. In *Ariana*, however, there is no ironic gap between the cinematic author and his romantic heroine, Ariana. On the contrary, the author seems to identify with Ariana and does his best to emphasize emotional and romantic aspects of film discourse.

In Bourekas films that focus on a affair (such as *Charlie and a Half* and *Kazablan*), the romantic value of the film's courting plot is reduced by showing it through individuals who represent an instrumental view of the male-female bond. By contrast, *Ariana*'s cinematic sequence emphasizes romantic moments, first through constructing the courting plot from a scene in which the couple is alone. This strategy gives the author a chance to linger on the couple's feelings towards one another.

Hence, Ariana and Gabi are alone when they meet for the first time,<sup>133</sup> when riding in Gabi's car, and they are alone in the hotel when they first make love.

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<sup>133</sup> Both in *Charlie and a Half* (1975) and *Sallah* (1964) the couples are not alone when they first meet. In *Charlie and a Half* when Gila and Charlie meet Robert, Gila's fiancé, is there, and in *Sallah* when Habuba and Zigi first meet, Sallah is there.

Apart from this, the cinematic author creates a romantic atmosphere in the film by constructing scenes which naturally support the romance – such as the scene where Gabi takes Ariana to the nightclub. The film also stresses the romantic aspects of other scenes, such as Ariana and Gabi's car ride, where the beautiful forested landscape that serves as the location, the hour of the day that was chosen (sunset), and the music that accompany the scene, all serve as indices which together create a romantic atmosphere.

Finally, *Ariana's* melodramatic narrative naturally supports the romantic ethos. The film plot in which Ariana, after being abandoned by her fiancé for the sake of a Shiduch to a rich girl, sues him and wins the case, seems to suggest allegorically that a bond which is formed through a natural, mutual attraction is both stronger and more just than a bond artificially produced that reflects a materialistic view of marriage. *Ariana* supports and approves a romantic ethos not only through the heroine's triumph in court against the rich Shiduch, but also through the reunion of Ariana with her biological father. It seems that through this moving reunion the film retrospectively approves and supports Cochava's decision to follow her heart. It shows that at the end of the day, there were no bad consequences from her passionate decision and that it all ended well.

Although not a melodrama, in *Only Today* a romantic atmosphere is also stressed both through the narrative and the author's cinematic rhetoric. There is no matchmaking in the film. All the meetings between Sasson, the hero, and the women in his life are incidental, and mutual attraction is involved in them. Sasson meets Stella, who will soon become his lover, when she comes to pick tomatoes in his vegetable stand; he meets Dahlia, the girl he will fall in love with, when she comes to visit her father who works in a stand next to his.

In a way that is reminiscent of Ariana's insistence on the triumph of romance in her private life, Sasson, the protagonist of *Only Today*, demands a revelation of romance in Dahlia's relationships with Alex, her boyfriend. Sasson challenges Dahlia to confront the reductive, insulting, and instrumental attitude of Alex, and tries to force the romance back into their relationship. When it doesn't work out, and when Alex doesn't accept the challenge, Sasson replaces Alex, and it seems as if he does it not only because of his love for Dahlia but also for the sake of bringing back romance into Dahlia's life. Like in *Ariana*, scenes with romantic potential are integrated into the film's narrative, such as the long moments in which Sasson stands under Dahlia's window waiting for her to appear, and the meeting between Sasson and Dahlia on the beach.

### **The Material Culture of the Mizrahi Neighborhood**

At first sight, it seems as though Ariana's neighborhood could be reminiscent of the ontological characterization of the neighborhoods portrayed in the Bourekas films. The streets of the neighborhood are unpaved and the hybrid character of the neighborhood (both rural and urban) is emphasized by shots that focus on chickens, a mule, and even two sheep that dwell in Abud's backyard. Apparently, here too the neighborhood suffers from lack of development, lack of cultivation, and neglect. As in the streets of Sallah's Maabara, there are no trees and no greenery in sight; and of course, no street furnishings, such as a bench, electricity poles, fences, etc. However, there are some important differences between this neighborhood and the one that appears in the Bourekas films.

In many of the Bourekas films (*Kazablan*, *Charlie and a Half*, *Snooker*, *Rabbi Gamliel*), the neighborhood, the Mizrahi living space, is the space that opens the

cinematic sequence of the films, but in *Ariana* this is not the case. The opening space in *Ariana* is a thoroughfare on which Cochava, Ariana's biological mother, and her lover, the attorney Sharir, are driving in a car. The second space is the neighborhood in which Ariana's mother grew up, not the neighborhood that will be the film's primary space. Only third, in the chronological sequence of the film's spaces, comes the neighborhood in which the Mizrahi family lives. This presentation raises questions as regarding the relationship between the representation of space and the community.

One might claim that while the authors in the Bourekas films use the neighborhood space as an instrument to metonymically characterize the community in the center of the film, *Ariana* presents a functional use of the Mizrahi neighborhood space that undermines any metonymic significance. Instead of utilizing the neighborhood space to characterize the heroine, the film uses the inner space of the house she lives in to shape her character. Thus, in *Ariana*, the metonymic presentation of the family/community moves from relying on the communal neighborhood space to relying on the private indoor space. Unlike the Bourekas films, where the protagonists are depicted mostly out on the neighborhood streets and in cafés – films in which the cinematic sequence does not concern itself with the presentation of the protagonists' indoor spaces (their houses)<sup>134</sup> – most of the scenes in *Ariana* are indoor scenes filmed within the house. To summarize this point: the neighborhood representation of *Ariana* might show some resemblance to the Mizrahi neighborhood presentation in the Bourekas, but this representation in *Ariana* is of a marginal

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<sup>134</sup> In *Snooker* (1975), for example, none of the protagonists are seen in their houses; and in *Kazablan* (1972), the film does not present the protagonist's house as an actual space at all. In principle, it seems that the cinematic sequence in George Ovadia's films follows the protagonists' activity within their houses or in other closed spaces, and uses these spaces to present the characters. Generally, the films' cinematic sequences present a preference for indoor shots. In *Midnight Entertainer (Badranit Be'Hatzot*, 1976), the film focuses on the protagonist's home, as the central shooting location. There is only one outdoor shot that reveals the neighborhood in which the story takes place (the Hatikvah neighborhood).

importance to the characterization of the Mizrahi community in the film, since it lacks the metonymic aspect.

Yet another difference between the neighborhood space presented in *Ariana* and the neighborhood spaces presented in the Bourekas films has to do with the fact that in *Ariana* the space is neither crowded nor dense. On the contrary, the space gives a sparse impression; the streets are depicted as empty, and the houses have large yards that separate them from the street. For example, when Cochava reaches Zohara and Abud's house and knocks on the exterior entrance door, Zohara comes out from her house, crosses the big yard and only then opens the gate.

As in *Ariana*, and unlike the Bourekas films, the spaces in which the Mizrahi community lives in *Only Today* have a recognizable location in the extra-textual space. Two such spaces stand in the center of the film: the neighborhood in which Cohen, Dahlia's father, lives and the market, which are both located in Jerusalem.

Another difference between the neighborhood portrayed in *Only Today* and neighborhoods in Bourekas films is its evidently urban character, in contrast to the hybrid character of the neighborhoods in the Bourekas films. Additionally, these spaces have a relatively high level of configuration, unlike the neglect dominating the neighborhoods in the Bourekas films. The opening shot in *Only Today* depicts the neighborhood in which Cohen, the protagonist's best friend, resides. It is a typical Jerusalemite city center neighborhood. The shot reveals stone houses with flat, or rounded roofs and the Old City can be seen in the distance. The cinematic sequence escorts Cohen and his worker while they walk the paved and cobbled streets on their way to the market (as we later discover). Unlike the depiction in the Bourekas films, the streets of the neighborhood do not echo any neglect. Furthermore, as in *Ariana* and the self-representation films, the streets are not crammed. On the contrary, the

streets are depicted in the early morning, when there is no one around, in a way that emphasizes the spatial sparseness.

However, it seems that the most evident difference between *Only Today* and the Bourekas films in this respect is the rhetoric employed by the film. Clearly opposing the Bourekas films, *Only Today* presents an effort to beautify the space, to organize the signified – the Mizrahi living space – within a positive pattern of a signifying cinematic sequence. By presenting the signified (space) through indices that function to ascribe beauty to it, the cinematic author ornaments the Mizrahi living space with aesthetic urban values. Though the marketplace, the primary Mizrahi space in the film, is essentially a chaotic space that is inherently lacking in aesthetic organization, the cinematic author endeavors to portray it in the most aesthetic way possible, by means of producing a careful and highly configured cinematic sequence. For instance, the long shots of the market are taken either at sunrise or at sunset. The light at this time of day colors the objects either in blue or gold, which serves to create a romantic atmosphere, and characterizes the shots with low exposure, which serves to conceal the dirty surroundings and other imperfections.

The effort made to beautify the space depicted characterizes other elements of the cinematic sequence in *Only Today*. The film's opening shot, for example, presents a classic aesthetic perception and a cinematic rhetoric of great virtuosity. This shot, which lasts two minutes with no cuts, opens with a beautiful picture of the domed roofs in Cohen's neighborhood, while on the horizon we see the Old City of Jerusalem. The balanced composition, the perspective that gives a sense of depth, and the soft morning light combine to create a breathtaking scene. After a few seconds the camera pans a hundred and eighty degrees and shows Cohen's attractive stone house. Cohen and Hershkovitz, his employee, leave the house, and the camera follows them,

by use of a crane, as they walk through a gate with a striking stone arch, take a look at the awe-inspiring view, and descend the stairs going down to the street. Both the slow pace of the shot and the compositions created attest to the respect and appreciation the film has towards this Mizrahi living space, a respect that entirely contradicts the attitude which is fundamental to the cinematic rhetoric in the Bourekas films.

### **Nature of Togetherness and Community Life**

The neighborhood in *Ariana* is not crowded, and there is no imposed togetherness or the phenomenon of peeping. On the contrary, it seems as though Ariana and her family live in relative seclusion. Often, when the streets of the neighborhood are filmed, they are deserted or show little movement. It seems as though the Mizrahi family has no neighbors. Additionally, in clear opposition to the situation depicted in the Bourekas films, in *Ariana*, the private and public spaces are absolutely disassociated, a feature illustrated by the fact that a large yard and a high wall separate Ariana's house from the street. This separation makes the transition from one space to the other quite difficult. So for example, when Abud first arrives with Cochava, Ariana's biological mother, to his house and wants to speak to his wife, he must knock on the door and wait for his wife to open the door of the house, cross the yard, and open the exterior door separating the yard from the street.

When the perimeters between the private and public spheres are clearly defined and protected, there is no flow of information, and so, no gossip either. Ariana, for example, is constantly missing out on vital pieces of information. She does not know, until the end of the film, that Abud and his wife, who raised her, are not her real parents, and she does not know who her biological mother is. She is unaware of the existence of a contender of Ashkenazi origin over Gadi's affections, and when

Gadi is sent to Paris on his father's orders and writes to her from there, she does not receive the letters as they are taken by George (Gabi Amrani), the father's "yes man."

As we have discussed, the main space of the Mizrahi community in *Only Today* is the marketplace. A market is a place that is essentially crowded and has an atmosphere of togetherness, and indeed, the market merchants conduct the kind of life that could easily be defined as communal. The ambiguous differentiation between the private and public spheres is also characteristic of the atmosphere and life in the market. So, for example, Sasson plays backgammon with his merchant friend outside on his stand; the merchants ask each other over for coffee by the stands; all the merchants in the market rush to aid Hayun's wife (the tailor) as she goes into labor; etc.

However, despite the apparent resemblance between the depicted reality in this film and the one depicted in the Bourekas films, a comparison between the two settings gives rise to some fundamental differences. First, in the Bourekas films the togetherness characterizes the private living space, the home, and in *Only Today* it characterizes the workplace, which is public by nature. It wouldn't be accurate, if so, to talk of an ambiguous differentiation between the private and the public in *Only Today*; at most we see a mix between the professional and the personal.

Correspondingly, it does seem as though the privacy is kept in the merchants' own homes. For example, Cohen's house, the only one of the merchants whose house is presented to the viewer, isn't characterized by free access to the surrounding space, but quite the reverse. As in *Ariana*, the separation between the private and public sphere is emphasized by a yard and a wall that separate the house from the street.

Second, unlike the imposed togetherness in the Bourekas films – which is the result of competition, and serves the neighborhood's inhabitants in their industrial

espionage and in gathering information in order to improve their financial or social standing the accent is put on the positive elements of the togetherness and the communal life in *Only Today*. So, when Hayun's wife goes into labor and the ambulance is delayed, many people invade Hayun's house, but their invasion, which does indeed express an ambiguous separation between the public and private spaces, is presented in the film as a positive event, an incident in which the marketplace people offer their help to a friend in need. On the whole, it seems as though the togetherness in the market is voluntary and serves social goals concerning responsibility and mutual support. The advantages of a communal life are emphasized. So, the marketplace people warn each other when the inspector Shmaryahu comes along; help each other to get through the quiet hours (playing backgammon at lunch, etc.); support each other when in need (helping with Hayun's wife, visiting Cohen at the hospital); and even share their pleasures (as when Sasson moves his mistress over to Yehezkel's care). The togetherness also helps moderate the interpersonal conflicts in the community. For example, the conflict between Dabach and Sasson is solved during the merchants' daily lunch break.

Third, there is no gossip in the market. Unlike the situation depicted in the Bourekas films, where the imposed togetherness is the source of gossip, and supports the unhindered flow of information from the individual to the public, in *Only Today* this phenomenon has no place. In view of that, Sasson does not know that Dahlia is Cohen's daughter, though they have been working together for years, and no one knows that Sasson has a mistress, though the working hours are the time he goes off on his intimate meetings.

## Work and Making a Living in the Neighborhood

No sordid or criminal elements exist in *Ariana*. The film depicts a working neighborhood – all the characters work for a living: Abud is a greengrocer; Ariana works in a sewing workshop; Gadi is an officer in the army; and Danielli, his father, is probably a businessman. In one of the scenes, a prostitute appears and tries to persuade Cochava, Ariana's biological mother, to join her, while in the background stand two men who are probably her pimps. However, the aggression with which Abud, Ariana's father, handles them functions to persuade the viewers that they are not accepted in the neighborhood, and that their presence is not customary.

In *Only Today* as well we are confronted with a working community. The characters in the market all work, of course, and though they are seen playing backgammon, it is not the kind of professional backgammon that serves as a source of income as in *Sallah*, but a game intended to help unwind the tensions of work and get through the quiet hours of the day. In fact, the only idler in the film, who is also a drunk, is Cohen's Ashkenazi friend Hershkovitz, who serves as his assistant – the only Ashkenazi in the market. The rumors say that he used to be a doctor, but became a peddler once he started drinking. During one of the lunch breaks, he is seen taking a drunkard's snooze on the table, and on another occasion he asks Sasson to donate towards building a fence for a cemetery, but instead uses the money to buy a bottle of vodka.

Though there is fraud in *Only Today*, it is restricted to the characters outside the neighborhood. Alex, for example, is a defrauder that fools and misleads Dahlia, until the kindhearted Sasson saves her from him. But mostly, the place of fraud in the film is filled by a certain form of cunning. Sasson, for example, is a charming

opportunist who knows how to exploit certain situations and weaknesses to his benefit, without harming anyone too severely. With this cunning he takes advantage of Dabach's (the carpenter's) naiveté and manages to lead him on with a simple trick: he makes him name the absolute value, before the mediating fee, of a chair that he wants to buy from him, and he also uses Stella's (the doctor's wife's) boredom to his advantage. But this crafty action turns out for the best, since it gives Sasson a way of arranging free medical treatment for Cohen.

### **Practical Attitude to Life**

There are no superstitious practices or beliefs mentioned in these two films. In *Ariana*, the characters keep close touch with the concrete, visible, and practical world. When Gadi leaves Ariana she does not go to a fortuneteller or an astrologist, and does not search for mystical ways to get him back to her. Instead, she sues Gadi for breaking his promise of marriage. There are no superstitions in *Only Today*, either. When Cohen falls ill, he doesn't go to a witch doctor, but seeks the treatment given by modern medicine.

### **Summary: Presentation of the Mizrahi Community in the Films of Ovadia and Revach**

It seems that the films examined here, made by Ovadia and Revach, have little to do with the Bourekas films, and the Bourekas' paradigmatic representation of Mizrahim does not exist in them. In *Ariana*, there is no clearly delineated Mizrahi neighborhood or community. The focus of the film is the family unit, which seems to have little to do with the cultural characteristics and way of life attributed to the Mizrahi families in the Bourekas.

The film moves to connect the living space of the Mizrahi characters (neighborhood, home) with the surrounding areas, and does not present it as an

isolated or neglected space. As a result, there is less economical and psychological pressure on the community and there is no diegetic justification for a degraded representation of the resident's way of life; indeed, in the Mizrahi family world in *Ariana* there is no reduction of the emotional and spiritual values of human acts and relationships into their instrumental function, like in Bourekas films. Unlike the Bourekas films that present a community which don't believe in romance, *Ariana* does its best to convince the viewer of the Mizrahi characters' belief in love (both Ariana and her mother follow their hearts) and of the importance of romantic love as a value. Finally, the cinematic author tries to convince the audience that these sorts of emotional relations are both stronger and more just than a bond artificially produced by matchmaking, and which reflects a materialistic view of marriage. We also see that these relationships have substantial, tangible rewards (as we see with Gadi and Ariana's marriage, and when Ariana finally unites with her biological father). The same goes to other social values such as neighboring and work, which are not reduced to their instrumental functions by Mizrahi characters in the film.

In conclusion, Ovadia's film fundamentally differs from Bourekas films in presentation of Mizrahi neighborhood and family. *Ariana* seems to be not a Bourekas film but a classic melodrama that portrays the relations between the rich and the poor while realizing the principles of universal justice. If one must find *Ariana's* local source it would be not Bourekas films but the Egyptian melodrama, a film formula that was spread starting in the 1940s around the Middle East, and in which "It is always love that holds the first place, spiced with mean seductions, rapes, adulteries, prisons, death, suicide and mental illness" (Shafic 1998, 28). This focus on romantic love and its obstructions, presented from the point of view of a heroine, is typical also

to other famous films by Ovadia, such as *Nurit* (1972), *Sarit* (1973), *Midnight Entertainer* (*Badranit Be' Hazot*, 1977), *Nurit 2* (1983).

Revach's film, *Only Today*, seems closer to Bourekas films than *Ariana*, because it presents a Mizrahi living space which is reminiscent of the neighborhood in the Bourekas (a market). But the likeness between this film and the Bourekas ends at this point. The ontological environment of the Mizrahi living space, the sociology and culture of the Mizrahi community, and the rhetoric employed by the cinematic author to characterize the two, are completely distinguishable from those of Bourekas films.

In *Only Today*, too, and more apparently than in *Ariana*, the cinematic author acts to associate the Mizrahi living space with the surrounding spaces. As a result he discards the source of the reduction of human values to instrumental aspects, which is fundamental to the reductive representation of the Mizrahi community in the Bourekas. Accordingly, the representation of the Mizrahi community in the film is different: the film presents a community built on values such as good neighborly relations, mutual help, friendship, loyalty, and love.<sup>135</sup> It seems as though features such as an accommodating representation of the Mizrahi community and neighborhood, a narrative that focuses on the coming of age process of the male hero, as well as the cinematic author's rhetoric and style, make *Only Today* reminiscent of other Mizrahi self-representation films of its time, specifically those by Moshe Mizrahi.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Another interesting difference between the presentation of the Mizrahi community in *Only Today* and its presentation in the Bourekas has to do with sexual competition. Bourekas films tend to present a charming Mizrahi man who surpasses the Ashkenazi man by the power of his masculine appeal, which allows him to compete with the Ashkenazi despite the socio-economic gap between them. Contrasting this depiction, *Only Today* presents a situation in which the Mizrahi man does not stand a chance in a sexual competition over a woman with an Ashkenazi man. In so doing, the film chooses to portray a more realistic state of affairs instead of the manipulative presentation in some Bourekas films, which has been perceived by modern critics of the Bourekas as "dishonest" (see Ne'eman 1979, 20).

<sup>136</sup> Films such as *The House on Shlush Street* (1973) and *Father of the Girls* (1973) represent a Sephardo-Mizrahi community in a non-reductive way, and construct their narrative around the coming of age process of their male heroes (see also Lubin 1999).

## VII. Summary of the Comparison Between Bourekas Films and Mizrahi Self-representation Films

Both the differences between Bourekas films and Mizrahi self representation films, pertaining to the ontological and the social-cultural character of the Mizrahi neighborhood/community/family, and the homology within the Bourekas films concerning the presentation of Mizrahim, call attention to the singularity and inner uniformity of the group of films presented at the beginning of this chapter as assembling the Bourekas cycle.<sup>137</sup>

Indicating the exclusive features of the representation of Mizrahi community, neighborhood, and family common to all Bourekas, the dissertation's comparative study has shown that the essence of the Bourekas as a distinguishable group of films lies in its unique themes about Mizrahim, expressed through paradigmatic representation of a particular nature in them.

In addition, our analysis has found features of a more rhetorical and poetic nature, which seems typical to the Bourekas. These features are the particular mode of narrative construction in the Bourekas, and the particular rhetoric that the Bourekas' cinematic authors use in their cinematic construction of space. This rhetoric of space is supported by specific cinematic strategies such as choice of location and set design, and cinematic techniques such as camera handling, composition, and editing.

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<sup>137</sup> Showing the singularity of the Bourekas as a film group in their representation of the Mizrahi minority is of essential importance to this study. Since the study is about to claim a linkage between the Bourekas representation of Mizrahim and the representation in classical Yiddish literature of the shtetl Jews, any similar or homological presentation in a different group of films might weaken this claim. Two groups of films have been suggested as a source of influence for the Bourekas: Egyptian (Arab) melodrama and Black exploitation films. The Egyptian melodrama seems closer to George Ovadia's films than to the Bourekas (see page 145). As for Black exploitation films, they do not present competition within the black community, nor do they present community togetherness or reduction of the romantic ethos in the same way; they also do not typically end with intermarriage between a man of the minority group and a woman from the hegemonic group.

## **Bourekas' Aesthetic Choices and Narrative Construction**

Juxtaposing the Bourekas with the films that embody Mizrahi self-representation emphasizes the fact that the cinematic authors in Bourekas films uniquely organize the narrative so that it revolves round an axis of a conflict based on competition.<sup>138</sup> The cinematic authors then arrange the smaller units in the film (sequences and scenes) in a way that accentuates the element of competition. We see this in *Snooker*, where the competition between Azriel (Yehuda Barkan) and Mushon (Tuvia Tzafir) over Yona (Nitza Shaul) is the central conflict, while the scenes are structured around competitive situations between the characters, such as the game of snooker between Salvador (Yosef Shiloah) and Gabriel (also Yehuda Barkan), or the competition between Azriel and Mushon concerning their knowledge of Holy Scripture.

## **The Aesthetics of the Cinematic Sequence**

The comparative analysis also reveals that the rhetoric in the Bourekas revolves around a cinematic sequence with a low level of aesthetic organization. The cinematic sequence of Bourekas films is reduced to documenting the character's dramatic actions, thereby presenting a chaotic cinematic space that serves to signify a torn and severed society in a constant war of all against all, a society defined by a fierce struggle for survival. This portrayal is achieved through a cinematic rhetoric, which deliberately degrades the aesthetic organization and spatial continuity of cinematic sequence. Often, this disorienting effect is employed in such a way that opposes the nature of the situation depicted. For example, in *Katz and Karasso* when Karasso's son (Yehuda Barkan) and Katz's daughter (Effrat Lavi) kiss on the beach in

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<sup>138</sup> In the Mizrahi self-representation films the focal conflict is of male maturation (coming of age), and the composition of the smaller units of the film (sequences and scenes) are varied according to their contribution to this central conflict.

Eilat, the cinematic author includes in the cinematic sequence features which turns this potentially romantic scene grotesque.

## **VIII. General Summary and Conclusions: New explanations, New Phenomena, and a New Definition**

In this chapter I have consistently identified, catalogued, described, explained, and showed in action *all* the characteristics contributing to the paradigmatic Mizrahim representation in the Bourekas. Furthermore, the study has indicated these as thematic traits of the Bourekas, pointing at them as inherent to the Bourekas cinematic rhetoric, and part of a recurring pattern in the films.

The study also points at a comprehensive and rational array of reasons for this recurring pattern. The source of this pattern is the chronic neglect of the Mizrahi community by local authorities, as well as its insulation. One could describe the logic of the recurring pattern in the Bourekas' Mizrahi representation as follows: the Bourekas depict the Mizrahim as a pre-modern Jewish society that is neglected by the authorities, and is financially and socially isolated. This results in a severe restriction of this society's resources and in overwhelming crowdedness (the result of imposed isolation), which leads to a society that prescribes a ruthless struggle for survival, and whose members live in an atmosphere of chaos, anarchy, and decadence; consequentially, the result is the reduction of values to their instrumental aspects within the sphere of this community.

Shohat (1989, 124) and other critics of the postcolonial school (Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi 2002, Chetrit 2004) have argued for misrepresentation of the Mizrahim in Bourekas films. The findings of this study strongly support their claims.

The difference regarding the mode of Mizrahi representation, found between the two groups compared by the study – the films that embody Mizrahi self-representation and the Bourekas films – cannot be disregarded. These differences, which can be described somewhat reductively as a more favorable representation of Mizrahi in Mizrahi self-representation films, and which seem to prove that Mizrahi see themselves differently (and in a more positive way) than presented in Bourekas films, support complaints made by critics of the postcolonial school about misrepresentation of Mizrahi in the Bourekas.

While modern critics (Ne'eman 1979) attribute the reductive cinematic sequence in Bourekas to the incapability of the directors, or their greed, I offer a different explanation. The study explains this aspect of the films as a conscious choice, a *rhetoric* that I describe as a "reduction of the cinematic sequence," which is used by the cinematic authors. The chapter indicates that the reduction of the cinematic sequence to a mere documentation of the character's dramatic action, the low aesthetic organization of the films' compositions, as well as the breaching of spatial continuity in the cinematic sequence by creating pockets of disorientation, are all, in fact, rhetorical tactics employed by the cinematic authors. Their intention in using these techniques is to present the Mizrahi community and the Mizrahi neighborhood as a chaotic sphere that suffers deterioration and is characterized by reduced values.

Although it is only halfway to the end of this study, already a definition of the Bourekas can be articulated: the Bourekas are a distinguishable cycle of 11 films produced between 1964 and 1977, which share a particular paradigmatic representation of Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family, focalized through the agency of a director with an Ashkenazi cultural background; in these films the

narrative is constructed around competition as a focal conflict, and the cinematic sequence is constructed using a rhetoric of low configuration.

As in many other cases, answering fundamental questions seems to encourage the emergence of new ones. Previous critics explained the misrepresentation of Mizrahim in the Bourekas as influenced by the Eurocentric ideology of the authors (Shohat 1989), or as a reflection of Zionist modernization theory (Shenhav 2002), or as a means to anesthetize the citizenry's social criticism of Mizrahi viewers (Ne'eman 1979). As we explore these explanations, it seems that all of them are based on the assumption that representation of Mizrahim in the Bourekas is built on two elements. The first is an essentially authentic Mizrahi reality (that these critics seem to assume actually exists). The second is an ideology of the cinematic authors of Bourekas films that serves as a lens through which this authentic reality passes and is twisted.

However, in light of this study's findings, these explanations do not fit any longer. The considerable difference that was found between the representation of Mizrahim in the self-presentation films and their representation in the Bourekas hints at the fact that the Bourekas do not offer a "twisted" Mizrahi reality, but a totally different one. Furthermore, in light of the inner logic and inner harmony that the study finds in the recurring pattern of Mizrahi representation in the Bourekas, it makes little sense that this pattern is made of two clashing elements (authentic Mizrahi reality and a twisted ideology); instead, it seems as if this paradigmatic representation has only one harmonized source.

A new answer, then, is needed as to the sources of this representation. It seems that since Ashkenazi cultural background has been proven essential in the production of this paradigmatic representation, Jewish Ashkenazi cultures could be the place to look for the origins of this representation.

At this point I would like to turn to a quotation from Amos Elon's book, *The Israelis* (1988), in which he talks about the culture of the founding fathers of Israel.

There he seems to give us a clue to where the origins of the Mizrahi representation in

Bourekas films can be found:

The deterioration of the [Jewish, r.k.] shtetl had drawn the attention of a well-known author who said: "this is an ugly life." It was Shalom Yaakov Abramovitz, Mendele Mokher Sfarim.... In his bitter novels, which are based on [Jewish, r.k.] life in Eastern Europe, pathetic, horrific products of a deteriorating society are huddled together: scroungers, beggars, consumed by flees, vagrants, fools, idlers, witch doctors, and charlatan rabbis. (Elon 1988, 50-51, my emphasis)

Since Mendele Mokher Sfarim is the pioneer of what was later to be called "classical Yiddish literature," in the next chapter of the dissertation I will try to find out whether classical Yiddish literature is a source of the paradigmatic representation of Mizrahim in the Bourekas.

# Chapter Four:

## The Cultural Roots of the Bourekas in Yiddish Classical Literature

### I. Methodology of Analysis

#### Corpus Selection Criteria

The previous chapter defined Bourekas films through the paradigm of Mizrahim representation and the cinematic rhetoric applied by its directors. Assuming a connection between this representation and Ashkenazi agency inherent to all Bourekas films, this chapter will seek its roots in one of the most prominent phenomenon of Jewish Ashkenazi culture of recent generations: classical Yiddish literature. The study will look for the origins of the representation paradigms used in the Bourekas' depiction of Mizrahi neighbourhood, community, and ontology, in the shtetl representations of the most famous classical Yiddish writers<sup>139</sup>: Mendele Mokher Sfarim, Shalom Aleichem, and Y.L. Peretz.

One work from each writer will be analyzed. The rationale for selecting the particular works is their central significance within the writer's corpus, and their

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<sup>139</sup> We follow here Frieden (1995, 1996) and Miron (1973, 1996) in seeing these writers primarily as Yiddish writers. Indeed all three writers were bilingual writers and wrote also in Hebrew, but their mother tongue was Yiddish, their writings reflected the Yiddish culture, and, as Miron remarks, they each had an obligation to the Yiddish language (Miron 1996, 1). Moreover, all three works selected for this dissertation were written originally in Yiddish; two of these works, *Be'emek Ha'bacha* and "Ben Shnei Harim," were translated to Hebrew by the writer. We will use these translations here.

relatively rich descriptions of the shtetl community and material culture.<sup>140</sup> The selected works are: Mendele Mokher Sfarim's *Be'emek Ha'bacha* (*In the Valley of Tears*, which was first published in Yiddish under the name *Das Vintshpringel* [*The Wishing Ring*], in 1865. The first version in Hebrew, translated by the writer, started to be published in continuation in 1897 in the literary journal *Hashiloh*)<sup>141</sup>; Shalom Aleichem's *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan* (*Motl, Son of Peisi the Cantor*, first published in continuation in 1907 in the Yiddish American newspaper *Americaner Friend*)<sup>142</sup>; and Y.L. Peretz's story "Ben Shnei Harim" ("Between Two Mountains," from Peretz's important collection *Hassidut* [*Hassidism*], that was first published between 1894-1899).<sup>143</sup>

*Be'emek Ha'bacha* seems to conclude Mendele's literary creation.

Miron sees it as the major novel of Mendele's "mature years" (Miron 1996, 95),

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<sup>140</sup> The study has selected works which also best demonstrate classical Yiddish literature's tendency towards pseudo-anthropological description of the Jewish shtetl of its time. However, the approach of this study, which follows Miron, is that in classical Yiddish literature, the description of the shtetl has only limited anthropological-historical value (See Miron 2000). This will be discussed in the following section.

<sup>141</sup> There were a few versions of this work. The first version appeared in Yiddish in 1865 under the name "*The Wishing Ring*" (דאס ווינטשפיגל). It was shorter than the later ones and apparently of less literary value. Aberbach thinks it has only "historical" value (1993, 21) and Miron remarks that it was a literary failure in which Mendele "was caught at one of the less guarded and perceptive moments" (1996, 113-114). The story's full name was "*The Magic Ring, with which Everyone can Achieve whatever His Heart Desires and through which He Can Become Useful to Himself and to Society*" (Miron 1996, 113), and Miron remarks that it was a blunt expression of the Haskalah ideology of Mendele. The second Yiddish version appeared in 1888 and was an enlarged version of the first one. Miron sees it as the major novel of Mendele's "mature years" (1996, 95). Written after the pogroms of 1881, the second version was effected by these events and was far less optimistic as to the ability of the Haskalah to improve Jewish life in Russia and to solve the problem of anti-Semitism (Miron 1996, 95).

The first chapter of the Hebrew version (translated by Mendele himself) appeared in the first issue of *Hashiloh* in 1897 under the name "*In the Valley of Tears*" ("בעמק דכחא"). The change of the name in the Hebrew version may be seen, claims Aberbach, either as testimony to the perverse faith of an aging ideologue who could find no alternative to Haskalah, or as an ironic comment to the content of the novel. In its Hebrew version, claims Aberbach, the use of biblical and Talmudic Hebrew brings a rich allusiveness which sharpens the irony of the novel towards the Jewish inhabitants of the shtetl (1993, 23). Werses (1987), on the other hand, claims that the change in the name expresses the fact that the legend of the Wishing Ring lost its centrality in the Hebrew version (Werses 1987, 11-49).

<sup>142</sup> See *Bibliographical Dictionary of Modern Yiddish Literature*, eds: Ephraim Oyerbach, Moshe Kalsh and Moshe Shtarkman, Narstin Press Inc., New York 1965 (original title in Yiddish).

<sup>143</sup> And also in stories from the collection *Mipi Am* (first published between 1904-1916).

and in Brenner's view it offers the best expression of his talents of observation, evaluation, and articulation of Jewish shtetl life.<sup>144</sup> *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan* is Shalom Aleichem's last novel,<sup>145</sup> which Miron defines as one of his three most important works (the other two are *Menachem Mendel* and *Tuvia Haholev*). Simultaneously, it is the one out of the three which presents the shtetl's material culture and community most lucidly, using the child narrator's perspective to describe the "shtetl's physical and economic destruction" (Miron 1971, 126). Peretz's "Ben Shnei Harim" offers both a pseudo-Hassidic<sup>146</sup> story (thereby belonging to a group that critics see as his most important work),<sup>147</sup> and one in which literary space contains, relative to other pseudo-Hassidic stories of Peretz, a large amount of useful data on shtetl community and material culture.<sup>148</sup>

These three works will supply material for relevant comparative analysis between the representation paradigm of the Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and ontology in the Bourekas and the Jewish shtetl community and the ontology presentation seen in classical Yiddish literature. However, since of the three works only *Be'emek Ha'bacha* is of an epic nature, and thus the only work which supplies the reader with informants (see Introduction) whose density is adequate to this research, a limited number of other works from Shalom Aleichem (particularly *Tuvia Haholev*)

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<sup>144</sup> Brenner claims that this is the novel in which Mendele's talent for observing the nation's true spirit rises to its peak (Brenner 1985, 73).

<sup>145</sup> Actually, he never finished it and he died while writing what seem to be the final chapters.

<sup>146</sup> I use this term although Wisse (1994) and others, particularly Neiger (1961) refer to this story as "Neo-Maskilism," and claim that even though it uses both a Hassidic story structure and language, it does not assimilate a Hassidic content or ideology.

<sup>147</sup> See Neiger (1961), Wisse (1994), and Frieden (1995).

<sup>148</sup> While many of Peretz's stories focus on the act of narration and emphasize the psychological level of the narrator, figures, and dialogue instead of the space aspects (see Frieden 1995), in "Ben Shnei Harim" the narrator also describes the ontological environment in which and through which the story takes place. This is also the piece Neiger uses as an example of a story that transmits Peretz's criticism of Hassidim (Neiger 1961).

and from Peretz (one short story from *Hassidism* collection and a few short stories from the *Mipi Am* collection) will be used as additional sources.

I read all works in their Hebrew translation, for two reasons. The first is that the Hebrew translations were the most common and widespread versions of these works in Israel during the 1960s and '70s, when Bourekas films were produced (the Hebrew translations were more popular than their original versions in Yiddish; see Fishman 1973).<sup>149</sup> The second reason is that in the case of *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, the Hebrew version is as close as the Yiddish version to the original intentions of the author, since it was done by the author himself, and in the case of *Ben Shnei Harim* the Hebrew version is the ordinal.<sup>150</sup>

### **Comparative Analysis Methodology**

A comparative analysis will be used to examine the literary works mentioned above and the Bourekas films, in order to discern areas common to both. Through a close reading, and the use of semiotic approaches (the latter especially when reconstruction of physical space is needed),<sup>151</sup> the study will attempt to show that these Yiddish writers portray the Eastern European Jewish shtetl using representational paradigms that strongly correspond with the paradigms used by the Ashkenazi directors of Bourekas films in their effort to portray the Israeli Mizrahi neighborhood and community. This correspondence appears by reading Yiddish literature through the lens of Israeli canonic culture, mainly through the works of

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<sup>149</sup> Although the dissertation does not claim a direct influence of classical Yiddish writings on authors of the Bourekas, it seems that one cannot totally ignore the importance of the fact that Yiddish culture penetrated Israeli Yiddish-negating discourse, through these works' Hebrew translations.

<sup>150</sup> See Peretz 1962. On the other hand, there are two short stories by Peretz whose Hebrew translations I haven't been successful in locating: "Impressions of a Journey through the Tomaszow Region" and "The Dead Town." Therefore in these two cases I'll use the English translation that appears in Wisse's collection (1990).

<sup>151</sup> The study will use some of the principles and terms developed by Zoran in his study on space in literature (Zoran 1988).

Zionist critics who vigorously express the "negation of exile" of Zionist discourse (Korkuzkin 1996) A good example of these critics is Brenner, who, although personally ambivalent towards Yiddish and Yiddish culture, shows a tendency to see in some of classical Yiddish literature works a literary portrayal of an exilic, decadent Jewish civilization and tends to value Yiddish writers by their level of criticism towards it.<sup>152</sup>

Controversy exists between critics over the question of whether the classical Yiddish writers' portrayal of the shtetl has historical-anthropological value<sup>153</sup> or is totally fictional. In attempting to show that the shtetl representation paradigms of classical Yiddish literature were used, years later, by Bourekas films to portray the totally different reality of the Mizrahi neighborhood, this study will follow Miron's idea that the representation of the shtetl by classical Yiddish literature is both conventional and mythical (Miron 2000, 10). Following Miron I will argue that the shtetl presentation of classical Yiddish literature occurs within a mega-metaphor, whereby the shtetl is described as a Jewish political body, a Jewish piece of territory carved out from the continuum of space in which it was abandoned, but to which it ostensibly never belonged.

Furthermore, I will continue to elaborate on Miron's claims by presenting the solitude and isolation of the shtetl from its surroundings as an elemental feature of the shtetl representation paradigm of classical Yiddish literature. However, while Miron finds that representations of shtetl solitude relate to central Jewish myths (such as the one of the exile and return), this study, without contradicting Miron, will indicate that

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<sup>152</sup> It seems that the best example for this tendency of Brenner is his article about Mendele, "Ha'arachat Atsmenu Bishlosa Kerachim" (1985, 73). Brenner is the best example of this attitude but even Miron seems to see Shalom Aleichem's works through this lens, describing *Menachen Mendel* as "a fundamental description of the Jewish economic of nothingness" and *Motl* as "the physical and economical destruction of the shtetl" (Miron 1971, 126).

<sup>153</sup> Brenner (1965) and Frieden (1995).

it is a part of a literary strategy taken by the authors meant to reproduce and promote their ideology.

The main effort of the dissertation in this chapter is to trace and to indicate the homology between the various features of the representation paradigm of the shtetl in the works selected and the Mizrahi neighborhood representation paradigm in the Bourekas illustrated in the previous chapter. I will then make an account of the differences between the two. I will not, however, be explaining the meaning of this mode of the shtetl's representation as a literary strategy in the selected works. The dissertation is not negating any other possible analysis of the work selected. However, since it views their representational paradigms of the shtetl, following Miron, as non-historical, conventional one, it will focus on describing the inner structure and logic of that representation paradigm and on its homology to the Bourekas, and not on any historical or anthropological meaning that might be attached to it.

The dissertation's hypothesis is that the shtetl representational paradigm of the selected literary works is fed by ideology, and functions to spread the author's viewpoint concerning the future of the Jewish people in Europe. What is this ideology? And what is its historical context? These and other questions will be discussed widely in the next chapter.

### **Use of Selected Works in the Study**

#### ***Be'emek Ha'bacha (The Wishing Ring)***

*Be'emek Ha'bacha* has been chosen from the entire collection of Mendele's novels as an object for comparison with Bourekas films, because focusing on the Jewish shtetl representation paradigm of literary works requires the selection of a

novel that best expresses Mendele's special articulation of the Jewish exilic traditional life and shtetl culture. This one does just that.<sup>154</sup>

In his exposition of *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, Mendele describes the shtetl of Kabtsiel (an epigamic name which literally means in Hebrew "town of beggars"). Kabtsiel appears in several of Mendele's works, and earns its status as his archetypal Jewish shtetl. The description of Kabtsiel in *Be'emek Ha'bacha* is full and rich in all aspects that are relevant to this study. Although in the course of the story, the plot moves to a bigger neighboring Jewish town by the name of Kissalon (also an epigamic name, which literally means both "stupidity" and "pocket" in Hebrew), Kabtsiel remains the author's archetypal Jewish shtetl, and thus will remain the focus of this study; examples from Kissalon's description will be used only rarely.

### ***Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan (Motl, Son of Peisi the Cantor)***

The first 13 chapters of *Motl* describe the shtetl of Cassrilevke, the hometown of the eponymous hero. Cassrilevke is a literary Jewish town that through repeated appearances in Shalom Aleichem's writings has gained the status of an archetypal literary Jewish shtetl of Eastern Europe.

The novel reveals the shtetl through the eyes of Motl, a nine-year-old boy, an orphan who loses his father in the beginning of the story. The study will focus on Cassrilevke's representation in these first 13 chapters of the novel, primarily trying to locate the roots of the representation of Mizrahi neighborhood community and ontology of Bourekas there, referring only when necessary to other parts of the

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<sup>154</sup> These qualities are what Brenner identifies as quintessential characteristics of *Be'emek Ha'bacha* as a novel. *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, claims Brenner, is the novel in which Mendele's talent for observing the nation's true spirit rises to its peak (Brenner 1985, 73).

book. The study will also compare *Motl's Cassrilevke* and *Be'emek Ha'bacha's* Kabtsiel.

### **“Ben Shnei Harim” (“Between Two Mountains”)**

Unlike his fellow Yiddish writers, Peretz never wrote a novel, only short stories gathered in thematically determined collections. The story “Between Two Mountains,” a neo-Hassidic story from what seems to be Peretz's most prominent collection, *Hassidut (Hassidism)*, will be used. The ontology and Jewish community of Biala, the shtetl in which the story takes place, will be examined. Since this is a short story in which literary space is sparse, other stories from *Hassidut*, as well as stories from *Mipi Am (Folk Stories)*, first published between 1904 and 1916, will be used as needed.

## **II. The Bourekas Mizrahi Community Representation Paradigm as Seen in Yiddish Classical Literature**

### **Alienation from the Authorities, Detachment from the Environment**

#### **In Mendele's *Be'emek Ha'bacha*<sup>155</sup>**

Kabtsiel's isolation is deeper than that of the Mizrahi neighborhoods of the Bourekas; in Mendele's work, the shtetl determines all aspects of life. Whereas the people of the Mizrahi neighborhood, although isolated from and neglected by the establishment, have some connection with their surroundings and a motivation to

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<sup>155</sup> Source: Mendele Mokher Sfarim, *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, in *Kol Kitvei Mendele Mokher Sfarim* Dvir, Tel Aviv, 1966.

assimilate into their surrounding society by marrying individuals from outside the neighborhood, the isolation of Kabtsiel is almost absolute.

The most powerful declaration of the author about Kabtsiel's total isolation and its state of detachment and lack of interaction with its surroundings lies in the following description of Hershel, the narrator: "now when Hershel looks on the map searching for Kabtsiel, he doesn't find it. In his childhood he thought that it was the center of the universe and outside of its borders there was only desolation" (158, my translation<sup>156</sup>). Hershel's inability to find Kabtsiel on the map metaphorically reflects his sense of Kabtsiel's extreme detachment, its apparent absence from the universe. Further, his lack of awareness as a child of the existence of any other place in the world besides Kabtsiel also emphasizes the inverse of that same absence.

The extreme isolation, articulated through Hershel's consciousness, is metaphorically strengthened by what can be called a "names shortage." It is as if the isolation of Kabtsiel is so absolute that even names of people outside the shtetl cannot cross over into it. It seems that names are limited to the territory of the town: only the names of town people are available for use. For example, when Hershel's parents want to find a name for him, they face the problem of already having used all the names of their family members in town on their older children. In their predicament, although his father is not happy about it, they finally give their son the name of the mother's former fiancé.

Although the isolation of Kabtsiel is more absolute than that of most Mizrahi communities represented in the Bourekas films, the severe consequences

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<sup>156</sup> Since a translation of the final version of *Be'emek Ha'bacha* does not exist, I have translated the quotations from the Hebrew version. The page numbers here are also a translation since the original pages are marked in Hebrew letters.

of the community's detachment from the civil establishment is similar in both cases. In both cases this detachment tragically affects the residents, manifested through their lack of means of survival and lack of basic maintenance.

The novel opens with a saying that defines the people of Kabtsiel, as people who are self-employed or find their living in minor commerce and begging: "In Kabtsiel itself there is no other option of making a living (Parnuse) for the people of the town but only that they are living one on the other, buying and selling one to the other" (145). Given that the traditional Jewish Eastern European economy depended on trade with local, non-Jewish villagers, the fact highlighted here (that Kabtsiel's residents are both the peddlers and the consumers in town – buying and selling to one another) indicates Kabtsiel's extreme isolation from its surroundings – physically, sociologically, and economically. It seems that this severe isolation qualifies Kabtsiel as a separate universe.

This status represents a greater degree of isolation than that of the Mizrahi neighborhoods in the Bourekas, which, although detached from the establishment, maintains commercial relations with its surroundings. Moreover, Mendele hints that even when the residents leave Kabtsiel for another place in search of work, they cannot find real jobs, but are instead asked to be slaves. The story of Sipa Sosi serves as an example of this phenomenon (148): Hershel's older sister, Sipa Sosi, moves to the neighboring city of Kissalon to work as a maid. Once there, she discovers that they do not want her labor, but rather her body and soul. Repeatedly, her employers try to sexually harass her, and when she refuses she soon finds herself unemployed. Apart from indicating the severe economic isolation of Kabtsiel (there are no real jobs for girls even in the nearby city, only prostitution), this story stresses the fact that there is no easy way out of Kabtsiel's isolation. In

contrast to the situation in the Bourekas, where escape through marriage outside the neighborhood<sup>157</sup> exists, in Kabtsiel there is no easy way out from its cycle of poverty; not even a beautiful girl like Sipa Sosi is offered marriage outside the neighborhood, just sexual abuse (148).

However, although Kabtsiel is more isolated than the Mizrahi neighborhood, it has some slight advantages. While the authors of the Bourekas tend to stress only the negative aspects of isolation, *Be'emek Ha'bacha* presents some positive aspects. In Kabtsiel, self-sufficiency replaces governmental help; for example, isolation leads to the establishment of strong community organizations. The community has institutions of mutual aid within it that help the poor to survive (15). Another positive aspect of the isolation is the strong sense the resident's share of community, of togetherness, of a collective destiny. In the beautiful scene that concludes the first chapter (15), all the town's residents sleep outside together on a beautiful summer night, star gazing and arguing, talking and laughing; here the characteristic isolation and solitude reinforces the feeling of shared destiny between the members of this isolated community and stresses the positive aspects of being a member of an isolated group.

### **In Shalom Aleichem's *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan*<sup>158</sup>**

The measure of isolation of Cassrilevke bears a greater resemblance to that of the Bourekas neighborhood than to Kabtsiel. In *Motl*, the hero (nine years old at the beginning of the story) knows that a world exists beyond the borders of Cassrilevke, but he seems to know very little about it. For example, he does not know what or

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<sup>157</sup> In some of the Bourekas films it is a male Mizrahi resident of the neighborhood who marries an Ashkenazi girl from outside the neighborhood. In others it is a Mizrahi girl who marries an Ashkenazi, for example in *Sallah*, or *Slomoniko*.

<sup>158</sup> Source: Shalom Aleichem, "*Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan*," translated to Hebrew by Arye Ha'haroni, Alef, Tel Aviv, 1980.

where America is, and he testifies (80) that he never traveled anywhere (79), or rode on anything at all, with the exception of the back of his neighbor's goat.

Older residents of Cassrilevke reflect a similar ignorance about the world outside the shtetl through their (lack of) knowledge about America. Motl's brother, Eli, thinks that America is a land with no thieves (85), while Motl's mother (unnamed in the story) thinks that America is a land with no pillows (80). The neighbor, Pesia, says America is a place where people "lose their souls and have fun" (81). Pini's father, Hirsh Leib, says America is a disgusting country, although he cannot explain why (83), and Pini, the "Maskil," thinks it is a country where everybody is equal (151). It seems that each projects onto America their own hopes or fears.

The course of the story stresses two different aspects of Cassrilevke's isolation: the socio-cultural and the economic. Within the framework of the cultural aspect, Cassrilevke's residents are presented (Like Sallah Shabati and his family in *Sallah*) as culturally detached from the world around them. The fact that they do not speak any other languages but Yiddish seems to be the major reason for this.<sup>159</sup> Even when very close to their shtetl, at the nearby railway station, the family already confronts people with whom they cannot communicate, like "the railway goy" who does not let them board the train with their luggage (87-88). Pini who "speaks Russian well" according to the narrator, goes to speak to him, but his Russian is too "fluty" to communicate. Thus, the negotiation fails and the goy takes the money but does not deliver the goods – the luggage goes to a cargo wagon. Of course, the isolation worsens when the family crosses the border into Germany. Although German is quite similar to Yiddish, according to Motl only Pini speaks it "well" (95).

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<sup>159</sup> Stressing the language aspect of isolation in *Motl* is possible because the novel involves travel and immigration. Lack of knowledge of the country's language was one of the main criticisms of the Jewish enlightenment movement (Haskalah). This detachment from the area's surroundings is quite subtle in *Be'emek Ha'bacha*.

Plenty of evidence attests to the economic isolation of Cassrilevke. Much like the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas, Cassrilevke is economically detached from its surroundings. This seclusion seems to cause the total failure of Eli's ink business enterprise (Ch. 8), as it dramatically limits the demand for his products. According to the text, even when it becomes clear that the shtetl market was too small to consume the large quantities of ink that Eli manufactured, it never crosses Eli's mind to distribute his bottles to the neighboring areas. It seems that he, a little like Hershel, cannot imagine the world outside the shtetl. Unemployed and with just a slight chance to find a job in Cassrilevke, he does not think of finding one in the large city nearby, or of starting a commercial enterprise that will spread beyond the borders of the shtetl. Rather, he thinks only about mass manufacturing of products for the shtetl's very limited market, even though the nature of his enterprise requires a larger market.<sup>160</sup>

At least two more commercial enterprises fail due to this economic isolation. At the start of the novel, Motl describes the failed negotiation between the doctor's wicked wife and the apple dealer to purchase the apples still on the tree. The consequence is that the apples spoil on the tree. It seems that the shtetl's small and isolated market had prevented the doctor's wife from finding another buyer. The story of Yona the baker, Eli's father-in-law, also points to severe economic isolation. Yona goes bankrupt after his workers (there are only three of them) go on strike, and he is unable to find replacements for them (50-51).

The job market also is similar in the Bourekas' Mizrahi neighborhood and Cassrilevke. It is obvious that in Cassrilevke, much like the Bourekas' Mizrahi

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<sup>160</sup> It seems that Shalom Aleichem mocks the lack of real modern thinking in the town through presenting Eli's clumsy enterprise – which includes manufacturing a food product which has only limited seasonal demand (the apple drink), manufacturing a cheap product for mass distribution without having a real market for it (the ink), and manufacturing a product which needs special storage without having the means to store it (mice poisoning powder).

neighborhood, no member of the community is employed by the authorities. Motl's father is a cantor, and his brother and mother are unemployed. All other occupations mentioned belong to the independent sector: baker, bookbinder, two doctors, a book dealer, goldsmith, carpenter, musician (a cantor who can't sing), apple dealer, bakery workers, miller, pulp writer, an independent mechanic, watchmaker, shoemaker, tailor, and water drawer.

However, Cassrilevke enjoys the presence of some government officials, and resembles the Bourekas neighborhoods in this respect also. Unlike Kabtsiel, Cassrilevke has a policeman who is mentioned at least once when he tries to arrest Motl for selling a rotten drink (the kvass, 56), and there is a police station, mentioned at least twice, once during the kvass business (56) and again during Yona's bankruptcy story, when a *goy* threatens to go to the police (49).

The Cassrilevke police, like the police in the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas, are inefficient. Motl successfully escapes in the middle of the day from the policeman, with the help of the Jewish crowd. The police also have little control over the town. No one in the shtetl thinks about turning to the police to settle differences or quarrels. As in the Bourekas neighborhood, the Jewish residents of the shtetl have developed the habit of settling conflicts by themselves. When Eli's ink damages the neighbor's property, the neighbor comes to him to settle the differences without turning to the police. When the ink damages the river, Eli fears the water drawers, not the police. It is a habit among the residents to see the police as an institution existing to serve only the *goyim*<sup>161</sup> (non-Jews), which has authority only in matters in which

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<sup>161</sup> It is interesting to note in this context that the entity which seems to be responsible for guarding the community norms, the one which Motl is afraid of the most, is the "Oilam" (48, 49, 56, 85). Oilam is a Hebrew word that literally means "a world" or "universe" and is used in the shtetl's Yiddish to mean "community" (262).

*goyim* are involved. The only man who threatens to call the police is a *goy* who also threatens Yona the baker (49).

Other government institutions mentioned by Motl as part of the shtetl include the "post office" through which Eli gets his "magic book" (53), the train station (87), and a church (25). However these make little difference to the shtetl's economy since all employees of these official institutions are *goyim* (Motl calls the train station worker the "*goy* of the railroad" [87]).

People of the shtetl, just like people of the Mizrahi neighborhoods in the Bourekas, sometimes gather to interrupt the work of the police. When Motl sells the sour kvass, the policeman catches him and wants to take him to the police station. Immediately other Jews of the market place interfere. They try to give Motl useful advice such as "don't speak about your brother," and "take your legs and run." They try to bribe the policeman to let him go, and produce pressure on the policeman to let him go by saying he is an orphan.

Compared to Mendele's Kabtsiel where there is only one symbolic Shabbat *goy*, in Cassrilevke, the isolation of the Jewish shtetl is not as severe. A communal fair is open to Jews and *goyim* where the Jews are peddlers and the *goyim* are clients, though sometimes there are fights between them (39). Some commercial connections exist between the shtetl and the *goyim* and surrounding villagers; I should note, however, that these small-scale traditional commerce relationships are connected to the traditional role of Jews in the rural provincial areas, which seem to be shrinking and are doomed to disappear (Eliach 1979). Therefore, they are not productive enough to break the economic and cultural isolation.

The speech, in broken Russian, that Pini gives to the emigration committee in Lemberg summarizes this situation of Cassrilevke's isolation: "We are going to

America because of an aspiration to independence and civilization, because there, in our shtetl, we are lacking not only progress but even air to breathe" (105).

### **In Peretz's "Ben Shnei Harim" ("Between Two Mountains")<sup>162</sup>**

In "Between Two Mountains" Peretz describes the economic, cultural, and institutional isolation of the Jewish community residing in the shtetl of Biala from its surroundings. Similar to the author of *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, Peretz hints at its residents' feelings of cosmic solitude, their sense of being left alone in the universe. In the only description of the town in the story, it appears as if the Jewish community lives alone on this land, surrounded only by nature. "Biala was not then as it is today. It was at that time still a little town. All the houses were small and built low to the ground, with the exception of the synagogue and the rebbe's house and except from this there were only the hills on the east and to the west, the river" (21). In Biala, like in Kabtsiel, non-Jews are rare.

Actually the only non-Jew who appears in the story is the carter who takes the narrator to the shtetl of Brisk. It seems more than significant that his appearance occurs in the sphere that lies outside the shtetl, between one shtetl (Biala) and another (Brisk). It is as if he belongs to this exterior space (17).

The story reflects a pure Jewish consciousness which does not see non-Jews as beings of genuine existence in its world; similar to the works of Shalom Aleichem and Mendele, non-Jews are mentioned only in the exterior context, whether physical or conceptual. Moreover, they are presented as hostile towards the Jews, which seems to be the reason why having relationships with non-Jews hints at betrayal of Jewish

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<sup>162</sup> Source: Peretz, Isaac Leib "Ben Shnei Harim," *Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz*, translated from Yiddish by Y.L. Peretz, Dvir, 1962.

national unity. The only other non-Jews mentioned are the people in authority who the Rov of Brisk uses to crush the Hassidim in his town. The narrator uses this fact to show the Rov of Brisk's cruelty and self-centered nature – he is willing to go as far as cooperating with Jew-haters to fight his own Jewish enemies (11).

Otherwise, Peretz's is only a Jewish world, with only Jewish characters. The main conflict occurs between two Jewish religious branches – the Litanies (Litvaks) and Hassidim. The seasons are seen through the Jewish calendar. Sukkoth is a significant mark in the local calendar, and the narrator uses its progress (16-17) to inform the reader about the exact sequence of the story's events.

However, it is noteworthy that both nature and the residential world are Jewish. Both the world of nature and the heavenly world appear to be only a continuation of this separated Jewish world, or a projection of it. When the narrator leaves to bring the Rov of Brisk, he feels as if "Heaven does not encourage easy solutions... suddenly there arose such a gust of wind as if demons were flying in every direction at once" (17). The rov seems to have control over nature. When he enters the cart, "the storm subsided. The clouds split apart and the sun shone through the crack" (17). Nature and the heavens are also happy with the Hassidim dancing in front of their rabbi.

## **Ruthless Struggle over Physical Subsistence – A War of All against All**

### **In Mendele's *Be'emek Ha'bacha***

Like the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas, Kabtsiel experiences the same kind of struggle, originating in conditions of limited economic means and isolation. The resulting struggle for survival dominates life in these communities. It is

a struggle and competition over the provisions of economic wellbeing. For Mendele this tendency toward struggle is the main characteristic of Kabtsiel's residents. Accordingly, Mendele opens the novel with a metaphorical description of the competition and its sources: "The people of Kabtsiel are beggars. In Kabtsiel there is no livelihood for them (Parnuse) but this, that they beg one from each other, maintaining their family by invading their neighbor's territory" (145, my emphasis). The next passage describes how this fundamental economic competition spreads to all walks of life and becomes, as in the Bourekas, struggle and competition about everything: "Everybody is his friend's parasite," is one formulation, and "each one tells his friend: I will share with you everything, meaning, we will both have nothing" (145).

The struggle described in Kabtsiel has no particular object and no limitations: it includes attendant antagonism which exists between male neighbors, for example between Leizer, Hershel's father, and Benzion, who are "fighting and making peace and then fighting again" (157); antagonism also exists between female neighbors, like Lezier's and Benzion's wives who are "fighting mornings and making peace at evenings" (157). It seems as if Mendele suggests that struggle is the habit of the neighbors in the town.

A similar pattern of struggle also exists *within* families. For example, Hershel's mother and father fight about what name to give Hershel (147). This incident is described not as a common family argument but as a real struggle in which manipulations and subversive tactics are used to win, such as when Hershel's mother tells her husband about "the dream" she had, which she fabricates to persuade him to adopt the name she wanted for her newly born son (147).

As in the Bourekas, competition pervades every aspect of life, including knowledge of community tradition and myths. When Hershel and his friend argue about which is the true version of the folk legend of the Magic Ring, even minute details, such as the look of the nose of a holy man in that folk tale, result in a fierce argument between the two (48). However, unlike the Bourekas where the only explanation for the residents' behavior is their isolation (a fact that makes this behavior temporary, because the Bourekas narrative typically resolves in marriage and assimilation into the surrounding society), here Mendele points to a mythological source for this competitive behavior. He suggests that this behavior is inherent in the soul of Jews, and is essential and unchangeable.

Mendele's narrator points to competition's deep roots within the Jewish nature. He suggest that this antagonism and struggle, this savage competition, is actually inherent to a Jewish soul, which passes from the world of truth to the world of the living characterized by pushiness and struggle: "The way of other peoples," the narrator explains, "in which the soul is waiting up there until somebody prepares her a nice flat with household amenities, is not possible for the Jewish soul; if it is not in a hurry and does not push itself down to earth, with all its strength, it will stay up there forever" (145). This fundamental Jewish competitive pattern, which starts before birth, later takes control over Jewish earthy life, as the Jew continues to push himself "farther and farther... with all his force, intruding through windows and openings" (145).

While this mystical presentation seems greatly exaggerated, competition indeed plays out in the behavior of Kabtsiel's residents. The people of Kabtsiel struggle in the most unlikely places and at the most unlikely times, and about everything, as if controlled by irresistible instinct. Even when residents of Kabtsiel are

at peace with one another (for example, when they are in the synagogue) they find something to argue and compete over, whether it's the wealth of the rich Jews in Kissalon, the meaning of the story of the legend of Rabbi Shmilkli (152), or the Crimean War (156).

It is also clear that these arguments are not purposeful or initiated to prove or to demonstrate a truth. In many cases, these arguments are only for the purpose of pushing aside potential competitors. As Mendele describes, “when it came to talk about the question of the wealth of the Jews in Kissalon, Bril stubbornly says, ‘I think it’s the other way around.’ He did it in order to make Rabbi Izik look poorer and to hurt Leizer” (156). This tendency to struggle causes the appearance of this same pattern even in the most harmonious of situations. Even in the first chapter's ending scene, during the bright night when everyone is resting outside under the sky, enjoying together the beauty of the universe, two men of the shtetl argue about the meanings of the stars and “deny one another’s words” (158), and the women secretly compete over the crown for the best housewife, “one is saying my kugel was so good today as if of princes, and another says, my beans were so soft that they melt in the mouth, another one has a story about a radish as big as a head that she bought very cheap” (158).

As in the Bourekas, women are another subject to fight over. The quarrel between Gedalia-Hiersh and Leizer reflects the competition for women which pervades Kabtsiel’s society. When Gedalia and Hershel’s mother<sup>163</sup> (who has no name in the story other than a nickname that Leizer gives her, Shatia) were teenagers, they were in love and prepared to marry their suitors. But then came Leizer Yankel with a greater dowry than the suitor, and he persuaded the family to give Hershel's mother to

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<sup>163</sup> It is interesting that Hershel’s mother does not have a name in the novel. This may be connected with the dehumanization of women in that community (see dissertation chapter on romantic love).

him as a bride. The struggle between Gedalia and Leizer does not end here. Mendele again emphasizes that struggle is actually a way of life in Kabtsiel by describing how these two continue to constantly fight, insulting one another until Gedalia's death. In fact, Leizer seems to continue fighting Gedalia even after his death, through his objections to his wife's desire to name Hershel after Gedalia (156).

### **In Shalom Aleichem's *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan***

Mendele begins *Be'emek Ha'bacha* with a mythological story which explains, in a way that sounds almost anti-Semitic,<sup>164</sup> that the dog-eat-dog competition typical of Kabtsiel derives from the competitive nature inherent to every Jewish soul. In Shalom Aleichem's *Motl*, the competition and struggle are presented as the result of the shtetl's economical suffocation.<sup>165</sup>

The most reductive form of competition is a quarrel over food. In the home of Pesia, one of Motl's neighbors, this form of competition is a part of everyday life. Fourteen people, mostly children, sit around the dinner table in Pesia's home. All grab food, competing with each other when food is put on the table; when Motl goes to grab his own share, they kick him under the table (26).<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Mendele's so-called anti-Semitism is suggested in Karib's *Adabra Veirvah Li* (1950). Karib suggests that Mendele appears to be "anti-Semitic" because of his descriptions of a degraded shtetl world. Aberbach (1993) on the other hand sees Mendele's tendency to attack and blame the Jews for their own condition, among other reasons, as an outcome of his fear of Tzar government censorship.

<sup>165</sup> The difference between the two at this point is essential. In Mendele's story, the blame is on Jews and their competitive nature. Shalom Aleichem seems to blame the Goyim, and although it is not clearly mentioned, the Russian government and its neglect. In *Tevia* (1980) Shalom Aleichem directly accuses the government of displacing Jews and of organizing pogroms. In *Motl*, he does not mention the government directly but again hints to its neglect and biased attitude towards the Jews. One of the characters, a child, describes a pogrom that occurred in his shtetl. First of all, he says, "the goyim robbed and set fire in all the Jewish shops, and after they passed through the houses with clubs and axes, the police walked behind and then they hit and killed and slaughtered and stabbed with spears" (110, my emphasis). In *Motl*, through the character of Pini, Shalom Aleichem expresses socialist democratic views and a nationalistic Jewish approach.

<sup>166</sup> Here Shalom Aleichem describes a grotesque scene around the table reminiscent of Charles Dickens (see, for example, *Oliver Twist*). One of the diners is the old blind uncle, who can't chew "but grabs and swallows the food like a goose" (18).

However, in *Motl*, like in the Bourekas films, a major aspect of competition is commercial. In the first chapter, the narrator presents the bitter commercial competition in the shtetl by describing the auction of Motl's dying father's belongings. While the sick father lies dying in his room, Michel the book peddler takes advantage of the family's helplessness by purchasing the father's books for "cents," and "grabs them very fast and hastily escapes the house" (13). This behavior cannot be attributed to the book peddler's personal greed, but reflects a norm of abusive behavior in Cassrilevke since the scene repeats itself when Yossel, the goldsmith, comes to purchase Motl's mother's jewelry; when Nachman, the carpenter, comes to buy the furniture (14); and when Hana, the Yiddene,<sup>167</sup> negotiates the purchase of a bed and sofa (15).

As in the Bourekas, harsh commercial competition gives rise to deception and corruption within the shtetl. Motl reveals that "Yente sold the villager's candle wax instead of goose fat (Shmaltz)" and Gedalia the butcher, it has been told, "fattens the town a whole year with non-Kosher meat" (Ch. 8a). Corruption seems to spread even throughout the religious institutions. According to Pini's song about Shmuel, the synagogue's beadle (collector) is corrupt and steals money from the public providence box.

The residents of Cassrilevke mislead one another, using deception as a legitimate tactic of commercial competition. Before Eli starts the ink business, the pulp author tells him that he spends a fortune on ink. However, when Eli comes to sell him bottles of ink that he has manufactured, the pulp author claims that he has already purchased one bottle, and it will be enough for the whole summer (61). When the

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<sup>167</sup> A derogatory term for a vulgar adult Jewish woman.

doctor shows off his new and expensive watch, he asks Eli whether he has one. Eli tells the doctor that he also owns a watch, although he doesn't (19).

The shtetl residents who inspire the deepest competitive urge are the rich. When Yona, the wealthy baker, announces that he will pay money to any person who will find a hair in his breads, "all the shtetl looked into his breads to find one" (42), and when he goes bankrupt, his creditors treat him with "humiliation and contempt" (51). The commercial competition is so intense that only when a man dies do people allow themselves to praise him. "My father," said Motl, "won a good name but when he was alive we never heard any one speak so highly about him, only now after death everybody praises and glorifies Peisi the cantor up to the sky" (37).

As in the Bourekas, competition between residents spreads to every aspect of life. The people of Cassrilevke compete about leadership, functioning and knowledge. When the group of emigrants from Cassrilevke, during their journey to America, are asked by other immigrants about their border-crossing experience, they keep interrupting each other's monologues, taking the conversation by force. Each claims that the other does not know or remember the true story (96-97).

Of course, when more important matters arise, competition becomes more forceful and violent. During the meeting with the emigration officials who will determine whether the group is eligible for tickets on the boat to America, the competition over who will lead the group in front of the officials becomes vigorous. Motl's mother, who had been chosen to be the group speaker, is violently interrupted by Pini and Eli, who are pushing to have their versions of the story heard (104-105).

Competition among the group grows during the trip. This scene repeats itself in front of the officials on Ellis Island. Motl's mother starts to negotiate on behalf of the group, Eli interrupts her, and then Pini interrupts Eli. At this point, Bracha

interferes violently and disqualifies Pini as leader because "Pini has no one in America and all the friends in America are ours" (164).

Upon arriving in America, Motl – who had previously described Eli and Pini's friendship as harmonious (Pini listens to Eli like "a doctor to his patient") (73) – writes, "those two, Eli and Pini, disagree about everything." What one says, his friend automatically contradicts: the "summer and the winter calls them Bracha" (151). Since leaving the shtetl<sup>168</sup> the two quarrel regularly. When there is nothing better to fight over, they even compete over who knows better the exact pronunciation of the word "furniture" in English (218).

Motl wonders about this competition, which he finds an odd element of friendship. What especially surprises him is the competition among the women (as if among men it is more of a norm). Three women are in the group: his mother, Bracha, Eli's wife, and Teible, Pini's wife. Motl reports that "the women fight very often, exchange stings" (121). He comes to the conclusion that "if it wasn't for his mother, the women would be fighting every day like "peddlers in the market" (121).

As in the Bourekas, residents of Cassrilevke also compete over knowledge. They compete about the accuracy of their geographical knowledge, quarreling over the actual size of cities in Europe and America, and about their understanding of border police routines, arguing over where the best place is to cross the border (91). Being highly competitive in nature, Pini seems to be most anxious that his position as "Mister know it all" might be taken away from him. He just cannot stand that someone besides himself can demonstrate control over knowledge that he feels to be a master of, in fields such as history, geography, philosophy, and political trivia.

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<sup>168</sup> At this point they resemble some notable couples in Bourekas films who compete all the time. These couples include Sallah and his Ashkenazi neighbor in *Sallah*, Gavri and Hanucha in *Snooker*, Zion and Israel from *The Tsan'ani Family*, all friends who also compete regularly.

Throughout the journey, Pini's superior knowledge is challenged by two characters, Biber the medic and the Yesinai tailor.

What threatens Pini the most in Biber is the fact that, as Motl testifies, Biber's Russian is better than his (129). So Pini spreads a rumor that Biber is a liar and also writes a nasty poem about him (129). Hence, when their mother is rejected by the committee because of her eyes, Pini jumps up and blames Biber for damaging them (132).

Pini has a harder time with the Yesinai tailor. He is, as Motl observes, a man who thinks highly about himself and challenges everybody a man who "will always say the other way around" (160). He not only challenges Pini's knowledge, but undercuts his naïve belief in the rightfulness of the American regime, hinting that America is as abusive toward common people as is any other country. Pini reacts forcefully. He calls the Yesinai tailor names, insults him and "mounts on him as if he wanted to trample him" (160).

Jealousy goes hand in hand with competition. There is much jealousy in Cassrilevke. For example, the mother thinks that the reason that Yona, her son's father-in-law, went bankrupt was the villagers' jealousy over her success in getting Yona's daughter as a match for her son (38).

Motl also tends to interpret a range of human behaviors as signs of jealousy. This kind of interpretation is evidence of a competitive atmosphere in the shtetl that affects Motl. For example, after his father's death, Motl feels that "Everybody is jealous at me, even the son of Yossi the Gvir [the "rich man," r.k.]. Hence the cross-eyed would have drowned me in a water spoon if he could" (23). Motl feels that people are jealous because he knows the Kaddish<sup>169</sup> by heart<sup>170</sup> (24), and because of

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<sup>169</sup> The prayer said for the dead.

his travel to America. When Elte, Motl's young female friend, teases him that he would not be able to write her letters from America because he doesn't know the alphabet, Motl thinks that she does so because she is jealous of his journey to America. Also, according to Motl, all eight sons of Pesia are jealous of him because of his expected travel: "Hershel is jealous. He sighs and tells me: you will see the world" (84). However, the behavior to which this suspicion of jealousy fits is the response of the children in the shtetl to the success of Motl's kvass enterprise. When Motl successfully sells the kvass, a bunch of children run after him and try to mock him and imitate his singing (55).

Joy in another person's failure usually accompanies jealousy. This is what Moshe, the binder, cannot hide while commenting on the failure of Eli's ink enterprise "Why did you make such large amount of ink?" he says in a good mood. "Did you want to supply ink to the whole world in case there will be shortage of ink, or a hunger for ink?" (63).

In this atmosphere, good manners can be seen as a sign of weakness. The residents of Cassrilevke do nothing to hold their temper. Motl reports that Yona is as grumpy as "a killer" (38); the carter is a "grumpy Jew" (87); Pini is a harsh type "who right away catches fire and starts cursing"; Eli is a "bit grumpy" (87); Bracha has a bad temper; and Teible has a habit to swell, to puff.

In Mendele's Kabtsiel, competition is softened and eased through the shtetl's groups of mutual assistance, but these have lost their influence in Shalom Aleichem's shtetl. The public mutual aid institutions appear to be in extremely bad shape. Motl's

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<sup>170</sup> Even if one suspects Motl's reliability on this matter, and attributes the response to his very developed self-protection mechanism ("Hooray, it's great to be an orphan" [27]), the fact that a child of his age thinks in such terms reflects a certain atmosphere in the community.

mother says that it is better for her to die than to admit her dying husband to the Hekdesh<sup>171</sup> (17).

Hence, in Cassrilevke, as in the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas, it is everyone for himself. Motl's mother complains that nobody helps with the expenses of his father's illness: "what a town, why don't they look around? 23 years he ruined his lungs in prayer. Maybe I could have rescued him, [but, r.k.] there is nothing to save him with" (18). It seems that that decline in mutual responsibility is best emphasized through the sequence of Motl's father's death. The family is forced to sell all its belongings, including furniture, to pay for his cure, and there is no one to help out. The wealthy Yossi the Gvir, comes to the rescue only after the father's death, paying for the expenses of the funeral, explaining that he wasn't there before to help cover the illness expenses since "nobody told him" that the father was ill (21).

As in the Bourekas, women are also something to compete for in Cassrilevke. Everyone in Motl's world, especially his mother and Pesia the neighbor, are impressed when Eli marries Bracha, and thus becomes the son-in-law of Yona, the wealthy baker. The women make it sound as if it is a victory in a kind of competitive sport. However, the fact that Motl, the narrator, is a child<sup>172</sup> leaves this aspect of competition underdeveloped in the story. Motl is nine, and this aspect of reality is not yet apparent to him. However, the other stories that describe the shtetl of Cassrilevke address sexual competition in a way similar to that of the Bourekas, which note competition between men over a woman.

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<sup>171</sup> Hekdesh is the place the community devotes to the homeless and the sick. They are taken care of by the community with the help of volunteers.

<sup>172</sup> One of the greatest examples of childish behavior on the part of Motl is his statement, "Hooray, it's great to be an orphan" (27), which points to his lack of maturity.

This happens in Shalom Aleichem's most famous story, "Tevia the Milkman" ("Tuvia Haholev"). Competition between two men is a feature of some of Tevia's daughters' matches. Competition occurs between Leizer Wolf, the butcher, and Motl Kamsvil, the tailor, over the eldest daughter, Zytele. Competition between two men over a woman also characterizes the marriage story of Huddle: a few hours before she confesses her love to Perchik, the communist, and her desire to marry him, another groom is offered to her by a Shidduch.<sup>173</sup>

### **In Y.L. Peretz's "Ben Shnei Harim"**

Competition is the kernel of this story. Although it is an ideological difference which apparently causes the rivalry between the two main characters of the story, the Rov of Brisk and Rebbe of Biala, it seems that it is the competitive nature of each which fuels it. The competitive nature of the Rov of Brisk is obvious and manifests through his unnecessary cruelty when dealing with all opposition and rivalries,<sup>174</sup> and his generosity to his allies. Furthermore, the rov's competitive quality can be seen in the way he looks down on people and his intimidating daily conduct with ordinary people, clearly demonstrated by the severity with which he examines the narrator at the dinner table when he first sees him (20).

The unfriendly, competitive behavior of the rov during the sequence of the meeting with the Rebbe of Biala, his former student, indicates that he cannot abandon the competitive paradigm, which seems to be inherent to his nature. When the rov consents to meet his ideological opponent, the Biala Rebbe, he is driven, not as one might think by a desire to better understand his way of thinking, but by the urge to convert the rebbe to his own Jewish outlook: "Up to now I have judged him behind

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<sup>173</sup> *Tevia the Milkman* (*Tuvia Ha'holev*, Aharoni 1978).

<sup>174</sup> A case is described in the story in which the rov orders non-Jews to shave his own student's beard as a punishment for becoming a Hassid.

his back.... I want to see with my own eyes.... Maybe... I will be able to rescue my pupil" (21). This competitive and aggressive attitude is also demonstrated by the fact that when the rov and rebbe first meet, the rov, acting like a quarrelsome person, does not accept the rebbe's invitation to sit, but instead opens their conversation with an accusation: "Why did you run away from my Yeshiva?" (194).

The fact that the Rov of Brisk keeps treating the Rebbe of Biala as his pupil, and even calls him "my pupil," indicates paternalism and an arrogant attitude towards a man who is now a great rebbe of his own. Moreover, the Rov of Brisk refuses to be persuaded to give up his negative, competitive attitude towards Hassidim. Although willing to watch the parade of Hassidim with the rebbe, he tries his best not to be emotionally affected. Instead of concentrating on the parade and trying to figure out what his former student would like so eagerly to prove to him through it, he clings to his daily prayer routine, saying "we must say the afternoon prayer" (195).

Competitive people seem to have a hard time changing their opinions about things. Did the Rov of Brisk change his mind about the Hassidim following the visit to Biala? It seems that he didn't. It is said that the Rov of Brisk "remained a Mitsnaged [Hassidim opponent, r.k.] as before" (24, my emphasis). It is obvious that the rov was not persuaded that Hassidism was a legitimate form of Judaism.

While the competitiveness of the Rov of Brisk is clear, the competitive tendency of the Biala Rebbe is harder to see. This is partly because he is being introduced to the reader by the narrator, his follower, who presents him as a lover of humanity. However, one can dismiss this as mythology being repeated by his followers, particularly after examining his actions in the story. Surprisingly enough, being a small man (20) with a little voice, the Rebbe of Biala is portrayed by the author, behind the back of his unreliable narrator, as a highly competitive man, full of

bitterness. The rebbe refuses to give a blessing to the daughter-in-law of the Rov of Brisk, his opponent, when she is about to die. His excuse is that her denial of the Hassidic way makes it impossible to bless her, since "without a faith this thing can do harm, and she has no faith" in him, and in his Hassidic way (16).

The next time the narrator appeals to the rebbe his response seems even more painful. He avoids responding directly to the narrator's request and actually hints that the dying young wife is none of his business, but his opponent's business (the rov of Brisk). The rebbe is not going to make it easier for his opponent; "Perhaps the Brisker Rov will come," he responds to the narrator's request to help the woman (16).

The next meeting between the rebbe and the narrator occurs in the middle of a harsh moment, when the rov of Brisk goes into the dying young wife's room. Without any ability to control his fear, the narrator runs to his rebbe for support. Indeed, he finds the rebbe smiling. The devoted follower interprets this as a good sign ("all must be well," [19]), which implies the recovery of the dying young wife, but it could also be interpreted as a sign of indifference to the fate of the Rov of Brisk's daughter-in-law, who in this moment fights for her life.

The view of the competitive nature of the rebbe is strengthened by his behavior during the meeting with the Rov of Brisk. Upon greeting him, as noted earlier, the Rov of Brisk asks him firmly, "why did you run away from my Yeshiva" (22). Instead of calming the offended rabbi, using kind words as one would expect, the rebbe chooses first to tease the rov and further humiliate him: "What I lacked was air. I could never catch my breath" (194), and then proceeds to attack him, "Your Torah is nothing but law.... It is nothing but steel and iron commandments, copper laws" (22).

In light of this, one better understands the failure of this meeting between the "two mountains" and the fact that at the end of the story the Rov of Brisk and the rebbe of Biala "did not reach an understanding" (24): both are possessive of the ideologies they have incorporated into their competitive egos. The competitive character of these two leaders of the shtetl's community metonymically stands for the nature of their communities as a whole, and indicates their essential competitiveness.

In addition, beyond this metonymic presentation of competitiveness there are other signs of competition in Biala. The narrator, himself, is competitive; he demonstrates baseness while talking about the rebbe and the rov, and displays arrogance towards people who, he feels, do not deserve his respect. He defines his merchant employer, also an ideological opponent, as "not much of a scholar" (14). He also makes fun of his employer's ignorance when mocking his response to the rov's lecture: "he looked at the Brisker Rov, as they say, with the blank eye of a rooster contemplating a human being" (14). The narrator is also arrogant towards the gentile peasant carter. He expresses his contempt for his superstitions and belief in demons (17) and expresses astonishment at that carter's sensitivity to the rov's power (he calls the rov "mighty Rabbi"), as if this understanding seems to be "too high" for him (17).

This story, which focuses on a conflict within patriarchal Jewish orthodoxy, does not deal with the relationships between men and women. The story focuses on the male world, one in which women have no place. But in other stories by Peretz, one can find sexual competition of the same kind as seen in the Bourekas. In the story "A Virgin Gets Married,"<sup>175</sup> the author is assimilated into the consciousness of Lea, a poor young Jewish girl. Her parents would like her to marry the old widower, Rabbi Zeinwilli, her father's rich employer, but Lea is in love with the doctor's young

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<sup>175</sup> From *All of Y.L. Peretz's Writings (Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz)*, Volume 3, Book 1, The Dvir Co., Ltd., Israel (1962, 128-151).

assistant. She is caught between these two men. While her heart is given to the doctor's assistant, her parents have already decided that she must marry Zeinwilli, who knows nothing about this. However, the doctor's assistant does and he tries his best to attract the lovely virgin. He tells her of his life story and his suffering and sings songs when they are together.

As in some of the Bourekas films, such as *Sallah* and *Fortuna*, here the competition over the girl occurs between two characters who symbolize different generations and different world views.<sup>176</sup> While the doctor's assistant represents modernity – he is dressed in modern clothes, his mustache is curled, he sings secular songs (136), and he uses a Polish accent in his speech (131) – Rabbi Zeinwilli, an old merchant, represents the traditional ways in his habits and appearance.

“Downcast Eyes”<sup>177</sup> offers an example of a slightly different form of sexual competition. This is a story of Malcali, the daughter of a Jewish inn owner who falls in love with the nobleman's son. While Malcali is being married off by her father to a young Jewish scholar, she keeps thinking about the young handsome prince. In fact, she never really stops thinking about him, until her death. Whenever her husband touches her, she closes her eyes and thinks about the nobleman's son (80).

This competition remains unknown to one half of the competitors. However, the pattern is clear. Each competitor represents a different ideology and life view. The

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<sup>176</sup> For example, in *Sallah* there is competition over Sallah's daughter between the taxi driver and Zigi, a kibbutz member. While the taxi driver is a man of about 40 and an urbanite, and is self-employed – meaning in Israeli terms of the time, a liberal – Zigi is very young, about 20, a kibbutz member, meaning an extreme socialist. The same type of sexual competition over *Fortuna* can be seen in *Fortuna*. The two competing men are her old uncle Jack, who is a conservative pre-modern patriarch, and the young engineer who is free and modern. The courtship tactics of the competing men in both the story and the movie are the same. Both the driver and Zeinwilli tend to stress their economic position, and Zigi and the doctor's assistant tend to share with the girls and open their hearts to them. Zigi talks about his hardships in the kibbutz and sings a song; the doctor's assistant also talks about his hardships in life and sings a song (138-139).

<sup>177</sup> *Mipi Am* (“the people's voice”), Dvir Publishers Ltd., Tel Aviv (1953: 71-86, translated by Shimon Meltzer).

nobleman's son stands for a Christian and Greek world of values. He is handsome, brave, and (seen from the point of view of Rabbi Yechiel-Michal, Malcali's father) a man who is focused on fulfilling his emotional and physical desires (71). Her husband, on the other hand, is a typical Jewish scholar, with few emotional and physical appetites. He lives on a spiritual level, and strives for a spiritual contact with his wife, as "his soul is tied to her soul" (79).

### **Reducing Values to their Instrumental Functions**

As in the Bourekas, the existential spirit of survival and the struggle and antagonism presented in these stories results in the deterioration of social and interpersonal relationships that, by their nature, include emotional and spiritual aspects. Thus human actions, capable of extra-instrumental value, devolve through a process of reduction to their basic and instrumental functions in the daily struggle to survive.

### **Reducing Relationships with Romantic Potential to Pairings that Merely Fulfill a Financial Function**

#### **In Mendele's *Be'emek Ha'bacha***

In *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, Kabtsiel is described as a community where the concept of romantic love does not prevail.<sup>178</sup> Instead, the community holds a more materialistic view of marriage as important because of what you gain from it; romantic love is subordinated to this more basic need.

The story of the arranged marriage of Leizer, Hershel's father, and his mother is a perfect example of this definition of marriage priorities. Years before Hershel was born, the reader is told that Hershel's mother and Gedalia-Hirsh, the tailor (and also

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<sup>178</sup> This is despite the fact that Kabtsiel is not lacking of people with sexual desire, as demonstrated by the sad story of Sipa Sosi, Hershel's beautiful and sexually harassed sister (148).

her cousin), were in love. Their marriage was about to occur when Leizer enters the scene and impresses the family so much with his money and earning potential as a Hazan with singing talent.<sup>179</sup> The family cancels their daughter's engagement to Gedalia on the spot and marries her off to Leizer Yankel (146).

In *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, this instrumental view of marriage and romance is at least equally affected by society's ethos and tradition. Through the consciousness of his hero, Hershel, Mendele presents a community ethos about relationships between men and women that naturally leads to this instrumental view. Even as a child, Hershel clearly thinks about women as property. When he dreams about the magic ring, he wishes it would bring him "a beautiful princess, two goats and three cows" (57). This reflects a dehumanization of women inherent to the community ethos and tradition, and surely plays a part in forming attitudes towards marriage.

### **Shalom Aleichem's *Motl* and the Negation of Romantic Love**

There are no love affairs in *Motl*, only marriages. As in most Bourekas narratives,<sup>180</sup> the *raison d'etre* of the marriages in this novel (for example, the marriages of Eli and Bracha and of Pini and Teible) are not romantic but socio-economic<sup>181</sup>.

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<sup>179</sup> They thought that this ability was "a valuable instrument and a priceless dowry" (146).

<sup>180</sup> With the exception of *Kazablan* (Golan 1971) and *Aliza Mizrahi* (1969) all Bourekas films have marriage at the core of their narratives, and stress the economic aspect of the marriage and the social benefit to the Mizrahi characters while degrading the romantic aspects of it.

<sup>181</sup> Romantic love is not a part of the ethos of this society, so it is more accurate to describe the negation of the concept and ethos of romantic love. Shalom Aleichem had a strict idea about the place of romance in Jewish life. In his letter to Mendele which accompanies the Hebrew version of *Stempenu* (Ha'aroni 1997, 11), he mentions the advice Mendele had once given him – never write a "Jewish romance" for two reasons. First, this genre is not appropriate to Shalom Aleichem's writing style, and second, the unique Jewish culture and traditional way of life are impossible to represent in the format of a "romance."

The Hebrew literary authors of his generation adopted the idea of the divinity of erotic love and assimilated it into their novels. This was definitely the case of Berdichevsky (Mahanaim) and Gnesin. But the Hebrew literary writers wrote for a limited audience of Zionists who had themselves left Jewish values and traditions and tried to assimilate into the larger surrounding society. They saw

Bracha, the daughter of Yona, the baker, is rich. However, Eli, the son of the shtetl's cantor, holds the higher status. Both obtain material gain from their marriage. Eli is in a hurry to marry Bracha after his father's death<sup>182</sup> since the economic condition of the family declines dramatically with the death of its sole provider.

As in the Mizrahi neighborhood of Bourekas, materialistic attitudes toward marriage are a well-established norm in Cassrilevke. The shtetl's first response to Eli's marriage focuses on its materialistic aspect. Pesia encourages Eli to leave the wedding expenses to his rich father-in-law (37). Later Pesia discusses the watch that Eli should receive as a wedding present from Yona, the father-in-law. When the residents congratulate Eli on his successful match, the only thing they talk about is the material benefit to Eli's family. Nothing is said about the bride until the wedding day (38). The reaction of Eli's mother summarizes the shtetl's view of the marriage: "Eli got married not bad, may the evil eye not affect him, but very good, he has found a gold mine" (44).

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themselves as Hebrew, but not Jewish, writers who never had a need or desire to write in a "Jewish way."

The position of Shalom Aleichem was different. He wrote in Yiddish for a large, mostly traditional Jewish audience and saw himself as a Jewish writer, and therefore could not afford to adopt what seemed to be strange "Christian" (or pagan) concepts. Despite Mendele's warnings, Shalom Aleichem did try to write romances, his most famous is *Stempeniu* which he called a "Jewish romance." What makes *Stempeniu* Jewish is the absence of the essential concept of the divinity of erotic love. However this fact sabotages the novel. This absence appears to cause what can be interpreted as a reductive presentation of Stempeniu's and Rachel's characters and love. While Stempeniu is presented as a shallow ignorant skirt-chaser and his attraction to Rachel appears as a kind of habit, Rachel is presented as a narrow-minded provincial girl who lacks the most elementary ability to understand her own feelings and whose attraction to Stempeniu grows out of confusion. This reductive presentation prevents the reader from identifying with either character or their love for each other. This phenomenon, along with the apologetics sections that are spread through the novel (in which the author turns to the reader and apologizes for the unique Jewish nature of the novel), actually promotes his efforts to give this non-Jewish genre a Jewish look. Similarly, the obsession of the author to justify Rachel's (the nice and pure Jewish girl) motives and thoughts so that she won't be presented as a sinner, seems to justify Mendele's warning to Shalom Aleichem. A novel whose essence is a love affair is out of reach for those who have pretensions to be Jewish writers. This structure is inappropriate to represent traditional Jewish society.

<sup>182</sup> They leave for America several months after the wedding. It is still not a year since his father's death. His mother says while packing, "I wouldn't believe if someone had told me a year ago that I'd be a widow" (80).

Finally, the description of the bride implies that there is much more than love at stake here. She is "big, tall and manly. She has a red face and freckles." It also seems that the bride and groom make a funny couple, since the groom is "very short" (41). And at Eli's wedding ceremony, one gains another insight into the way matches are made in Cassrilevke, and to the lack of importance attached to the bride and groom's feelings. Here the announcement is made of Motl and Elte's engagement, even though "bride and groom-to-be" are nine years old at the time and hardly know each other (41).

Money is also of central importance in married life. Motl observes that usually Eli's wife, Bracha, behaves rudely towards his brother, insulting him regularly, and only when he acquires money does he become "highly distinguished" in her eyes (71). As if to stress that Eli and Bracha's case represents the shtetl's marriage norms, Pini also marries not out of love, but because his father felt it was time that he become a "mensch"<sup>183</sup> (Yiddish) and earn his own income. Pini marries the miller's daughter and opens a flower store (77).

The only relationship that resembles a love affair in the novel occurs between Motl and Golda,<sup>184</sup> the girl abandoned in Antwerp by her parents since she could not

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<sup>183</sup> A Yiddish term for "a real man," a fine human being.

<sup>184</sup> It is not only feelings connected to romantic love that are absent or negated within the shtetl sphere, but other kinds of feelings as well. The narrator, Motl, has a hard time expressing positive feelings toward people around him, even family members. The monologues of *Motl* are full of love and admiration for nature, the sun and skies (11), the garden fruits (28), Meni the calf (12), the Rabbi's cat (58). All evoke his wonder, enthusiasm, and love. When he hears about the death of the calf, he feels like "breaking out in tears" (18). Yet he never reports the same kind of feeling towards his family. He never indicates any feelings of love toward his brother. He only expresses fear, appreciation, or criticism towards his mother. He feels pity for her only in the scene of his father's death. Otherwise he criticizes his mother's habit of crying about everything (39). As for his father, after he dies, Motl is happy about being an orphan (27), protected, privileged, and exempt from all obligations. With his friends from the shtetl, he feels mainly competitive (The Pesia Boys, 26) and jealous (Henech, the son of Yossi, 24). He criticizes the neighbor Pesia for "sticking her nose everywhere" (18). The doctor's wife is a "wicked woman" (30). His sister-in-law, Bracha, is ugly, rude, and always furious (66). Pini has good ideas but he is ugly, cumbersome, and absent-minded (Ch. 11), and Teible, his wife, is good hearted but cross-eyed (77) and has a habit of swearing (115). His brother's father-in-law, Yona, has a murderer's face and eyes of a robber (48). The only person he shows positive feelings about is Golda, who he says he really loves and about whom he says, "She is like pure gold" (137).

enter America due to her infected eyes. Motl tells Golda that she is as pure as gold. He consoles her when she cries. Golda kisses Motl (142), but also withdraws when she hears about Motl's engagement to Elte. She "blushes like fire, turns her face and wipes her eyes" (131).

### **In Peretz's "Ben Shnei Harim"**

Like the Mizrahi neighborhood community in Bourekas films, Biala's community devalues romantic love. The event that testifies most effectively to this is the narrator's statement about the harmony and love between his employer's daughter and her husband, along with his astonishing remark that "they tried to conceal this harmony and love that prevailed between them from others" (15). The fact that love and harmony between the mentioned couple should be concealed indicates that this kind of relationship may be considered inappropriate or childish, and something that should be hidden (15).

As in *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, the community prefers functional relationships between men and women: women work and make money, while the men must pray for them. Love, or sensuality, is not part of their vocabulary. A woman is expected to create the connection between her father and "the great religious figures of Israel through a successful match" and to bring her husband a "thousand gold pieces" (14).

As is the case in Motl's Cassrilevke, Biala appreciates and demands the loyalty of a woman to her husband. For example, the Gvir's wife finds it suitable to declare her loyalty to her husband in front of other people, as does the mother in *Motl*, but neither character expects love to be a part of their marriage relationships (15).

## **Reducing Neighborly Relations to Frictional Conflicts, Blurring the Boundaries between the Private and the Public Domains**

### **In Mendele's *Be'emek Ha'bacha***

As in the Bourekas, the social behavior of Kabtsiel residents is characterized by phenomena that blur the boundaries between both the private and public, and that incline towards intruding upon the neighbor's domain. Mendele hints that this behavior is the consequence of the limited means that Kabtsiel's residents have to maintain their lives. At the beginning of the story the author allegorically explains that since Kabtsiel's measures of providence are slim, residents must share whatever remains, which blurs the borders between one's domain and that of the other's. Mendele describes a situation in which a resident who opens a shop forces other residents to immediately open similar shops in the same location, thus invading each other's territory and interrupting one another's efforts to earn a living (145).

However, it seems that the phenomena that begins as a survival impulse becomes habitual, gradually expanding to all aspects of life until Kabtsiel becomes a place in which "Everyone goes into their friend's private domain and pushes them around. In a place where two Jews are standing, a third and then a fourth come, and thus they come and grow into a group of ten to fulfill the biblical saying: 'and you had joined us together'" (145).

As in the Bourekas, gossip is another means by which borders between private and public space become blurred. In *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, this phenomenon is represented as a central characteristic of the community. Gossip is described as one of the main occupations and activities of the men in town, while in Beit Hamidrash the men "tell each other stories and gossip about the rich people of Kissalon" (156).

Moreover, gossip is one of the main sources of information in the narrative itself. Usually the knowledge that the author relates about the people of Kabtsiel conforms to the convention of the omniscient author-narrator, one who knows all. As such, the narrator need not rely on gossip to tell his story. But sometimes this “omniscience” is imperfect and socially contingent. For example, in the case of the story of the marriage of Hershel’s mother, the author indicates that gossip is its source. He defines the source of information about this event as “Midrash Haggada” (Hebrew – a kind of a legend) and indicates that this story is one passed from mouth to ear over the years as gossip (146).

However, in sharp contrast to the Bourekas, most of which present the negative aspects of blurring, the author of *Be'emek Ha'bacha* chooses to also relate positive aspects. For example, one positive aspect of gossip lies in its ability to create a local mythology. In creating the mythology about Rabbi Shmelki, gossip plays an important role. When the author explains the way events become common knowledge (and thus transform into a mythology) in Kabtsiel, he remarks ironically that “the old man [Rabbi Shmelki] revealed the ‘secret’ [the story, r.k.] to his relatives, the relatives told it to their relatives, and the tale was rolling until it was known to all the universe” (155).

Another positive aspect of the tendency to intrude on another’s space lies in the togetherness that this behavior forces. Community sharing is described as something that belongs to the nature of the villagers of Kabtsiel, a manifestation of their ancient roots. Therefore, the community is represented as one with a tradition of sharing, which inevitably results from the collective habit of intrusion. On one hand, in the environment of Kabtsiel there is no privacy. On the other hand, there is no loneliness. This duality pervades Kabtsiel’s reality, as everything seems to come

dualistic pairs. Even names, as I have already shown, come in pairs, as well as the men, as in the story of Hershel's mother who had first been matched to Gedalia and then to Leizer. In Kabtsiel, "even the dead come and go two by two" (146). The frequency of these "pairings" also has legendary roots. According to local mythology, Kabtsiel has two owners: the high priest Matityahu Hahashmonai, and a local duke. As they say, "one is holding the horn of the cow while the other is milking her" (155).

Another positive aspect lies in the simple confidence shared with others and the relief brought to the villagers through the simple joy of togetherness. This communal sense of belonging to a group is strengthened by their awareness of a shared destiny. The men of Kabtsiel, as described, take relief from their everyday troubles through a habit of sharing them. They gather regularly in front of the fire in the synagogue, among other activities, to complain and discuss everyone's troubles. They share their anxiety over provisional problems and act collectively in response. For example, in times of hunger, they all go together to Kissalon, the next and richer Jewish town, to beg for money. During Purim, "all of them went to Kissalon" (150). Additionally, all gather together regularly to share the joy of worshipping God. Mendele describes the Kabtsiel villagers as Jews who worship God together in happiness, especially during the holidays (148).

The events that result from this "sharing" are described in the final paragraph of the first chapter, which describes an informal gathering of all residents on a bright summer night outside their homes. The passage stresses the joy of togetherness as primeval and sensual: "The houses are all open... plenty of people are coming out of their holes. Men appear with no upper clothes but in their underwear, women with only their underdresses on their skins, and with dresses that are not buttoned, and the children run naked. Groups of neighbors are laying outside, young men and also

maidens” (158). The general atmosphere of this togetherness is one of friendliness and good spirit, a state of relaxation characteristic of a happy family. Here the shtetl’s sense of loneliness and solitude from the world pales in comparison to the familial closeness and togetherness that characterizes the “tribe” of Kabtsiel. There is a sense of friendship, brotherhood, love, and shared destiny.

This section is a very rare one in the novel; even the author seems to put his irony aside and adopt a more empathetic tone. This gathering is characterized by pleasant idleness, small talk, and social games. All residents seem to become children for a moment, children of God so to speak, as if their ancient mythological destiny as Jews, to be the loving children of their God, is being fulfilled for a moment. Despite loneliness and isolation in the universe, they also unite in love for each other. Mendele succeeds in this section in echoing and evoking the best qualities of Jewish existence in the shtetl: the importance of the family and familial feelings of comfort and a sense of shared destiny.

In many ways, the Kabtsiel community is represented as a tribe, one isolated from the universe but united within itself. Its isolation is emphasized by creating a mythical endless horizon around the town, a clear, dark, starry night that reinforces both the solitude of the town and its unification with the universe, with nature, and with God. There is nothing between the community and the sky. The residents have a direct connection with the cosmos, with creation itself and even with God, who seems in these moments to exist only for their benefit.

The familiarity of everyone in the community is emphasized through the residents’ physical proximity, and the endless ways they share physical space, as well as through conversation. Although there is still a kind of competition in these conversations, it is clearly not a harmful one. Men arguing about the meaning of stars

or women competing about their bargaining abilities are all arguments conducted in such good spirits that they resemble pleasant, childish games. The shared destiny is stressed by both the setting of a cosmos-wide horizon that surrounds the town and by the conversations about the stars and their meanings. In Jewish tradition, “star” means destiny. Since the specific content of the conversations about the stars is not mentioned, this may point to the fact that the conversation is about the Jewish meaning of the stars. They might be conversing about the shared destiny of the community, about the end of days, and about another form of existence after death. In terms of space, the horizontal measures of the shtetl are blocked and dense, but the vertical measure of space is very open and inviting. The harmony of the people is bound to the mystery of the summer night skies and to the cosmos’s wide space, from the internal to the divine to the afterlife.<sup>185</sup>

### ***In Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan***

The conditions of crowdedness typical to Cassrilevke, that is, the blurred borders between the private and public, are natural. Life in Cassrilevke brings people together. The women do their laundry together in the town's only river, and the carters and water drawers also use the same small river together (66).

The story of Eli trying to get rid of the ink bottles, quarreling first with his neighbors and then with the whole town, demonstrates yet again the congestion of the shtetl. The area is so crowded that there is literally no place to throw things away (Ch. 9). This is a characteristic that Cassrilevke shares with the Bourekas

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<sup>185</sup> With regards to the spirit of the Mendele's community representation up to this point at the story, this description of "harmony" could be also understood as ironical. There is enough data in the text (such as the resident's arguments, their unbuttoned appearance, etc.) to support this interpretation as well.

neighborhoods,<sup>186</sup> which seem to be just as crowded. As in the Bourekas films, here, too, people lead much of their life outside, on the streets. People gather outside in certain places and on certain occasions. For the people of Cassrilevke, the marketplace (39) and the streets (57) serve as gathering places, as do special occasions such as weddings (42), deaths (21), and the departures of residents<sup>187</sup> (80).

Moreover, one cannot do anything in privacy in Cassrilevke since "in every spot and corner," as Motl complains, "people pop up suddenly" (83). The novel presents this habit of togetherness as so deeply rooted in the residents' lives that they export it to the places they travel. Throughout the family's journey to America, crowding occurs wherever there are emigrants from any shtetl. It is crowded near the emigration committee's bureau in Lemberg (119), in the emigrant's inn in Antwerp (122), on the walk leading to the ship that takes emigrants to America (132), and on the deck of the ship itself (153).

In Cassrilevke, as in some of the Bourekas films,<sup>188</sup> neighbors share living spaces. Motl and his family share their apartment with the slaughterer's family (82). Motl plays with Pesia's calf (12) and eats with Pesia's family (25). This closeness, as in the Bourekas, causes some loss of privacy and also creates subsequent intrigues. Motl reports that Pesia is "sticking her nose everywhere" (18) and her husband Moshe is a "nuisance, he likes to enter to the other's soul" (63). Motl's sister-in-law, Bracha, also shares this characteristic of "minding other people business." According to Motl, she has a habit of listening "to what people are talking" about (134).

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<sup>186</sup> This crowdedness of Mizrahi neighborhoods in the films is only suggested in various scenes. It is implied as a result of low socio-economic status (see Chapter 2).

<sup>187</sup> In *Fortuna*, there is a scene which is very similar to this one (when all the people of the shtetl come to say farewell to the family starting on their journey to America). In the film, all the townspeople come out to welcome the visitor to Fortuna's family.

<sup>188</sup> Like, for example, in the film *The Tsan'ani Family* by Boaz Davidzon (Israel 1976).

Pesia's invasion into the private sphere of others can be embarrassing. The same characteristic can be said for Aliza in *Aliza Mizrahi*, who embarrasses the police commander by telling everyone funny stories about his childhood. Pesia does the same to Eli, who is trying to be considered a man, by saying that she took care of him while he was a child and took him in her arms and saved his life when he had swallowed a fish bone (81).

As in the Bourekas, this blurring of the private and public works both ways. People of the shtetl share their most private moments with others in the community, exposing them in the public sphere. When Motl's father dies, his mother is in a hurry to share her deep sorrow and trauma with neighbors and those who gathered around the house. Motl describes a conversation between his mother and Yossi the Gvir, which takes place in the public sphere, outside the house, in front of many people, right after his father's death, and before the funeral. Motl's mother is crying and says loudly that she did everything she could to save her husband's life, while Yossi loudly blames her for hiding the illness from the public (21).

It is not only the ontological spheres of Cassrilevke that are blurred; the borders of the imaginative spheres of the individual are also crossed. This tendency has many variations in the shtetl, one of which is renaming. The name given to a person by their parents is one of their most private properties. Given this, renaming a person by someone who is not a parent is an aggressive intrusion into his or her private sphere. Nevertheless, renaming is a well-developed habit in Cassrilevke. It is true for the brothers in Pesia's family, who rename each other and also rename Motl (25-26).<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> They call Motl "the lips kid" (25).

However, in *Motl*, as well as in *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, the positive aspects of neighborliness are described. Within the borders of Cassrilevke, the value of neighborliness has not been totally reduced. There is one major example of this in the novel. Pesia, although described as an aggressive and pushy person who habitually intrudes into other people's business, is also described as a responsible and helpful neighbor. She takes Motl into her family and adopts him right after his father's death (25). She helps to promote Eli's business. She lets Motl's mother wear one of her dresses to Eli's wedding (41). She stands forcefully on the side of the family in arguments with others and protects them. She quarrels with Eli's future father-in-law when he suspects that Eli had gambled away the watch that had been given him (38).

At times Motl enjoys the positive aspects of this togetherness. When he talks about the hostel that they were given by the committee of Lemberg, he says that "It was cheerful. Getting to know new emigrants, sitting together, eating together, telling stories. Oh what beautiful stories, miracles, miracles from the pogrom, miracles from the recruitment bureau, miracles from the border" (82).

In *Motl*, as in the *Bourekas*, gossip comes with crowdedness and the blurred borders between private and public spaces. Cassrilevke is characterized as having a free flow of information about the private lives of its villagers. For example, Motl knows a great deal about the villagers, even things that happened before he was born. It can be assumed that all of this information derives from gossip. Sometimes Motl reveals his sources, such as when he tells the reader about Hirsh Bar, the cantor. "He himself," says Motl, "couldn't sing, this is what I heard from my father" (16).

Gossip is rooted in the shtetl way of life. Motl tells us that he used to eavesdrop on other people's conversations without them knowing about it on a regular basis. For example, he listened to conversations between Eli and Mose, the binder

(61), and to those between Pini and Eli (77). Other people in town also eavesdrop. For example, when the carter says Selihot instead of the Passover Haggada in his house during the Seder, most of the town knows about it (64).

Gossip is so much a part of the representation of shtetl life that it influences Motl's narrative style. Sometimes, his monologue style is structured in the form of gossip dialogue between two villagers, such as in these lines: "Do you know Mendel, the slaughterer, or don't you? If you don't know him, it is obvious that you don't know his house" (31).

In Cassrilevke, information moves quickly. Only a few days after Motl's family sells their house, all the Oilam<sup>190</sup> know about the deal and show concern about the money that was paid, asking Eli "if he hid the money well" (85). As soon as Motl comes back from his forbidden fishing experience at the river, he is beaten by Eli, who has already heard from somebody about his little brother's behavior (24).

Residents of the shtetl, as in the Bourekas, use gossip to promote various interests. Yona's bakery is ruined by the evil gossip of his competitors, but gossip can also serve as a way to promote business. When Eli and Pini start their third commercial enterprise Pesia, the neighbor, serves as its advertising department. She does it for free, using the shtetl's existing gossip network to spread good rumors about their work (69).

The shtetl's gossip network is also, just like in the Bourekas, a powerful tool to spread fear, foolishness, ignorance, and superstition. Eli uses it to spread rumors of his magic powers, spreading the story about the spell he put on all the rats in town which allegedly caused them to leave their holes, swim across the river and disappear

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<sup>190</sup> A word in Hebrew adopted into Yiddish. Here the literal meaning is "a world," and it is used as the meaning for the whole community of the shtetl.

(70). Ber, the shoemaker, tells a story about rats that have eaten a cat (69). Pini tells people about a canon shell that is "bigger than a house" (70).

This habit of gossip, like the habit of competition, follows the Jews of Cassrilevke and other Pale settlement villagers everywhere. They use gossip and rumor networks to help families on their way to America (Ch. 13), by helping them find a way to cross the border into Germany (91), directing them to the committees for aid to emigrants that developed all over Europe (100), helping them prepare to meet with the committee's officials (112), and instructing them to avoid bad places for emigrants, such as Hamburg (112).

Through this instant intelligence network, the emigrants learn about what is expected of them in America. Indeed, at times this network is used to spread panic, such as when the tailor spreads the rumor that all the emigrants are going to be jailed like calves in a barn upon arriving in America (161). However, at other times, the information is accurate and helpful, and in the case of Pini, whose attitude to America is completely idealistic, even eye-opening (164).

### **In "Ben Shnei Harim"**

As in the Bourekas, nothing is private in the shtetl of Biala and everybody knows almost everything about one another. Here the third-person narrator, although only a witness and a character within the story – and thus lacking the ability to freely penetrate into the consciousness of those he describes – is nevertheless well-versed on the details of the shtetl's life, probably through alternative sources of information, such as gossip. The narrator knows a great deal about his rebbe's biography, including his dreams and his most private thoughts (11), the rov of Brisk's cruel acts towards Hassidim (11-12), the exact sum of money his employer gave his daughter as a dowry

(a thousand gold pieces) (14), the punishment that the rov has suffered (14), and the good relations between Yechiel, his employer, his daughter and her husband, even though "they tried to conceal it" (15).

An opportunity to see how this network works within the shtetl appears after the rov of Brisk arrives in Biala. When he sits around the table with his hosts after dinner and inquires about the Biala rebbe, a conversation develops in which he learns that there is a "certain Noah" who is a rebbe in Biala (20) and who has done miracles. The rov adds some new gossip of his own about the rebbe telling them about when he studied with the rov (20).

Although there may be some damage from this togetherness, Peretz's story also stresses the positive aspects of this situation. The narrator, through the story of Noah becoming a rebbe, presents this togetherness, this sharing, as the most significant value of Hassidim. In the story, Noah leaves the Brisker rov's yeshiva mainly because he felt that the rov's approach to Judaism is built upon the loneliness of the scholar. In his dream, Noah felt that "he was overcome by powerful longing, yearning for his fellow Jews, for friends, for the people of Israel" (13). At the end of the dream, when left alone by the rov, he weeps: "I would rather be in hell with the rest of Israel than remain here all by myself" (13). According to the rebbe, this togetherness has a mythological source in Mount Sinai, where the Torah was given and shared by all the people of Israel of the time and all the souls of Jews who had not yet been born (23).<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Of course, this sequence in the story echoes the deep gap between Hassidim and Lithuanians concerning their perception of the preferable way to worship God. The Lithuanians advocated worship through intellectual effort, knowledge, and scholarship, while the Hassidim advocated love, ecstasy, and community sharing. But the aspect that is interesting for me is the fact that from the representation it seems that the author favors the sharing of Hassidism over the scholarly solitude of Lithuanians. This seems to support and give positive meaning to the togetherness that is presented in the story.

## Reducing the Value of Work to Its Instrumental Aspects

### In *Be'emek Ha'bacha*

In a way that resembles the situation in the Mizrahi communities of the Bourekas, residents of Kabtsiel provide for themselves through non-professional, marginal work. The narrator describes the villagers as employed as “servants and maids” in Kissalon, the larger neighboring town (145). With the exception of Gedalia, the tailor, and some women who weave stockings, none of the occupations mentioned by the narrator are productive.

In both the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas and in Kabtsiel, idleness prevails and only a few people seems to possess steady jobs which provide for them. However, while the Bourekas neighborhoods feature very few religious occupations (usually only a rabbi), in Kabtsiel, religiously or ritually related occupations (although mostly unprofitable), form a large part of the work available to the villagers: Torah teachers for children, cantors, a man who blows the Shofar, women who say prayers and beg on behalf of ignorant people, women who sell goose oil for Passover, etc.

However, even this is not enough. Many have to beg for a living. This differs from the relatively marginal place begging has in the Bourekas Mizrahi neighborhoods.<sup>192</sup> The narrator also seems to characterize Kabtsiel on the whole through this quality: “The people of Kabtsiel<sup>193</sup> are total beggars. There is never a dime in their pockets and they provide for themselves out of begging one from the other” (145). Residents of Kabtsiel prove extremely creative in inventing new forms of begging. The list of the villagers “occupations” hides some creative forms of

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<sup>192</sup> Zacki from *Charlie and a Half* and Ha'aron in *Aliza Mizrahi* do beg for money, but this seems to be an result of their backwardness and unemployment, and not professional begging.

<sup>193</sup> The linguistic meaning of the name Kabtsiel in Hebrew means “the town of beggars” (*Be'emek Ha'bacha*, as discussed earlier, was originally written in Hebrew).

begging: "Jews who receive (money from somebody), Jews who own documents and letters of recommendation that say that they are honest and needy (to help them beg), Jews who have hemorrhoids (that also help them beg)" (145).

I should also note that in the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas, people sometimes make their living from occupations that border on petty crime, or are outright criminals.<sup>194</sup> Although these occupations are not represented in Kabtsiel, they are present among the Jews of Kissalon, the nearest large city.<sup>195</sup>

### **In *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan***

People of the Mizrahi community in the Bourekas are presented basically as idlers. If they do work, they usually perform a low status job. Also, they are not work-oriented and occasionally they engage in petty crime. Residents of Cassrilevke seem to have the same attitude towards work; non-manufacturing work has a higher status than productive labor.

Occupations that have the greatest status are religious or communal in nature (Kehali Kodesh). Motl explains the fact that his brother, Eli, marries a rich girl while still having no position as a result of his father's pedigree as a cantor (37). Pesia remarks that "Peisi, the cantor, doesn't deserve his son to be a craftsman," (41) and his mother says "all my enemies won't accomplish making Motl, the son of Peisi the cantor, a craftsman" (43).

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<sup>194</sup> *Sallah* makes a living from playing shesh besh (a local game) with his neighbors. He also tries to make a living from pimping. He pimps dogs and his daughter's dowry as well. Flora, the mother of Charlie in *Charlie and a Half* earns her money as a fortune teller, but not a very good one. Rabbi Gamliel in *Hacham Gamliel* makes a living telling the future. Sasson from *Charlie and a Half* is a petty criminal although exactly what he does remains undisclosed. Charlie himself provides for himself by fraud, gambling, and blackmailing, Gabriel in *Snooker* makes a living from fraud and blackmailing naïve people.

<sup>195</sup> In the course of the novel, the narrator tells a story of a Jewish prostitute, which shows the existence of Jewish prostitutes, brothels, and pimps in Kissalon.

The lowest status in Cassrilevke belongs to those who work in handicrafts, such as tailors and shoemakers. Pini mocks a tailor for his profession (160) and everyone on the boat to America is surprised to discover that tailors enjoy relatively high status in the United States, calling America "tailor's country" (175).

The villagers of Cassrilevke are not work-oriented. As in the Bourekas, they neither appreciate nor recommend work. When preparing Motl to go to work for old Luria, his mother says, "This is an excellent job, an easy job" (43). Professionalism is thus not important in Cassrilevke. Shalom Aleichem populates his shtetl with so-called artisans who are unskilled in what should be their profession, a phenomenon similar to the mentality of the title character in *Sallah*.<sup>196</sup> The baker's bread has hair in it (49), the watchmaker does not know how to repair watches (75), the doctor writes worthless prescriptions (29), and the oven builder cannot build a good oven (74).

Unemployment and idleness push the villagers into unrealistic commercial enterprises, characterized as unprofessional, sloppy, and inclined to fail. The kvass, ink, and mice powder manufacturing businesses are examples of this (Ch. 7, 8, and 9). Petty crime also exists in the shtetl. Motl mentions a thief in Cassrilevke (57). The family is robbed crossing the border by a Jewish thief (Ch. 13), as are people from other shtetls (111). Generally, the shtetl's values don't consider stealing a serious sin. For example, the villagers justify the actions of a boy who steals food out of hunger (111).

### **In "Ben Shnei Harim"**

This short story offers no real description of the society and its everyday life.

As a result, it presents no detailed description of work. However, such an absence

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<sup>196</sup> When Sallah is asked for his profession by the emigration clerk he answers that he is a shoemaker. The next question reveals that he never worked as a shoemaker anywhere. Despite this, Sallah keeps on claiming he is a shoemaker on several occasions.

may enforce the fact that this is a community where work has little value or importance, since no information about the occupations of the characters is given, except for that of the narrator who says that he is a teacher. The only other character whose work is mentioned is the non-Jewish carter. Furthermore, it is interesting that the narrator, when describing his employer, talks about his wealth but never bothers to mention what made him so rich.

In other stories by Peretz, begging is a major source of income. For example, "A Contribution for a Wedding"<sup>197</sup> tells a story of a successful begging episode conducted by Mendel, who succeeds in blackmailing the "wealthy" reb Oyzer and making him pay for his daughter's wedding (54).

In the story "The Dead Town" (Wisse 1990), the narrator meets a Jew who tells him about his town, the eponymous dead town. When the narrator wonders if the town is poor, the man tells him that the town actually lives by begging: "What's poor and what's rich I ask you? We get by. Whoever's hard pressed can always count on some help from town nearby.... Stick out your hand and it won't stay empty for long... and there are all kinds of odd jobs around too. If you don't mind working on commission you can pick them up right in the street" (163). At the end of his monologue, sensing that the narrator is not convinced, he says, "We all live quite respectably I assure you. But from what, from what? From the same things everyone else does! Our poor folk live on hope, our merchants live on air and our gravediggers live from the soil" (163).

In the story "A Pinch of Snuff,"<sup>198</sup> a description of the Jewish marketplace on a normal day reveals the idleness and economic depression caused by the solitude of

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<sup>197</sup> Source: Peretz, Isaac Leib, "Hachnasat Kala," *Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz, (Hassidism)*, translated from Yiddish by Y.L. Peretz and Shimshon Meltser, Dvir, 1962.

<sup>198</sup> Source: Peretz, Isaac Leib, "Beshel Richa Shel Tabak," *Kol Kitvei Y.L. Peretz, (Mipi Am)*, translated from Yiddish by Y.L. Peretz and Shimshon Meltser, Dvir, 1962.

the shtetl. Peretz writes, "The sun shone brightly that day on the marketplace of Chelm, crowded with Jews who had nothing to do. They stood about in groups, buying and selling skins of rabbits and hares that hadn't been caught yet, cases of eggs that hadn't been laid, timber from trees that hadn't been felled" (92). Similarly, the story "Impressions of a Journey through the Tomaszow Region" (Wisse 1990), presents the shtetl of Tishevitz as a place of many idlers. When the narrator goes on his tour with the shtetl's only maskil, a "handful of idlers" (31) dog his footsteps and listen to his conversation with the maskil, following them curiously and peering through the windows whenever they enter a house (32).<sup>199</sup>

## **Reduction of the Material Culture**

### **In *Be'emek Ha'bacha***

An important difference between cinematic and literary representation lies in the primacy of physical description to their mimetic sequence. For the cinema, physical description and the formalization of space embody the main linguistic structures of representation. For a book, by contrast, the space where action takes place is not often directly described by the author: data about it must be extracted from text units which have different prime functions. In *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, Mendele does not even bother to describe the space of Kabtsiel. Therefore, the site must be traced and interpreted within the framework of the other narrative signifiers in the literary text. In this fashion, the reader recognizes a considerable similarity between the presentation of the Mizrahi neighborhood in the Bourekas and that of Kabtsiel

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<sup>199</sup> This scene contains a clear analogy to the scene of the social worker's (played by Gila Almagor) visit in the transition camp in *Sallah*. A character who represents modernity (the social worker) is treated suspiciously there also. Just as in "Impressions of a Journey," in *Sallah* also the visitor is followed by a "handful of idlers" who listen to her conversations, curiously peering in and reacting to what is said and seemingly waiting for a conflict to arise.

(156). Through Hershel's consciousness, Mendele provides much information about the look of the outskirts of Kabstiel. As in the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas, the streets are unpaved ("God creates wind to dry the earth so the Jewish women would not have trouble walking to the markets"), the earthy streets are filled with puddles ("God brings water to the streets for the goats to drink"), and livestock roam freely in the streets. Houses are made of either clay or wood and their roofs are made out of straw.

If one considers the different eras in which they were produced, a certain similarity appears between representations of a Jewish community in *Be'emek Habacha* and in Bourekas films. The difference lies in the contrasting attitudes, of Mendele on one hand and the authors of the Bourekas on the other, to this represented "reality." Mendele is at peace with this setting, even nostalgic about it, as seen in his description of the town at the novel's end, where a "golden light from the moon was pouring between the roofs of the clay houses, coming on the walls and fences, and on the cows who are crouching in the middle of the street... a single cow walks on the side of the street and gorges green grass there" (158). In contrast, the authors of the Bourekas express the opposite sentiment: they seem detached at best and hostile at worst toward the neighborhood. Such a disparaging sentiment is evident in the "look" of the Bourekas films: the style of the shooting is very informal, which increases the effect of the ugliness, shabbiness, and chaos of the neighborhood. In fact, they transform this aspect of neighborhood representation into further evidence of its general decadence.

### **In *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan***

Shalom Aleichem, like Mendele, constructs a negative analogy between nature and Jewish life and stresses this relationship through the ugliness of Jewish everyday life. The child narrator compares the spring awakening of nature, with its natural colorfulness, to the environment in which he and his neighbor's calf live; he finds fault with the latter. He says in the book's opening scene that he lives in a mossy, cold, and dirty basement and that the calf dwells in a "dark filthy muddy corral with cracked walls" (11). The calf corral is part of the shtetl's street furniture, and as such testifies to the lack of maintenance of the shtetl streets and public space in general.

This negative analogy between the world outside and the world of the shtetl is mentioned at least once more, when the narrator describes a heavenly summer day with a beautiful and merciful sun and fair skies and then moves to a description of the Jewish fair: "Jews are running around like drugged mice, sweating, shouting" (39).

In *Be'emek Ha'bacha* the narrator speaks from Olympian heights, whereas in *Motl*, the hero/narrator is a child. This makes it much more difficult to trace the evidence of the nature of the shtetl's ontological environment, since children tend to take their surroundings for granted, rather than analyzing it. Nevertheless, the information about space, which can be read between the lines, presents a sad scene. The houses are wooden (even the houses of the rich – Yossi's house for example, is built with logs, 16). The streets are not paved (16) and are full of garbage and building materials (16). The shtetl, like the Bourekas neighborhoods, is a hybrid space, the worst of rural and urban. Animals wander around in the streets. But at the same time the houses are crowded so close together that it is possible for one to

move from house to house via the windows (31). The houses are also dirty and poorly maintained, their interior walls covered with stains.

There is a river that crosses the shtetl. Pigs paddle in it and horses bathe in it. Everybody uses it to throw away "all their litter" (66). The river has no fish, and in the summer, it becomes a muddy puddle (66). Much of this ugliness comes from official neglect. The neglect of the shtetl leads to a degree of disrespect of public space by the villagers. This explains how Eli could spill his ink in a public space (65).

This becomes evident after the family starts to visit other places in other countries. Motl, who seems to miss the shtetl while traveling abroad, is happy when he reaches a place that reminds him of it: "In the lodging where we live with the other emigrants everything is as it should be, *i.e.*, dirty, filthy, mossy, slippery, narrow and crowded up to the point of suffocation" (122). Likewise when he talks about the market of London, he remembers the shtetl: "Everything is like in our place... the mud is the same and the stench also as ours" (144), and "The English are pretty drunk but they are not scattered in the streets like in our place" (148). When in New York, Motl reacts to the norm of spitting in the street. He reveals that the same norm existed in his shtetl. "You can think that here it's clean and tidy and nobody spits in the street. You are mistaken, they spit and spittle everywhere" (178).

Another aspect of the reduction of this sphere can be described as bad manners and the lack of hygiene habits that Motl attributes to the villagers of Cassrilevke. This, too, resembles the description of the Bourekas neighborhoods.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> For example, the character of Sasson (Ze'ev Revach) from *Snooker* who speaks with his mouth full; Moshe from *The Tsan'ani Family* who walks outside in his nightgown and hair net; Hacham Gamliel who wipes his hands on his pajamas; Zecharia from *The Tsan'ani Family* who takes the ring

Beyond the rude behavior of interrupting conversations and shouting regularly, people of the shtetl generally display a repulsive behavior. The lack of hygiene is reflected, for example, in the case of the baker, where it becomes known that one worker kneads the dough with a bandaged finger and another has the habit of putting the dough under her head every night when sleeping (49). Michele the book peddler is "a meager bearded Jew who scratches all the time" when estimating the value of the book; he turns pages with one hand and scratches his beard with the other (13). Nahman, the carpenter, has a red nail on his dirty hands (14). He and his sons definitely have bad manners. When having trouble getting the cupboard out, they curse one other: "nimbleness of an elephant," "bear legs," "the demon is after you," "break your neck" (14).

These behaviors are presented not as exceptions but as the norm. The representation of everyday manners in the shtetl constitutes a great deal of what could be seen from the standards of western society today as default rudeness. Motl reports proudly that "when the visor of the hat stops shining, one spits on it and rubs and it starts shining again" (41). When Motl gets closer than usual to the dancers during the wedding, a man catches him and throws him to another "like a ball" while cursing him, "psoriasis," "Schlemiel." Pesia, who sees this, says nothing about this cruelty and rudeness in general, but attempts to stop it only because "this is the brother of the groom" (41).

As in the Bourekas, the shtetl is represented as inhabited with strange, sometimes ugly individuals. People of the shtetl are not blessed with an appearance that meets the aesthetic standards of their time. In Cassrilevke, both Pini's wife Tieble and Henech, the son of Yossi the Gvir, are cross-eyed (21). According to

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right out of his baby's shit and brings it to his wife; or Sallah from *Sallah* who seems never to change his clothes.

the narrator, Pini is especially bad looking as are the other members of his family. Motl says they are all tall and skinny with large noses (76). Pini's aunt, Kreine, "has a nose from the noses land, and not as much the nose but the face. The face is not human, it's like a bird or an animal. Pini looks like her, a little" (75-76). The doctor's wife has giant legs, a manly face and a manly voice (30). The neighbor Pesia is fat (37). Eli is "very short "and Bracha, his wife, has a big manly red face, freckles, and a rough voice. Pesia's children are also far from beautiful: Pinie is fat, Velvel is black, Mendel has a pointed nose, and Zerah has something very nasty in his hair (26).

As in some of the Bourekas films,<sup>201</sup> there are people in the shtetl who are crippled in various ways: Dubchi is a hunchback (17), Henach is cross-eyed (21), his father Yossi the Gvir has a speech impediment (21), Uncle Baruch is a blind old man with no teeth (25), Menashe the doctor has a twisted mouth and sweats a lot (29), and Feitl has a speech impediment, one different from that of Yossi the Gvir (26).

### **In "Ben Shnei Harim"**

As mentioned earlier, this lyrical short story does not describe a dense and detailed space. Transparent<sup>202</sup> space is typical of other stories by Peretz, but here and there, one can find some abbreviated descriptions of the shtetl, which is presented in the same way that the Bourekas present Mizrahi neighborhoods.

The only direct description of the shtetl by the author appears towards the end of the story. The narrator describes Biala as a small town with "small and poor

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<sup>201</sup> For example, in *Snooker*, Azriel is a stutter and Moshon has a speech impediment. In *Hacham Gamliel*, the assistant suffers from mental retardation.

<sup>202</sup> Regarding density and transparency in literary space, see Zoran Gabriel (1991).

wooden houses" (21). The only description of the way the villagers dress appears a few lines later after the narrator wakes up from a daydream in which he saw Hassidim dance in "glimmering" caftans. He then sees the villagers as they really are, "ordinary Hassidim in torn caftans murmuring old tattered fragments of song" (24).

A description of the shtetl's ontological space that is close in its spirit to the presentation of neighborhood space in the Bourekas is evident in another story, "Impressions of a Journey through the Tomaszow Region" (Wisse 1990). Here the narrator visits the shtetls of this region in Poland to specifically describe their life conditions. When the narrator arrives at Tishevitz, he describes the Jewish part of it as follows: "It was a large square, hemmed in by rickety houses, some roofed with thatch but most with shingles, none more than one story high, and each with a wide porch over rotting, discolored piles" (21). Then the narrator starts touring the town that is populated by both Jews and Christians, as historically most of the shtetls were.<sup>203</sup>

At one point, Peretz considers the differences between Jewish and Christian neighborhoods, hinting that neglect of dwelling places is especially Jewish: "I do not need to be told where Jews and where non-Jews live. All I have to do is look at the windows. Unwashed windows are a sign of the chosen people, especially where gaps left by missing panes have been filled by pillows or sacking. On the other hand, flowerpots and curtains suggest strongly that the inhabitants don't have the same inherited right to poverty" (meaning they are not Jews) (24). One peculiar wooden house makes the worst impression. It is not only higher than the others, but also darker and dirtier. Its face tilts strongly forward, looking down on a correspondingly darkened old ruin. Even the rabbi's house in Tishevitz suffers from neglect and poor maintenance. When the narrator opens a window in the rabbi's house, he faces some

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<sup>203</sup>However, classical Yiddish literature does not usually present things this way; it prefers to see the shtetl as a separate Jewish town (Miron 2000; see also the introduction to this chapter).

problems: "but opening the window is more easily said than done. The last time it was opened was about fifteen years ago. The putty is dried out and the panes, cracked by the shutters, are kept fastened to the wall only by rust. Whether the shutters still have hinges is doubtful" (33).

In visiting a different shtetl, the narrator stresses the fact that the shtetl space is a hybrid between rural and urban. "I arrived in Lashchev in the dark of the summer's night between eleven and twelve o'clock. Again a marketplace surrounded by the customary structures. In the middle lie scattered white rocks. As I approach the rocks stir, acquire horns, and resolve themselves into a flock of spanking white goats" (48).

"The Dead Town" also offers a short description of the shtetl space. The story begins when the narrator meets a Jew who tells him about his town, the dead town. The Jew answers some of the narrator's questions about the town and some of his descriptions match the reductive space presentations of neglect in other stories. For example, he describes the town's synagogue as once beautiful but now "full of dust and spider webs" (164), and in the end he talks about the smell of the town, "wherever you go there is such a stench in the air – in the synagogue, in the bathhouse, in the street" (171).

## **Reduction of the Value of Religion – Superstitions**

### **In *Be'emek Ha'bacha***

Superstition, common to the community of Kabtsiel, is interwoven through the fabric of daily life. For example, when Hershel's mother wants her husband to agree to name the child after her previous fiancé, she tells him about a dream she has had, in which the dead Gedalia-Hirsh appears to ask that she call the child by this name. It is the tale that ultimately convinces him. The villagers incorporate not only dreams, but also astrology into their belief systems. On a clear summer night, all the villagers

gather together outdoors to enjoy the stars and each other's company: "Izik and Bril, both astrologers and scholars, are pointing to the starry skies and at the stars, and they begin arguing upon their meaning" (158). Moreover, many villagers make their living from occupations based on superstitions. For example, one main occupation for women is to "whisper against illnesses and injuries and children's sicknesses" (148). The extent to which the superstitions become a part of the community discourse and replace some aspects of religion can be seen in the first training Hershel receives as a Jew, which corresponds to de facto superstitions. The adults tell him about "metempsychosis" and dead people who wander the universe, and also about ghosts, spooks, and demons (153).

The Kabtsiel narratives represent the connection between the decline of religious sentiments and the rise of superstition in a way that resembles that of the Bourekas. Here, a rabbi who should stand for religious order is presented as having more of a connection to superstition; all Kabtsiel believes the local mythology regarding Rabbi Shmelki. Both the community and its rabbi thus succumb to superstition (154).

However, the similarity between the Bourekas presentation of the decline of religion and religious spirituality and the Kabtsiel representation disappears when the Mizrahi neighborhood of the Bourekas totally replaces the religious ceremonies and belief with superstitions, for here there are no religious acts performed by the residents. In Kabtsiel, religion and superstition both exist. Mendele's description of the daily practice of the Jewish commandments, rituals, and visits to the synagogue attest to this. Moreover, the status of God's servants in Kabtsiel is not low. They are not ridiculed, but rather respected (Leizer, for example, for being a cantor). Rabbi

Shmenki wins the admiration of his entire congregation. By contrast, in most of the Bourekas, religion is either irrelevant or the butt of many jokes.

### **In *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan***

In *Motl*, Shalom Aleichem describes a community less engaged with religious life and ceremonies than in Mendele's *Be'emek Ha'bacha*,<sup>204</sup> and thus it resembles the communities of the Bourekas. People still fulfill the religious commandments and use godly phrases, but more by force of habit and without thinking too much about it. This resembles what can be seen in the Bourekas, for example, the common, but unconscious, habit of kissing the mezuzah when entering or leaving a Jewish house.<sup>205</sup>

Motl's monologues are innocent of religious feeling, which he also does not describe in others.<sup>206</sup> The closest Motl gets to religious feeling is when he describes the sun as "a merciful mother." This expression seems to be fed more by a pagan-Christian awareness than a specifically Jewish consciousness (39). Motl is not bothered by God; from his perspective, Cassrilevke is a place in which God and his commandments are no longer a vivid part of life. The villagers do not fear God anymore. Gedalia, the butcher, "fattens the whole town with unkosher meat" (Ch. 8a). Eli's wife, Bracha, is another example of the materialistic non-religious spirit of Cassrilevke. "Honesty for her is a hot oven and God himself is nothing but the money you have in your pocket" (71), says Motl.

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<sup>204</sup> It may be that Shalom Aleichem was less interested in fighting religion than the others, because in his time, religion was declining in importance among many Jewish communities. Superstitions were there, but they were more engaged with ignorance than with an atrophy of religious belief. In Cassrilevke, it seems as if religion is already fading away and not central to Jewish consciousness anymore.

<sup>205</sup> Examples of this can be seen in the completely non-religious Charlie from *Charlie and a Half*, who has this habit, or Azriel from *Snooker* who does the same thing. Residents of Bourekas neighborhoods also use godly phrases; for example, Sallah from *Sallah*, Azriel from *Snooker*, and the fisherman from *Kazablan*.

<sup>206</sup> This is not due to his age since other child heroes of his stories, such as the boy in "Hagedel" (Shalom Aleichem 1981), have well-developed religious feelings.

When Motl thinks about stealing fruit from the doctor's garden, he never thinks about the sin of this act from a religious perspective. Motl's mother and other characters do not think in religious terms about their actions. God's name has suffered so much degradation in Cassrilevke that he has been "thrown to the rats," as Motl cheerfully reports about the rats that ate the Hebrew letters of Melech (God) in the Siddur (Prayer Book) of Moshe the binder – a wonderful metaphor for the reduction of religion in the shtetl (69).

The shtetl as a community, "Oilam," present in everyone's life through gossip, replaces God as the authority through which one's deeds are judged. Villagers estimate their deeds according to what the Oilam will say about them.<sup>207</sup> For example, Motl's mother acts as if she must justify her deeds to the community. It is very important for her that people get the impression that she is doing all she can to save her husband's life. When his illness becomes severe, she says to the bunch of women: "I sold everything, with God's help... the last pillow... all for his sake... for the sick man" (18). In the scene of his death, when Yossi the Gvir comes, she again justifies herself in front of the crowd: "all the town saw how I suffered trying my best to save him" (21).

Motl stresses that after his father's death, his mother became a person who wept a lot. She wept on every occasion as a way to demonstrate to the community that she still mourned her late husband. Yet it is typical that she picked the most visible moment to visit her husband's grave, before the family leaves the shtetl for good. While everyone is getting ready to leave, she disappears, only to return to tell those who came to escort the family that she had been visiting her late husband's grave (85). Religious acts are merely instrumental for Motl and possess nothing of their original

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<sup>207</sup> The same phenomenon can be seen in the exhibitionism of the Bourekas. There is an apparent lack of inner values, which are replaced by the need for judgment by the surrounding community.

spirituality. He confesses that he is fed up with prayers which are "everyday the same thing itself" (Ch. 8a). For him, the Kaddish is nothing but a headache, something to learn by rote, and about Selihot, Motl says: "I hate the crying days... I prefer it when it's cheerful" (50).

As do the Bourekas, Motl reductively presents religiously important characters. An example is his statement about the local rabbi. Motl confesses that in the Talmud Torah of the rabbi, he studied only "a little" and got beaten "boundlessly." The rabbi and his wife also cause the death of their cat by starvation and neglect, and generally "have no mercifulness" (58).

The story also offers a similar presentation of a Jewish scholar who turns Judaism into paganism and cannibalism. Old Luria is a scholar and a very wealthy man whose ceilings in his home are drawn more colorfully than in Bet Midrash (44). Motl becomes his companion after his father's death. His job is to spend the night with him. Luria studies the Rambam and gets enthusiastic, but the problem is that Luria's Rambam studies bring him to the conclusion that he must *eat* Motl. Mercy has nothing to do with it, says Luria to himself: "I'm fulfilling my will... I'll eat him, my will is to eat him, I must eat him" (46). This reductive presentation, of both a Jewish scholar and the most important philosopher of Judaism, indicates religious decadence and the decline of religious feelings in Cassrilevke.

Unlike *Be'emek Ha'bacha*, but like the Mizrahi neighborhoods of the Bourekas, there are no yeshiva scholars motioned in *Motl*. The older brother, Eli, is of the age to study in a yeshiva, but Motl says nothing about this. As for Pini, he mentions that he was a brilliant student at yeshiva but doesn't study anymore (76).

The lack of status of religious characters in Cassrilevke is also stressed by the fact that Pesia's sons call their fat cat "Peige lea, the synagogue manager" (26) and

Pini writes satirical songs about the corruption of another synagogue's manager (76). This lack of status of religion, as in the Bourekas, leads to two central but different phenomena, ignorance and superstition. In the novel, ignorance about religious ceremonies and about Hebrew is perfectly presented by the fact that the town carter says, without noticing, Selihot prayers during the Passover Seder instead of reading the Haggada (64).<sup>208</sup>

Superstitions provide the spiritual core that fills the vacuum created by a lack of religion. And, indeed, there are many superstitions in Cassrilevke. For example, Motl's friend, from the Heder, thinks that holding a cat damages one's memory (44). Motl's mother thinks that Yona's bankruptcy happens because of the evil eye (56). Bere, the tailor, spreads a rumor through town that Eli drove the rats out of his house using a magic whisper (70). The response of the villagers to this is to ask Eli to do the same magic on their rats (70).

### **In “Ben Shnei Harim”**

It seems as if the reduction in the community's religious feelings is at the core of “Between Two Mountains.” The story describes the two central branches of Jewish religion in Eastern Europe, Lithuanians and Hassidim, by presenting the ideological conflict between their two worldviews as if it was a personal conflict driven by the respective religious leaders' desire for power. Examining and focusing on this desire for power hints at the decadence of true Jewish belief in the shtetl (see competition section, above).

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<sup>208</sup> This kind of ignorance stands at the core of one of the most prominent scenes of *Snooker*, where Sasson and Gabriel are not familiar with basic Jewish traditions and sayings.

The description of the rov of Brisk is far from presenting him as a holy man. He is described as rude, almost animal-like. He "curses" (11) and "thunders" with his voice when he is "furious" (18) and sometimes roars like a lion (18). His appearance is so intimidating that the narrator does not trust him to help the woman who gives birth. On the contrary, he is afraid the rov will kill her in his rudeness (19).

As in the Bourekas Mizrahi neighborhoods, there are people in Biala who believe in superstitions. The women believe that the rebbe does miracles; the narrator believes that "demons are flying in every direction at once" around his cart (17). He also believes that the rov is able to control the weather (17).

However, the representation of the status of Judaism in Biala is much more refined and ambiguous than that of its status in Cassiliveke or Kabtziel. Although irony is directed towards important religious figures by the author, in Biala, it seems that God is still very much alive and his presence seems to fill the consciousness of the characters, who lead lives in which faith and Jewish rituals are essential.

It seems that this ambiguous and ambivalent approach towards the presentation of Hassidic life in the shtetl stands at the center of Peretz's stories. On one hand he describes characters who are in total agreement with their Jewish religion, love for God and Jewish ritual, and on the other hand Peretz uses irony in his presentation of their beliefs and rituals.<sup>209</sup> In certain stories, this ironical presentation

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On one hand, Peretz was a modernist and a socialist who had troubles with the authorities in Poland due to his subversive political activity, and on the other hand he was a yiddishist who devoted the best of his talents to enlarge and deepen Yiddish literature.

<sup>209</sup> In many of these stories that focus on highly religious Hassidic characters – most of them true believers – the author seems to praise the Hassidic characters while actually condemning them as fools, who are weak or hypocritical or anti-social. This is the case in the story "Richa Shel Tabak" ("A Pinch of Snuff") (Peretz 1962), where a so-called rightness rebbe is tricked by Satan to break Shabbat laws by manipulating his addiction to tobacco.

This tendency is also evident in the story "Im lo lema'ala mize" ("If Not Higher") (Peretz 1962), in which an admired Hassidic rebbe is seen through the eyes of a cynical "opponent" (*mithnaged*) as nothing more than a rude, old, extremely anti-social man, who prefers God over people. In this story the irony is directed towards both the rebbe and the *mithnaged*, since although this opponent is witness to the rebbe's anti-social behavior, he mistakenly interprets it as rightness. It is also

of the religious characters turns grotesque. Especially miserable and grotesque is the Rabbi of Tishevitz from the story "Impressions of a Journey through the Tomaszow Region" (Wisse 1990). This rabbi is too poor to have a fine coat in which to go out (33) and is occupied with his economically poor condition, making plans to make the community pay him "two gulden more a week" (32). The rabbi supports the narrator in his research, but as soon as he senses the first opposition from the community (which suspects a government conspiracy), "the rabbi loses his courage. If you say no, he says softly, then it's no" (34). When being criticized by his wife for interfering too much in communal affairs, he says, "you know what kind of man I am. I'm softhearted, I feel for others. But it's a pity about those two gulden a week" (34). The rabbi is seen as a weak, not-so-clever man and a bit of a hypocrite. Although his main interest is his income, he presents himself to the public as a righteous man. This is a critical presentation of the rabbi, almost anti-Semitic in tone.

### III. Summary and Conclusions

Differences obviously exist between the representative paradigms of the shtetl in the various literary works under discussion. *Be'emek Ha'bacha* and "Ben Shnei Harim" present the shtetl as a pre-modern community where life leads away from any progress. *Motl* describes a community already struggling with its assimilation into the contemporary world of modernism.<sup>210</sup> But the foundational features of the shtetl,

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evident in the story "Shiat Hassidim" ("A Conversation") (Peretz 1990) in which two old Hassidim from two different courts are talking about Passover Seder traditions in their courts. Without being able to forget the past between them, they tease each other and compete over what is the true way to do the Seder, while preaching at the same time to not bear a grudge.

<sup>210</sup> *Be'emek Ha'bacha* and "Ben Shnei Harim" tend to emphasize the degeneration of religion and religious feeling (reduction of religion) while *Motl* is more focused on the collapse of the mutual aid system of the shtetl and its solidarity. *Motl* was written in 1916 while *Be'emek Ha'bacha* was first published (under the name *The Wishing Ring*) in the 1860s.

common to these works, form a constant representative paradigm that resembles the representative paradigm of the Mizrahi communities in Bourekas films.

All the features that form the representation paradigm of the Mizrahi neighborhoods in the Bourekas (and which are, as I have shown, essential to any Bourekas film), likewise appear in the representation of the shtetls in the literary works examined. These reoccurring features are: isolation of the community, a ruthless struggle over physical subsistence, and a reduction of values to their instrumental functions. The singularity of this set of definitive features justifies the assertion that a shared paradigm of representation of Jewish communities exists between the Bourekas films and classical Yiddish literature.

However, differences persist in the presentation of the two communities – the Mizrahi neighborhood and the shtetl – differences that need to be analyzed and tested. An important difference is the dissimilarity in the degree of isolation of each community. The isolation of the shtetls of Kabtsiel, Cassrilevke, and Biala appears more stark and deprived than any of the Bourekas Mizrahi neighborhoods. This is primarily due to the fact that in each case, the authors reflect different opportunities and potential for breaking this isolation. Among the classical Yiddish works, it seems that the author of *Be'emek Ha'bacha* presumes an *inability* to break this isolation, while the authors of *Motl* and “Ben Shnei Harim” indicate only a *feeble motivation* of the community to do so. However, the authors of the Bourekas describe communities that have the motivation, as well as the ability, to break their isolation – primarily through marriages to those outside the community, that is, Ashkenazim. Moreover, this potential to break their isolation is a key feature of many of the films.

Another difference lies in the dissimilarity in the nature of the explanations that justify the characteristics of the respective communities. The Bourekas explain

these characteristics only as a reaction of the community to certain circumstances and pressures. By contrast, *Be'emek Ha'bacha* and “Ben Shnei Harim ” make an effort to elevate some of these characteristics. *Be'emek Ha'bacha* gives isolation, pushiness, and reductive neighboring each mythological dimensions. “Ben Shnei Harim” explains isolation in equally mythological terms. Although ironically presented, these explanations contribute to the represented community some positive traits, such as shared values and original old traditions.

Another major difference is that while the Bourekas present only the negative aspects of community characteristics, classical Yiddish literature shows some positive ones. In *Be'emek Ha'bacha* and “Ben Shnei Harim,” the authors usually present positive aspects of the main characteristics, such as isolation and togetherness. Some of the positive aspects of togetherness are also stressed in *Motl*; however, the relatively positive tone of the community’s representation in *Motl* is achieved mainly because Motl, the child narrator of the story, is a nine-year-old boy who is enthusiastic, naïve, cheerful, and full of life. His consciousness serves as a metonym for the inner consciousness of the shtetl's residents.

The authors of the Bourekas tend to stress the negative when representing the Mizrahi neighborhood. In Bourekas films, the negative aspects (such as the reduction of religion and religious education, and the value of neighborliness, as well as the abundance of superstitions and sexual competition) are emphasized more vigorously than in the literary Yiddish works, and seem to indicate a more severe tone of authorial criticism.

Critics such as Miron (2000, 1-49) have shown that representations of the shtetl in classical Yiddish literature are ahistorical in nature. If this is so, the differences in representational paradigms between the Bourekas and Yiddish classical

literature can be better explained not as flowing from the nature of the different objects represented (the shtetl and the Mizrahi neighborhood), but either as an outcome of different authorial ideologies, or different relationships the authors have with their subjects.

Part of this difference is probably an outcome of the totally different identification patterns and emotional bonds that the authors have with their subject. While the classical Yiddish writers described their own ethnic group, their own tribe, and consequently have an emotional investment in what they described, and of which they claim essential knowledge, the authors of the Bourekas (Ashkenazi Israelis) were emotionally detached from the Mizrahi neighborhoods they described, and possessed little real knowledge about Mizrahi community. This dissimilarity, rooted in a fundamental and pre-existing disposition of authors toward their subjects, partially explains the hallmark differences in representations. This explanation is supported by the study of Ella Shohat (1989, 119-179) in which she claims this reasoning to be a cause of the stereotypical, orientalist representations of Mizrahi neighborhoods in the Bourekas.

Differences in the represented level of the community's isolation in both groups can also be explained by the background of the different ideologies of the authors and the dissimilar *raison d'etre* of each group of texts. One of the Bourekas' functions (this aspect will be discussed widely in Chapter 5) was *to persuade* the Mizrahim that the gaps between them and the Ashkenazim, although justified, would be closed in the coming generations, upon Mizrahim assimilation into modernity – a mission that could be achieved also through marrying modern Ashkenazim.<sup>211</sup> Bourekas narratives therefore stress these options. However, classical Yiddish

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<sup>211</sup> See also Shenhav, Hever, and Mutzafi (2002). This aspect will be widely discussed in Chapter 5.

literature had a different *raison d'etre*, one of which was *to encourage* assimilation of traditional Jewish communities into European culture. Tactics adopted by authors to promote this change included criticizing provincial shtetl life (Frieden 1995, 1-9). It seems that stressing the isolation of the Jewish traditional communities in the shtetl and the deficiencies it brought upon them, as we see throughout the chosen examples of classical Yiddish literature, is a part of this tactic.<sup>212</sup>

How this paradigm of representation from classical Yiddish literature found its way into the Bourekas remains to be determined. The next chapter will outline the possibilities.

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<sup>212</sup> See also Miron 2000.

## Chapter Five: The Dynamics of Continuity between Two Disparate Cultures

It seems that the homology between Bourekas and classical Yiddish literature consists of the following ingredients: First, Bourekas films and classical Yiddish literature share a Jewish Ashkenazi agency. Second, Bourekas films and classical Yiddish literature's paradigms of Jewish community representation share an homology.

The pattern of community representation that appears in Bourekas has no other cinematic source<sup>213</sup> and it is singular and particular to Bourekas. It does not characterize, for example, even the group of films that are thematically and aesthetically closest to the Bourekas – the aforementioned comedies and melodramas representing the Mizrahi community, created during the same period, which have been seen by previous critics as “Bourekas.”

Despite these connections, it is not the contention of this dissertation to prove a direct influence of classical Yiddish literature on Bourekas films. Instead, I aim to

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<sup>213</sup> It was suggested by early critics that the source of the Bourekas' Mizrahi representation could be Arab film. An echo of this explanation can be found in Dayan's article on *Lupo* (1976). However, it seems that our discussion of *Ariana* rules this option out (see Chapter 3). Alternative sources of influence might have been other minority film cycles, such as the American Blaxploitation films. However, Blaxploitation films do not present competition, isolation, or the Bourekas' romantic ethos, and do not usually end with a comparable intermarriage between Black and white characters (Benshoff 2000).

show that there is a reasonable probability that Bourekas films have been – through the agency of their Ashkenazi directors – in such contact with classical Yiddish literature that allowed an intersection of content and forms.

To demonstrate the likeliness of such a development, one has to show that classical Yiddish literature was present in Israeli cultural discourse and accessible to educated Israelis at about the time Bourekas films were produced, and that directors of the Bourekas had a good reason to adopt some of its ideas and themes, and especially its paradigmatic representation of Jewish community, into their films. I will show that, despite what seems an unfavorable ideological ground, classical Yiddish literature generally received a fair reception in Israel, maintaining a considerable presence in Israeli discourse<sup>214</sup> of the time. In due course, I also demonstrate that classical Yiddish literature's presence in Israeli discourse was one part of a larger trend which allowed, during the 1960s and 1970s, the survival of Yiddish cultural elements "under the surface" of an official institutional and cultural discourse that was generally oppressive towards Yiddish. I also show that Bourekas directors had more than one reason to adopt classical Yiddish literature's paradigmatic representation of the Jewish community and to present the Mizrahi community and neighborhood through it.

If one accepts the hypothesis that the source of the Bourekas Jewish community representation paradigm is Yiddish culture, then one, at the same time, can identify the Bourekas as an Israeli-Zionist text which both adopts and conceals Yiddish cultural elements. Accordingly, I show that during the period of Bourekas production (the 1960s and 1970s), similar phenomena existed in Israeli culture of

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<sup>214</sup> I will use "Israeli discourse" as a general term that includes all of the more specific intellectual pursuits (literary discourse, cinematic discourse, etc.) which take place within the borders of the State of Israel. "Zionist discourse" is therefore a part of the Israeli discourse.

imbuing Yiddish cultural elements into Israeli-Zionist texts, while concealing their Yiddish cultural sources, thereby presenting the texts as totally Hebrew.

## I. Presence of Classical Yiddish Literature in Israeli Zionist Discourse

Miron (1973, 11) points to the nature of the relationships between Yiddish and Hebrew languages, as a key to the reception of the classical Yiddish writers in Israeli discourse. He believes that a fully conceptualized understanding of the contradictory and complementary roles played by Hebrew and Yiddish vis a vis each other in the rise of modern Jewish culture is necessary for understanding it. These relationships of competing and complementary roles, of love and rejection,<sup>215</sup> made the reception of the classical Yiddish writers in Israeli discourse complex.

Several factors seem to have effected the reception of the classical Yiddish fiction writers by the Israeli discourse:

1. Zionist ideology, especially the phenomenon that has been called "the negation of exile."
2. The historical "inferiority" of the Yiddish language vis a vis Hebrew and the triumph of Hebrew over Yiddish.
3. The demand of mainstream critics of Hebrew literature that Hebrew literature should serve as "the Jewish nation watcher" (*hsazofe le'beit Israel*), that is, to foresee events and offers solutions for the nation's cultural, sociological, and political processes while reflecting a Zionist ethos and narrative (Miron 1987, 17).

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<sup>215</sup> Miron writes that researching Yiddish literature is like looking at oneself through the eyes of a "competitive and un-identical twin" (the other competitor being Hebrew literature), and that this research is "like watching oneself through the eyes of a... murdered, betrayed ancestor" (Miron 1973, 11).

## The Negation of Exile

In his article (written in Hebrew) “Le'bikoret Shlilat Ha'galoot Batharboot Hayisraelit,” Raz-Karkotskin claims that the term "negation of exile" is a central axis in a viewpoint that defines the self-consciousness of Israeli Jews and shapes their view of history and their collective memory (1993, 23). This term reflects a belief in a "natural sequence" of continuation between the current Jewish national independence in the land of Israel and the Jewish sovereignty in the days of the Second Temple. According to this notion, the centuries of exile that severed this "natural sequence" of continuation in the Jewish nation's history was a period in which the Jewish people lived in an abnormal condition, in a partial and faulty existence. The period of exile, according to this notion, was an era in which the nation's spirit couldn't survive because of external limitations. Raz-Korkozkin believes that assimilation of this notion led Israeli discourse to reject all that was considered "exilic," including Jewish cultural creations made during this period of exile.<sup>216</sup>

For Chinski (2002), negation of exile is an outcome of the efforts of Israeli Ashkenazi elites to ratify what she sees as their "fabricated" western identity; for her, this project is concerned mainly with wiping away and repressing the Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic past. It is a plan through which the Askenazi elites totally deny their origins, their cultural identity, and attempt to disguise the ethnic Ashkenazi

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<sup>216</sup> A few occurrences in the historical development of Israeli culture and society show that the power of "negation of exile" as a leading ideology is gradually fading. Bar Ilan, as mentioned in Fishman's article, opened Yiddish Literature and Language Departments in 1961. The secular universities, like Tel Aviv University, have lately started Yiddish and Ladino courses. The national foundation for documentaries recently called for entries (scripts) on the subject of Jewish identity both in Israel and in the Diaspora. Recently two documentaries about Yiddish culture were released – *The Komediants* (Israel, 2000) and *The Ashkenazim* (Israel, 2005) – that make connections between it and the Israeli elite. So it seems to me that at the end of the process we should expect the revival of classical Yiddish literature in the Israeli discourse, especially Shalom Aleichem and Peretz (who are not “exile negators”). One of the early signs of this development, as discussed, can be seen in the latest republishing of all the writings of Shalom Aleichem in 1997.

civilization that dominated European Jewry up to the Shoah. The Israeli Ashkenazi elites understood that externalizing their Ashkenazi diasporic tradition (which they considered "too provincial" and "too Jewish"), would undermine their hegemony in Israel – which draws its authority from their "fabricated westernization and universalism." These Ashkenazis feared that their diasporic tradition would enforce upon them, as a group, measures of evaluation relative to their ethnicity (2002, 62). Hence, a denial of their culture was undertaken by the Israeli Ashkenazi elite (and what Chinski calls the “westernized Israeli hegemony” [Chinski 2002, 62, my translation]) in order to imbue them with a "western-universal multi-authoritative profile" (Chinski 2002, 62, my translation).

However, this denial also has deeper roots, claims Chinski. Its origins are in the Ashkenazi elites' inferiority complex with regards to their original culture, whose roots are located in the ethno-cultural oppression of European Jews by European Christian discourse (2002, 64). Starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a modern Jewish identity consolidated in Europe. This process was accompanied by an ethno-racist diagnosis made by the European Christian discourse that ascribed to Jews an inherent cultural and racial inferiority. This discourse included the belief that there was something inherent in Jews that made them lack any sense of esthetics; they were depicted as shameless copycats, who owned an oriental imagination and were attracted to superficial glimmer (Chinski 2002, 65).

The emerging modern European Jewish identity handed itself over to this anti-Semitic ideology. It revealed in itself the same repulsive negative qualities that the anti-Semitic discourse ascribed to it. This process led Ashkenazi elites to see their own original Ashkenazi-Jewish identity as suffering from a chronic disease that needed to be eliminated, in order to free them from their deficiencies. This disease

was characterized by a continuing condition of exile, a lack of productivity, a spiritual decadence, mental filth..

This early concept supported the tendency of Israeli Ashkenazi elites to negate – for practical political reasons – cultural characteristics that attached them to their Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic subjectivity – a subjectivity that was seen as “ill,” and which in Israel was labeled "exilic."<sup>217</sup> Chinsky stresses that these self-denying trends were what enabled the birth of the "negation of exile" discourse.

Not surprisingly, classical Yiddish literature, written in "exile," also suffered under the negation of exile. This literature, with its representation of the provincial, usually pre-modern, traditional Jewish shtetl of Eastern Europe, testifies to the Jewish/traditional – as opposed to the westernized/European – “ill” cultural origins of the Israeli Ashkenazi elite, the very roots that they wanted to veil.

### **The Historical "Inferiority" of the Yiddish Language and the Triumph of Hebrew**

The inferiority of Yiddish, relative to Hebrew, is an idea that was common prior to and outside the Zionist discourse and the rise of Jewish nationality. It seems that seeing Yiddish as inferior to Hebrew and not worthy of a serious literature is part of the ethos of Jewish Ashkenazi culture. While Hebrew was venerated by Jews and non-Jews, if not as a holy tongue, then as a great classical language, Yiddish, in contrast – although a practical and highly expressive language – was commonly

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<sup>217</sup> Chinski indicates that the term “exile,” when used within the national Zionist discourse, was born of the specific history of the Jewish Diaspora of Eastern and central Europe and therefore is not usable for a discussion of other Jewish diasporic cultures (2002, 61). The universalism of the term “exile” therefore negates the existence of non-Ashkenazi Jewish collectives with different histories, identities, and traditions, and imposes upon them the specific significance that are cut from the Jewish diasporic experience in Europe. As Chinski writes, "Meaning all the society, and the relationships between those and others in the diasporic sphere, are suitable only to the Eastern European exile, but were imposed on other exiles as if they represent them also" (Chinski 2002, 61).

despised by both educated Jews and gentiles as a language unfit for modern education, and as a grotesque hybrid of German.

Yiddish's relative historical inferiority and low status with regard to Hebrew was supported through the gendering of both languages – while Hebrew was spoken and read almost solely by men (until the late nineteenth century), Yiddish was usually the only language the Jewish women could speak and read. Therefore, Yiddish was connected to popularity, oral traditions, and the prayers of women (*Tekhines*) (Frieden 1995, 1-67).

So low and reductive was the status of Yiddish in the nineteenth century that the Yiddish writer Rabinovitch (better known as Shalom Aleichem) had to invent a pseudonym to conceal his Yiddish literature from his relatives in the Jewish oligarchy of Kiev, and from his father, who regarded Yiddish as "a language of cooks and servants" (Frieden 1995, 118).

Zionist discourse inherited this attitude towards Yiddish and made it more extreme. For Zionism, Yiddish was even less than a hybrid language with no literary history. It was a part of the Jewish exilic culture that "had to be forgotten" (Chaver 2004, title), following the negation of exile idea.

This Zionist negation of Yiddish became decisive in 1922, after Yiddish lost the "language war" in the land of Israel (Palestine) to Hebrew. The result of the defeat was that Hebrew became the official teaching and speaking and writing language of the Yishuv (the pre-independence, Zionist-organized population in Palestine) and the land of Israel became the territory of Hebrew (Chaver 2004).<sup>218</sup> It seems that after Israel's independence in 1948, this history – which stresses the opposition between

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<sup>218</sup> However it must be indicated here that this triumph of Hebrew wasn't complete – nor was it immediate, since during the thirties and early forties the stream of immigrants arriving from Eastern and central Europe brought Yiddish as their mother tongue to this Hebrew territory (Erets Israel) and the status of Yiddish was strengthened (Chaver 2004).

Yiddish and Hebrew – inevitably created a situation within Israeli Zionist discourse that was highly unfavorable to Yiddish.

Fishman, who wrote in the early 1970s, indicates that Yiddish has long been downgraded and discouraged by most Zionist ideologies and activists, because it was once a powerful ideological and functional rival to Hebrew (1974, 140) Fishman also discovered what can be seen as a systematic oppression of Yiddish language and culture in Israel, and a denial of any privilege for Yiddish in fields such as education, press, radio, television and theatre (1973, 1974).

For Fishman this unfortunate situation of Yiddish in Israel is an outcome of two problems: the fact that Yiddish carries the traditionally low status of the Jewish-Ashkenazi Diaspora, and was therefore associated with the powerlessness and non-productivity of the Diaspora, and the fact that Israel, a country of immigration, made an effort to endow Hebrew as a national language and established a cultural dictatorship for the purpose of maintaining cultural uniformity based on Hebrew language and culture (1973, 17).<sup>219</sup>

All in all, Yiddish in Israel was associated with the Eastern European past, summarizes Fishman, “with older Eastern European immigrants, with sectarian opposition to the modern state, with vernacular and humor and with tenderness” (1974, 141). Fishman continues: “To dignify Yiddish, to permit it into the sphere of national symbols, to accept it as fitting for certain higher functions... thus runs counter to the ideological and emotional roots of the basic modern Zionist-Israeli enterprise” (1974, 141).

To summarize, the historic inferiority of Yiddish and the intense opposition to it, along with the fact that Hebrew became the national language of

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<sup>219</sup> The influence of such a uniformity was so great that official Israeli delegates, who did not hesitate to speak Yiddish while fundraising in Jewish communities abroad, did not deign to speak or publish in Yiddish when at home (Fishman 1973, 9).

Israel, generated an unfavorable situation for Yiddish culture in Israel at least until the mid-1970s. In this atmosphere, the reception of any Yiddish text should have been inherently and immediately problematic.

### **The "Jewish Nation Watcher" Demand**

Shimon Halkin (1950) called Hebrew literature "the Jewish nation watcher" (*Ha'tsaofe Le'beit Israel*). Dan Miron (1987, 418-429) elaborates on this special aspect of Hebrew literature: because this "national" literature appeared before the nation-state came into existence, many expected Hebrew literature to act like a prophet, to be a pillar of fire that marches before the nation, foresees events and offers solutions for the nation's cultural, sociological, and political processes. This belief about Hebrew literature has even influenced the reception of Yiddish writing. Indeed, many Zionist critics have judged Yiddish literature mainly for its sociological message and the ways it reflects official Zionism, focusing on the ideological contents of the literature, and sometimes completely disregarding the aesthetic, structural, and artistic aspects of these works.

Brenner, for example, although recognizing the literary value of works by all three classical Yiddish authors, makes a clear distinction between them – using as a main criterion the degree of assimilation of each into the role of the "Jewish nation watcher." Brenner salutes Mendele Mokher Sfarim for his "talent of observing the nation's true spirit" (1985, 73), while he criticizes Shalom Aleichem for having no "clear ideology."<sup>220</sup> From the same perspective, Brenner criticizes Peretz for being "a man without a belief," in whose writing ideology became "marginal." Instead Perez

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<sup>220</sup> Brenner also cites apparent contradictions in Shalom Aleichem's work. He points out that in one place Shalom Aleichem says, "a man has to conquer a place," but elsewhere he asks, "why do Jews need a country?" (Brenner 1985, 107).

sought, as Brenner puts it disrespectfully, to "renew different literary combinations, to find new forms of literary trill" (1985, 104).

Similar to the way Brenner sees Shalom Aleichem, for Frishman the main virtue of Mendele's literature is its "historical" value, as testified by his famous lines:

Let us say that a flood came to the world and wiped from the earth all the shtetl universe with all its vividness, and left no trace of it... [and] only four great novels of Mendele Mokher Sfarim remained on a raft.... There is no doubt in the fact that on the basis of these books a researcher could reconstruct and portray the Jewish life that was lost. (in Bartana 1979, 5, my translation)

In yet another example of expectations for a clear ideology from Yiddish writers, Karib (1950) approaches Mendele Mokher Sfarim mainly by exploring how his work reflected his ideology. Karib asks questions such as whether Mendele Mokher Sfarim belongs to the post-Haskalah generation, or whether he is the "shady and very ripened" fruit of Haskalah ideology itself (1950, 41). He also asks whether Mendele Mokher Sfarim was a Zionist whose writing reflects the negation of exile, as some Zionist critics would like to think, or whether he was only criticizing a backwards Jewish way of life from a Maskilic point of view (1950, 84-85)

To summarize, Zionist discourse demanded that literature offer a prophetic ideological content. The result was a critical tendency to judge literature for its positive contribution to the persistence of the nation's ethos, in this case the Zionist narrative. Reception of some of the classical Yiddish writers benefited from this demand, while others were hurt.

### **The Reception of Classical Yiddish Fiction Writers by the Israeli Discourse**

Considering these three aspects of Israeli discourse and the country's cultural history, one should not be surprised that Israel could not offer a prominent role to the culture of the Diaspora at large and to Yiddish literature in particular. Based on the

predominance of Zionist ideology, the reception of classical Yiddish writers in Israeli discourse should have been problematic. However, the reality was more complex. First, there were different levels to the marginalization of various kinds of this literature. Second, harmony between parts of this literature and the Zionist discourse affected the literature's reception, elevating pieces of it and allowing it a surprising presence in Israeli discourse.

In this chapter I examine the reception of the three classical Yiddish writers, Y.L. Peretz, Shalom Aleichem, and Mendele Mokher Sfarim to show that each has a slightly different position within Israeli discourse – which is the outcome of the different relationships between the author's work and the demands, ideas, and viewpoints of Israeli discourse that were mentioned earlier – and that, at the very least, Shalom Aleichem and Mendele Mokher Sfarim received a fair reception by Israeli discourse, which gave their writing a fair presence within it.

### **Y.L. Peretz**

Beyond the borders of the Israeli discourse, as Ruth Wisse (1991, XV) remarks, the bibliography of research written on Peretz is larger than those of his fellow classical writers, Mendele Mokher Sfarim and Shalom Aleichem, put together. But in Israel, Peretz's reception has been very different. Karib, for example, complains that Peretz has been marginalized in Israeli literary discourse (1950, 93). Indeed, the last edition of Peretz's writings in Hebrew was published in 1962 (edited and translated by Shim'on Meltser).

It seems that this situation is due to a particular correspondence between Peretz's writings and the relevant Israeli discourse, from which Peretz's writings do not benefit. Although Peretz translated many of his Yiddish writings to Hebrew himself, the works that he originally wrote in Hebrew seem less important than his

work in Yiddish. Critics (Wisse 1991, 37-71; Niger 1961, 137-148; and Frieden 1995, 281-311) usually regard his late Yiddish collections, *Hassidism* (written largely in Yiddish) and *Folk Stories*, as his most important works. Furthermore, it seems that the Zionist-Hebrew literary discourse in Israel, while not completely ignoring Peretz's contribution to the evolution of the national literature,<sup>221</sup> regarded Peretz as important mainly to "Yiddish literary tradition, with which, as one of the spiritual fathers of the Bund, he was ideologically identified" (Shaked 2000, 24).<sup>222</sup>

As for Peretz's Yiddish writings in Hebrew translation, it seems that two phenomena determine their relative marginality in Israeli discourse. The first is their literary complexity. As Niger argues, one of the characteristics of Peretz's writings is the "richness of thought" (1961, 165) and a density which makes them function "like a proverb" (1961, 37). Moreover, part of Peretz's style, as Frieden notices – at least in his late pseudo-folktales and neo-Hasidic stories – is to create highly charged scenes of narration in which irony and parody are built upon a well-known literary structure.<sup>223</sup> This literary complexity could make any translation difficult and unsatisfactory, and could be one of the reasons for Peretz's marginality in Israeli discourse.

But it seems that the greater conflict between Peretz's writings and the Zionist-Israeli literary discourse is an ideological one. Peretz was no Zionist and no exile negator. Peretz initially supported Hovevei Zion, but in 1890 he renounced their territorial goals. Peretz's lasting commitment was to the Diaspora nationalism of

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<sup>221</sup> Although for Miron (1987) Peretz is not part of the history of Hebrew literature, for Shaked (2000) he seems to be a milestone in the evolution of Hebrew literature (Shaked 2000, 24-28). However, in a later book Shaked, like Miron, ignores Peretz, presenting a narrative which goes from Mapu to Mendele and then to Brenner (Shaked 2005, Introduction).

<sup>222</sup> Later in the same account Shaked remarks that "canonical Hebrew could provide no match for [Peretz's, r.k.] colorful Yiddish expressions strongly rooted in folk speech" (Shaked 2000, 25).

<sup>223</sup> Like, for example, in "Richa Shel Tabak" ("A Pinch of Snuff") and "Neiyla Begehinom" ("Yom Kippur In Hell") (Peretz 1962).

Shimon Dubnov (Frieden 1995, 225-231). But this is not all. Peretz's real sin, from the perspective of Zionist ideology, lies in the fact that he strove through his writing to present and create an alternative path for the Jewish people's nationality in exile. Wisse (1991, XIII-3) claims that Peretz shaped Yiddish literature into an expression and an instrument of national cohesion, one that would help the Jews to compensate for the absence of such staples as political independence and territorial sovereignty. She compares Peretz to Herzl, saying that if Herzl pointed the way to a national Jewish homeland in Zion, Peretz presented his no less genuine determination that modern Jews could flourish as a minority in Poland.

It will be shown that one of the literary characteristics that helped the reception of the two other Yiddish writers was their criticism of the society of the shtetl, which the Zionists critics saw as an articulation of the "negation of exile" idea. Peretz also criticized the shtetl and Jewish life, but his criticism is so well immersed into the literary fabric of his stories that it is hardly noticeable. It also seems that he did not aim for didactic shock, but rather wanted to provide his contemporaries with the vocabulary of their collective experience and the modulation of their individual moods (Wisse 1991, XIII-3); as a result, the spiritual life of the Jews in his stories reduces the effect of the faults he finds with their social life.<sup>224</sup>

For these qualities Peretz's writings seem to pay by their relatively poor reception by Israeli discourse.<sup>225</sup> Brenner's words in memory of Peretz demonstrate well the Israeli discourse's conflicted attitude toward him:

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<sup>224</sup> In the story "Kiszad Mitgalim" ("How the Pious are Discovered"), for example, the fact that the people of the shtetl viciously call the poor woman whose husband left in order to serve in the army "the soldier lady," and the ugly treatment the population gives the newly arrived couple, are blurred and weakened by the miracle and the piety of this couple (see Peretz, *Hassidoot*, 1962). And in "Neyila Begehinom" ("Yom Kippur In Hell"), the social cruelty that is presented through the figure of the tax collector is subverted by the righteousness of the Hazan, etc. (see Peretz, *Mipi Am*, 1962).

<sup>225</sup> One of the "punishments" that Peretz has received for these "sins" is that Miron, one of today's most important Israeli literary critics, hardly pays any attention to his writings. In Miron's central book about the history of Hebrew literature (1987), Peretz is not mentioned at all.

The road of this giant who lies dead before us was great and long... he had ups and downs all of his life... in the evaluation of Judaism and in the prophecy of its future he was wrong... in his poetry he sometimes sinned and sometimes caused others to sin.... But he has made it big. (1985 [1916], 105, my translation and my emphasis)

## Shalom Aleichem

The situation of Shalom Aleichem within Israeli discourse is different.

Although he is not a part of the Hebrew literature narrative, his writings have been translated several times from Yiddish into Hebrew. A new edition of all of his writings<sup>226</sup> was published in 1997. Some of his novels and stories, such as "Tevye the Dairyman," have been adapted into cinema in Israel.<sup>227</sup>

It seems that the more favorable reception of Shalom Aleichem is the result of a different correspondence with the relevant aspects of the Israeli discourse mentioned earlier.<sup>228</sup> First, although Frieden remarks that Shalom Aleichem never found his "voice" in Hebrew (1995, 119), his original Hebrew writings were never totally forgotten and won some recognition in Israel.<sup>229</sup> Second, Shalom Aleichem's style of writing in Yiddish – consisting of monologues and dialogues – seems to be more accessible for translation than Peretz's.<sup>230</sup> Third, it seems also that a real contribution to Shalom Aleichem's better reception was made by Miron, through his appreciation of Shalom Aleichem's writings, and his successful effort to present Shalom

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<sup>226</sup> Shalom Aleichem, *Ktavim*, translated by Arie Haaroni (1997).

<sup>227</sup> *Tuvia Ve Sheva Bnotav*, Menahem Golan (Israel 1966).

<sup>228</sup> Also testifying to Shalom Aleichem's fair reception in Israeli discourse is the fact that Miron has devoted wide research to his writings (1971).

<sup>229</sup> His works in Hebrew, about 30 stories written between 1888 and 1908, were assembled by Chone Shmeruk and published in a book under the name *Ktavim Iverim/Shalom Aleichem (Shalom Aleichem – Hebrew Writings)* (Shmeruk 1976). Shmeruk writes there that "the original story of Shalom Aleichem in Hebrew deserves a recognition of its value" (Shmeruck 1976, 46, my translation). Samuel Werses also claims that Shalom Aleichem's Hebrew writings deserve more attention (1996, 35).

<sup>230</sup> What Miron calls pseudo-anthropological rhetoric (Miron 2000, 10). Brenner, on the other hand, says that Shalom Aleichem has no style and that he is like a stenographer who records the people's talk (1985, 107).

Aleichem's central writings as reflecting elements of Zionist ideology.<sup>231</sup> Miron finds that the heroes of some of Shalom Aleichem's central stories ("Tevye the Dairyman," "Motl," and "Menachem Mendel") reject the shtetl and its values, and in this way proclaim Shalom Aleichem as a writer who actually expresses the Zionist notion of the "negation of exile." According to Miron, the typical hero of Shalom Aleichem is: attached to the shtetl and the Jewish being but at the same time he is also a free and independent being. He does not identify with the family, the shtetl and the Jewish being, doesn't accept their values, their attitude towards themselves, their attitude towards him. (1971, 86, my translation)

Still, not all the Hebrew literature critics were as favorable as Miron toward Shalom Aleichem. Some of them couldn't forgive what was seen by them as a lack of national ideology and national message – that is, they couldn't put up with the fact that Shalom Aleichem didn't take upon himself the role of the "Jewish nation watcher." Brenner actually criticizes Shalom Aleichem for having "no ideas" and being "a folk writer" with no "clear ideology" (Brenner 1985, 107). It seems that Brenner also couldn't forgive Shalom Aleichem for what he saw as an exile conviction in his writings, instead of upholding the negation of exile. Brenner quotes a phrase from "Tevye the Dairyman" in which Tevye, who travels to the land of Israel (Palestine) in the end of the story, says that he knows that Shalom Aleichem, his master, won't make the same mistake as he does, and won't immigrate to the land of

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<sup>231</sup> Miron finds that some of Shalom Aleichem's central works reflect one of the meta-narratives of the Zionist discourse: "death and revival" (Miron 1971, 80-87). Nurit Gertz, in her work about Shoah survivors in Israeli cinema (1999), claims that the meta-narrative of death and revival is one of the major aspects of the Zionist narrative, and it reflects a deterministic belief that Jewish history is a sequence of catastrophes and reconstructions (like the Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel). Miron adopts Shalom Aleichem into Hebrew literature by explaining Shalom Aleichem's central works as a specific literary articulation of this narrative. Miron finds that "Tevye the Dairyman," "Motl," and "Menachem Mendel" are stories that reflect a meta-narrative of hope, defeat, and recovery (1971, 86).

Israel himself. Brenner ends this article by blaming Shalom Aleichem for regarding Cassrilevke (the typical Jewish shtetl in his writings) as the internal center of Jewish existence, instead of seeing the land of Israel as such (1985, 107).

As we will see, this objection to Shalom Aleichem by one of the founding fathers of Hebrew literary criticism was effective mainly in Israeli academic discourse and literary circles; in other, more popular circles, Shalom Aleichem's works showed a considerable presence.

### **Mendele Mokher Sfarim**

Of the three cases, the reception of Mendele Mokher Sfarim in Israeli literary discourse has been the most successful. Mendele is a true bilingual writer. For some critics his work in Hebrew is more important than what he wrote in Yiddish. Research has been published about his work since its first appearance on the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see, for example Kariv 1950, Bartana 1979, Miron 2000, 1-128, and Shaked 2005, 1-21) making him one of the most researched writers in Israel. In the past his works were part of the Hebrew literature program required for matriculation into university, and nowadays he is commonly taught in Hebrew literature departments across Israel. Hebrew literature critics are usually favorable towards Mendele as a Hebrew writer. Brenner sees Mendele Mokher Sfarim as one of the most important Hebrew writers ever. In his article about the collection of Mendele's stories,<sup>232</sup> Brenner crowns Mendele Mokher Sfarim as the first of all Hebrew writers, the Hebrew literature pioneer (1985 [1912], 58). Mendele, says Brenner, is the first real Jewish national writer because of his talent in truly analyzing the national spirit and evaluating the

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<sup>232</sup> I mean here the first edition of *Kol Kitvei Mendele*, which was published in Odessa between 1899 and 1902.

true condition of the Jewish nation in exile.<sup>233</sup> Brenner assigns Mendele Mokher Sfarim in his narrative of Hebrew literature as an especially important turning point. Mendele, says Brenner, is a step forward into national literature. He is aware of both the universe and the Jews and that is exactly what a Jewish national literature needs.

Mendele Mokher Sfarim is definitely an important part of the history of Hebrew literature. Dan Miron in *Bodedim Bemoadam* (1987), when reviewing the history of Hebrew literature, not only mentions Mendele Mokher Sfarim as a prominent part of this history, but presents him as the grandfather of the new Hebrew literature.<sup>234</sup> While describing the Hebrew literature circle of Odessa, Miron describes how the young Hebrew literature writers acted like pilgrims when coming to Mendele's house, treating him as though he were a holy man (1987, 357). In contrast, Shalom Aleichem and Peretz are not mentioned even once in the book.<sup>235</sup>

Samuel Werses also gives Mendele Mokher Sfarim a prominent position in the Hebrew literature narrative. In his introduction to his book *Mi Mendale Ve'ad Hazaz*, Werses talks about Mendele Mokher Sfarim as one of the fathers of Hebrew literature, among others like Fierberg, Berdichevsky, Agnon, and Hazaz (1987, 10); this seems to be the common outlook on Mendele among Hebrew literature critics today.

This relatively enthusiastic reception of Mendele lies in the way his work corresponds to the beliefs, ideas, and viewpoints of the Israeli discourse, which as demonstrated, can be very powerful in determining the reception of a literary work. As shown, Mendele Mokher Sfarim is perceived as the only one of the three who is as much a Hebrew writer as a Yiddish writer. In his writing career he moved consistently between writing in Hebrew to writing in Yiddish. In the end, Mendele Mokher Sfarim

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<sup>233</sup> He writes: "let us go to the first artist in our new national literature, to the man who got into the center of things... and wrote us three clear bright volumes on ourselves" (Brenner 1985, 58).

<sup>234</sup> And so, in a way, does Shaked (2000, 11-21).

<sup>235</sup> In Shaked's account of the history of Hebrew literature, by contrast, Peretz is mentioned as one of the founders of the national literature but not Shalom Aleichem (Shaked 2000, 22).

wrote nearly as much in Hebrew and in Yiddish. Moreover, some critics regard his Hebrew writings as the best part of his work, and see it as more sophisticated than his Yiddish work (Aberbach 1993, 21-23).

However, the most remarkable aspect of Mendele's reception within the Zionist discourse is that he is accepted simultaneously as a positive historian of the shtetl and the greatest of all exile negators. A good example of the reception of Mendele as the historian of the shtetl is Brenner's praise (referring probably to the release of the three volumes of *Kol Kitve Mendele Mokher Sfarim* [*All of Mendele Mokher Sfarim's Writings*] in Hebrew translation, in Odessa, 1912): "let us go to the first artist in our new national literature, to the man who got into the center of things... and wrote us three clear bright volumes on ourselves" (Brenner 1985 [1912], 58, my translation).

The same idea can be found in the Frishman quote discussed earlier, about how a post-flood civilization would "be able to reconstruct the whole picture of Jewish life" in an Eastern European shtetl, based solely on Mendele's greatest novels (Bartana 1979, 5). Similarly, Werses (1979) applauds Mendele Mokher Sfarim as a folklorist, and as the one who documented Jewish literary traditions and costumes.

But at the same time, Mendele Mokher Sfarim was received as the greatest proponent of the negation of exile. Brenner, for example, in the essay he wrote about Mendele for his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, claims that Mendele knew that the Jewish people didn't create anything in exile, and that all hopes for something good to happen in exile are nonsense (1985, 58).

Mendele Mokher Sfarim is the only one of the three writers who can be considered to play the role of a watcher of the Jewish nation.<sup>236</sup> Mendele can be seen as a prophet, although not an entirely Zionist one.<sup>237</sup> However, it seems that the Zionist critics appreciate in Mendele Mokher Sfarim his didactic tendency, which they saw as a sign of national responsibility. For Brenner (1985, 58), Mendele is the most acceptable of the three classical Yiddish writers. Among other reasons, this is because his ideology, prophecy, and message to the Jewish people were always clear in his writings. Hence, to summarize, it seems that not only relative to the other Yiddish writers but also in principle, Mendele's writings survived quite well the oppression of Yiddish in Israeli Zionist discourse, and have more than a fair presence in Israeli literary discourse.<sup>238</sup>

## **II. Presence of Yiddish Culture in Israeli Discourse of the 1960s and 1970s**

The positive reception that Israeli discourse generally showed Mendele Mokher Sfarim, and to a certain extent Shalom Aleichem, seems to improve further during the 1960s and 1970s. Due to a variety of particular circumstances, their

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<sup>236</sup> It seems that Mendele was aware of this demand of Hebrew literary criticism and made efforts to adjust the Hebrew versions of his novels to them. In his analysis of the title change that Mendele made to his originally Yiddish novel, *Fishke the Lame* (which became *The Book of Beggars* in Hebrew), Miron (1988) finds that the Hebrew title testifies to Mendele's more historical, national, and didactic intentions in the Hebrew version of the novel.

<sup>237</sup> Aberbach, for example, claims that Mendele Mokher Sfarim didn't take Zionism seriously (1993, 35).

<sup>238</sup> The importance and influence of Brenner on the Israeli discourse and on Hebrew literature can be concluded from the fact that Miron himself chose to note in the introduction to *Bodedim Bemoadam*, which is semi-autobiographical, the fact that among the few books he took with him when he went to study in Jerusalem were the three volumes of Brenner's writings (Miron 1987, 14).

Yiddish works in Hebrew translation, and their images of the shtetl, repeatedly turned up in Israeli discourse during this era.<sup>239</sup>

Moreover, Mendele's and Shalom Aleichem's writings were not the only part of Yiddish culture to survive the Zionist oppression in that period. Elements of Yiddish culture, though officially rejected, continued to echo through the Israeli discourse of the time.

### **Ambivalence toward Yiddish in Israel throughout the 1960s and 1970s**

It seems that Yiddish in Israel was doomed to an ambivalent position right from its first contact with the Israeli Zionist sphere. The fact that Yiddish speakers who came to Israel during the Yishuv period<sup>240</sup> typically abandoned this language, which was identified as part of the diasporic culture, in favor of Hebrew, created an immediate ambivalence towards Yiddish. On one hand it was something that "had to be forgotten," (Chaver 2004, title) but on the other hand it was the mother tongue: a reliable means of communication with parents and old people, and as such it held a positive aura of intimacy and identification with precious people, as well as cultural and personal memories. Yiddish soon gained the ambivalent position of a mother tongue "both beloved and rejected," and though suppressed it continued to reverberate and affect the nascent Hebrew culture.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Hebrew writers, for example, like D'vora Baron (see Pinsker 2007b, 145-146) wrote also about the shtetl, and their images of the shtetl were also present in the Israeli discourse of the time, but their work is irrelevant to the discussion here. It is my main interest here to show that the special paradigmatic representation of the shtetl typical to classical Yiddish writers, as analyzed in the previous chapter (Chapter 4), had a considerable presence in Israeli discourse of the time.

<sup>240</sup> This usually refers to the period between the end of the First World War and Independence in 1948, in which the greater part of Ashkenazi Jews emigrated to Israel.

<sup>241</sup> Zuckerman (2003) in his recent research on the origins of the Hebrew language, gives wonderful examples of this vividness and the underground existence of Yiddish in the Zionist sphere, and its decisive influence on Israeli culture. His main claim is that modern Hebrew, due to the fact that its inventors were native Yiddish speakers, reverberates Yiddish in many of its aspects, and that Hebrew is actually, fundamentally, a European language and not a Semitic one.

During the Yishuv period, claims Chaver, the overwhelming majority of Israelis were Yiddish speakers and they continued to speak Yiddish because Hebrew was unable to function as a complete substitute – Hebrew lacked the ability to perform all the functions that Yiddish formerly fulfilled. Moreover, although Zionist historians would like to create a different impression, people whose mother tongue was Yiddish continued to utilize its long colloquial history and its well established literary tradition, and kept on developing Yiddish literature upon emigrating to Israel.

This odd situation of a Zionist, Yiddish-negating world – populated by Yiddish speakers and readers – changed with the mass emigration of the Middle Eastern, North African and Sephardic Jews (Mizrahim) during the fifties, but ambivalence towards Yiddish continued to secretly<sup>242</sup> feed the Hebrew culture. This simultaneous ambivalence towards Yiddish and the underground influence of Yiddish on the official Israeli discourse, seemed to reach its peak during 1960s and '70s. In this period there were still a lot of native Yiddish speakers alive in Israel, and at the same time, the evident and unshakable success of Hebrew as a national language – and the triumph of the Hebrew Zionist culture over the Jewish diasporic one – permitted Zionist institutions to soften their negation of Yiddish and Yiddish culture.<sup>243</sup>

Fishman has described the curious ambivalence towards Yiddish throughout the 1960s and early '70s in the following terms: although officially and institutionally oppressed, there was in Israel a very widespread, though low-key, receptiveness towards Yiddish. He writes that Yiddish functioned at the level of vernacular, as entertainment and as nostalgia, and that Yiddish expressions were then "a part of

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<sup>242</sup> Pinsker claims an underground influence of Yiddish culture and literature through the work of the Young Israel group on Hebrew culture during the 1950s and '60s, particularly on Hebrew modernist poetry, and on writers like Apelfeld, Aloni, and Shabtai. He goes on to call Yiddish "the double agent of Israeli culture and literature" (2007a, 49, my translation).

<sup>243</sup> Weitzner writes in the same spirit in his article "Yiddish in Israeli Cinema" (2002).

almost everyone's stylistic repertoire" (1974, 140). Miron (2004) also describes the vividness of the Yiddish vernacular in the Zionist-Israeli discourse of the sixties and seventies<sup>244</sup> (this richness, he mentions, does not exist any longer since Israeli acquaintance with the language has dropped dramatically). Like Fishman, Miron stresses the penetration of Yiddish as a vernacular adjunct to the Zionist-Hebrew environment during that period. There was consensus in the Israeli discourse of that time, claims Miron, about Yiddish vernacular being amusing; as a result, entertainers and speakers used Yiddish to create comic relief and a feeling of partnership and solidarity with their audience (2004, 9).

It seems that the ambivalence towards Yiddish in the 1960s and '70s, and the relative receptiveness of Yiddish vernacular, was also reflected in the Israeli cinema of the time. Weitzner (2002) claims that in the 1950s Israeli cinema was indifferent and, at times, hostile to Yiddish. But in the 1960s, after it was already clear that Zionism had been culturally victorious, and the State of Israel was confident enough to make room for non-Zionist sensibilities, Yiddish made its entrance into Israeli films as a vernacular. This phenomenon was also connected, claims Weitzner, to the emergence of commercial cinema which, starting in the early sixties, received less financing from the government and thus were less ideologically tied to the Zionist project (2002, 188). Sons and daughters of Yiddish speakers who could no longer speak the language integrated it into their films, claims Weitzner, who notes that Yiddish vernacular was integrated in films such as *Sallah* (1964), *Shnie Kunilemel*

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<sup>244</sup> Miron does not mention any specific years but he mentions the actor Shaikhe Offir, who "was so good in using this [Yiddish, r.k.] in the first days of the State of Israel" (2004, 9). Shaikhe Offir was abroad during the 1950s and returned only at the beginning of the 1960s, and since his career faded at the end of the seventies, when Miron talks about "the early days of the state" I took an educated guess that Miron means the 1960s and '70s (Wikipedia entry, "Shaikhe Offir," [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), accessed May 6, 2007).

(1968), and *Bleus Lahofesh Hagadol* (*Summer Vacation Blues*, 1974) in comic contexts.

But it seems that the reception of Yiddish and Yiddish culture throughout the sixties and seventies goes beyond this vernacular penetration. Yiddish started to be studied at Israeli universities in 1951, first at the Hebrew University, and the number of students increased steadily during the sixties and early seventies (Fishman 1974, 137).

Original Yiddish literature was also written in Israel throughout this period. Pinsker (2007a), reveal the fact that starting in 1951, and up to the mid-sixties, there existed in Israel a group of young Yiddish writers and poets that went by the name "Young Israel." The group published a periodical of Yiddish literary criticism and a serial of original Yiddish literature and poetry books, maintaining a lively Yiddish literary discourse in Israel during these years (2007a, 47).

A reading of Fishman's articles (1973, 1974) on the presence of Yiddish in Israel up to the early seventies reveals that not only the vernacular but also written Yiddish and Yiddish high culture had a considerable presence in the Israeli discourse of the time. This presence was, of course, not comparable to the place of Hebrew literature at the time, nor was it as effective; nevertheless, the presence of this "underground" culture was quite meaningful, especially in Yiddish-speaking environments.

During these decades, for example, Yiddish book publishing was relatively flourishing. Although Yiddish was always most firmly established as a vernacular, as an informal spoken medium (see Miron), and although poetry, novels, dramas, short stories, essays, literary criticism, and science books written in Yiddish were always the privilege of a relatively small circle, Fishman finds that Yiddish book publishing

in Israel was surprisingly strong in the early seventies. In addition, these publishers also served as a publishing apparatus for American and other, non-Israeli, Yiddish authors (Fishman 1974, 131).<sup>245</sup>

Fishman also finds that Yiddish book publication in the 1970s was still on the rise in Israel, and that since the early 1950s Yiddish book publishing revealed a five-fold increase, while at the same time, the number of books published in other European languages remained very small. In 1970, for example 54 Yiddish books were published, while only eight books were published in French, six in German, four in Hungarian, and three in Romanian (Fishman 1974, 132, table 17). This Yiddish performance is impressive especially when taking into account the fact that in the two other Jewish diasporic languages – Ladino and Judeo Arabic – not a single book was published in 1970.

But Fishman offers two other even more interesting facts. The first is that the total number of Yiddish books published in Israel jumped from 10 in 1955, to 38 in 1960, and then to 54 in 1970, an increase of 360 percent at the end of the fifties and of 65 percent during the sixties. This seems to suggest that the late fifties and early sixties was a period in which an outbreak of Yiddish culture was taking place.<sup>246</sup>

Second is the fact indicated by Fishman that although there were a lot of literary translations from Yiddish to Hebrew, "only a fraction of these are identified as such" (1974, 134). In other words, many works in Yiddish were deemed valuable enough to warrant translation into Hebrew, but their original language was ignored in the new Hebrew publication, and hidden from the reader. This amazing fact offers

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<sup>245</sup> The fact that many of these books were written by non-Israeli Yiddish writers and were distributed in Jewish communities outside of Israel may not clarify the status of Yiddish in Israel, but it does shed a light on Israel's role as a global center for Yiddish in this period.

<sup>246</sup> This outbreak was probably due in part to the fact the Israel became at the time the world center for Yiddish literature publishing. However this process of Israel becoming a leading center for Yiddish starting in the late fifties seems to testify to the same phenomenon: the rise in the visibility and presence of Yiddish culture in Israel in this period.

living proof for the oppressive force of the negation of exile on one hand, and the vitality of Yiddish culture on the other hand. But it also indicates that the real scope of the underground trickling of Yiddish literature into the Israeli discourse was a lot deeper than it seems upon analyzing conventional sources.

To the relative popularity of Yiddish classical literature in this era testifies the fact that two cinematic adaptations were made by Israeli cinema from Shalom Aleichem stories during the 1960s: *Nes Ba'ayara* (Israel, 1966) an adaptation of *Motl Ben Peisi Ha'hazan (Motl, Son of Pessi the Cantor)*, and *Touvya Ve Sheva Benotav* (Israel, 1968) an adaptation of “Tuvia Hahalban” (“Tevia the Dairyman”). This fact testifies to the positive receptiveness to Shalom Aleichem in particular, and Yiddish culture as a whole, in Israel during the 1960s, especially when one takes into account the small number of literature adaptations being produced in Israel’s tiny film industry of the time.<sup>247</sup>

It seems that despite being institutionally oppressed, Yiddish culture succeeded in maintaining a considerable presence and vitality in Israel of that time, and Yiddish literature perpetuated a cultural essentiality. One of the more prominent aspects of this vitality was the popularity in Israel of the Yiddish classics. These literary works – loaded with their paradigmatic representation of the Jewish shtetl community – both in Hebrew translation and adapted into film, were among the most widespread elements of Yiddish culture in Israeli discourse during these years.

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<sup>247</sup> For example, during the 1960s and 1970s there were no film adaptations made from stories by Shay Anon, winner of the 1966 Nobel Prize, who is considered by many the most prominent Hebrew-Israeli writer ever, and only one film adaptation from Amos Oz, one of today's most prominent Hebrew-Israeli writers (*My Michael*, 1971).

### **III. Reasons for Adopting Yiddish Literature's Paradigmatic Representation of the Shtetl into Bourekas Films**

#### **The Ashkenazi Elite's Tradition of Using Classical Yiddish Literature as an Ideological Apparatus**

Exploring the genealogy of classical Yiddish literature criticism, one can identify a controversy over the historical value of its representations of the shtetl. While some, mostly earlier critics,<sup>248</sup> seem to think that representations of the shtetl possess an historical and/or anthropological value, Miron, among other more recent critics, indicates that these representations are ahistorical. Critics point to Haskalah ideology and post-Haskalah sensibilities<sup>249</sup> as the source which constructs the deviation of classical Yiddish literature's representation of the shtetl from historical reality.

While indicating the structuring affect that it has on the representation of Jewish life in the shtetl, critics ascribe Haskalah ideology to all three Yiddish classical writers discussed above. Karib (1950), as shown earlier, describes Mendele's stories as "the very ripe fruit of the Haskalah ideology" (1950, 42).<sup>250</sup> He also claims that Haskalah ideology, which was assimilated into the stories, turns Mendele's shtetl representations into a twisted mirror, which emphasizes and highlights all that is

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<sup>248</sup> See the discussion on page 151.

<sup>249</sup> While Karib's account (1950, 9-86) of Mendele indicates clearly Mendele's source of bias in the presentation of the shtetl as Haskalah ideology, and while Miron talks openly about how Haskalah ideology was crucial in Shalom Aleichem's creation of the dialogue of his characters (1971, 93), Shaked seems to argue for Y.L. Peretz's post-Haskalah sensibilities, stressing that Peretz was deeply influenced by the European literature of his time (2000, 25).

<sup>250</sup> Bartana (1979) also stresses the Haskalah ideology reflected by Mendele's writings, although claims that Mendele Mokher Sfarim's stories present a slightly different narrative than the fundamental "Maskilic" one.

distorted and defective in the life of the residents (1950, 12). As for Shalom Aleichem,<sup>251</sup> Miron (1973, 257-259) – after dividing all Yiddish writers before World War I into two groups, marginal Maskilim (believers in Haskalah ideology) and radical Maskilim – places him (and Mendele) in his radical Maskilim group. This group is characterized by the Haskalah radicalism of its members, which affects both their choice of satire and parody as main literary genres, and their choice of what Miron calls the "aesthetic of ugliness" as a main literary tactic when describing the shtetl.<sup>252</sup> Early Peretz's stories also reflect Haskalah ideology through their message which, as indicated by Ruth Wisse (1991, XIII- 3), is similar to that of Haskalah. Both, claims Wisse, fought Hasidic influence, championed the study of European languages, and promoted a positive emphasis on production skills and labor.<sup>253</sup>

Taking all this into account, it seems that – through its writers, themselves members of the Ashkenazi diasporic elite – classical Yiddish literature served as an ideological apparatus in the hands of the Eastern European Jewish Ashkenazi elite, helping to spread Haskalah ideas among the Jewish masses and "educating them in the Haskalah spirit" (Miron 2000, 10).<sup>254</sup> Moreover, classical Yiddish literature, with its critical, sometimes comic, representation of the shtetl, seems also to function as a

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<sup>251</sup> Miron (1971, 93) also claims that the talk of Shalom Aleichem's characters is the work of an artist who created an artificial dialect in which the norms of normal speech are violated deliberately in order to serve the Haskalah ideology of the author.

<sup>252</sup> By "aesthetic of ugliness" Miron means the authors' decision to present the shtetl's surroundings as repulsive both sociologically and physically, and through characters that are sometimes lacking basic human grace, and are characterized by rudeness and ignorance (Miron, 1973, 16).

<sup>253</sup> Nider (1961) writes that Peretz's *Hassidism* stories are characterized by a hidden critique and irony towards the Hassidic world, from a perspective of Haskalah ideology, and therefore should be defined not as neo-Hassidism (as some other critics argue, see Frieden 1995), but as "neo-Maskilism" (1961, 149).

<sup>254</sup> Although it officially ended in 1881, Feiner (2002) talks about "late Haskalah" or "post-Haskalah" as central ideological modes from 1880 to 1914. It seems also that the ending date of the Haskalah is not so razor sharp, and that the dating of Haskalah's period of major influence is vague. Shavit (1996) mentions two periodicals that were still published long after Haskalah officially ended – *Hamelitz*, published from 1860 to 1903, and *Hazfira*, published from 1862 to 1931 – and indicates that they "contributed" to the "development of the Haskalah and its literature... widening the readers of Haskalah journalism" (1996, 133).

justification to ease the Oedipal guilt of Jewish elites for abandoning the shtetl and the traditional Jewish world. Karib (1950), for example, claims that the critical nature of Mendele's shtetl representation serves as a ratification for the necessity of departing from it, and adopting a new identity "for the author and his readers alike" (47).

Miron (2000) develops and widens this approach, saying that classical Yiddish writers' rejection of Jewish folk civilization, and their use of the shtetl as a symbol of the "pre-modern Jewish condition" (2000, 28), is designed to justify their betrayal of their ancestor's tradition in favor of harsh, cold modernity. If one accepts this line of thinking, it can be argued that classical Yiddish literature, as an apparatus in the hands of Eastern European diasporic Ashkenazi elites, functions on two levels: it was a part of the general Eurocentric, Jewish discourse aiming to educate the Jewish Eastern European Yiddish-speaking masses in the spirit of the Haskalah; and at the same time it was part of the elite's internal discourse, which helped these westernized, already modern Jews, to justify themselves and their abandoning of the shtetl and pre-modern Jewish culture.

I suggest that this tradition – of using classical Yiddish literature as an ideological apparatus by Eastern European diasporic Ashkenazi elites – may have found a new expression in Bourekas films. As they reused classical Yiddish literature's paradigmatic representation of the Jewish community, these films became an optional ideological apparatus in the hands of the Zionist Ashkenazi elites (who are, as Chinski [2002, 62-68] argues, the successors of the Eastern European Ashkenazi elites).

I argue that adopting the paradigmatic representation of the Jewish community by classical Yiddish writers, and then representing an Israeli Mizrahi community through it, could have served Bourekas directors (and the Israeli Zionist Ashkenazi

elite of which they were a part) in ways that were homological to the way classical Yiddish literature had served their European ancestors. This successful adaptation turned the Bourekas into texts through which the Zionist Ashkenazi elite could: a) cope with their Oedipal guilt for their abandonment of Yiddish culture in favor of Hebrew culture and ratify their Hebrew subjectivity; b) spread their modern, western ideology throughout the Zionist sphere and ratify their modernity and assimilation into western culture (Chinski 2002, 58-60); and c) ratify their hegemonic status in the Israeli-Zionist sphere.

## **The Needs Satisfied by Adopting Paradigmatic Representation into the Bourekas**

### **The Need to Justify and Ratify the Adoption of Hebrew Subjectivity**

Fishman claims that Yiddish was usually preserved in the Zionist sphere in the form of the vernacular. This vernacular, and especially the comic mode of Yiddish preservation in the face of Zionist oppression, claims Fishman, testifies to the fact that Yiddish, for Ashkenazi Zionist Hebrew speakers, was connected with an Oedipal guilt – a guilt they felt for abandoning and rejecting their ancestor’s culture. Those Hebrew speakers preferred using Yiddish at the level of the vernacular, since as opposed to utilizing high canonical Yiddish, using Yiddish at this level would not elicit too much Oedipal guilt. On the contrary, it seems that through the reduction of Yiddish to its vernacular, low aspects, the Ashkenazi Zionist Hebrew speaker justified the need to abandon this supposedly inadequate, poor language and replace it with the more classical Hebrew.

Taking the same path, Miron (2004) seems to think that Yiddish survived as a comic vernacular because this mode of preservation served two

necessary functions, both connected to the ratification of Ashkenazi Israeli Zionists' desired identity (subjectivity). According to Miron, this mode of preservation first created a necessary differentiation between people who used Yiddish only in this reductive way from those who used Yiddish seriously in all its layers, as their cultural language. The first were tagged as acculturated, Hebrew-Zionist Israelis, and the latter as exilic, traditional, diasporic Jews, who lacked both Zionist-Hebrew or European acculturation (2004, 10). This differentiation, which served to strengthen the Hebrew subjectivity of users of the Yiddish vernacular, was highly important because at that time the Zionist Hebrew subjectivity was still unstable, and the "exilic-diasporic self" of these Ashkenazi Hebrew speakers was still strong, especially within the family.

Miron's second argument is that this mode of preservation served to distinguish between Ashkenazi Israelis and non-Ashkenazim – the Near Eastern, North African and Sephardic Jews (Mizrahim) who were not familiar with the Yiddish vernacular. This differentiation was important: although negation of exile threatened to wipe away all pre-Zionist Jewish diasporic subjectivities, an Ashkenazi element in Hebrew subjectivity was still – although officially rejected – a "secret" element, needed as a final confirmation of such a subjectivity and as an admission ticket to the sphere of the Israeli elite (Chinski 2002).

Weitzner takes a different path, and suggests that the use of Yiddish vernacular (in Israeli films) served to "fulfill a yearning for warmth, intimacy, family life, folksiness and simplicity" (2002, 197), qualities that characterized the deserted Yiddish culture. The Yiddish vernacular inherently acquired these attributes due to the image attached by Zionist discourse to Yiddish culture. However, Weitzner also suggests that Yiddish

vernacular has been used repeatedly in Israeli films to inject an ironic twist to narratives shaped by Zionist ideology, presenting Zionism in a humorous way.<sup>255</sup>

Referring to Israeli cultural discourse of the sixties and seventies, Weitzner remarks that of all the arts, Israeli cinema was best qualified to manifest Yiddish. Unlike Israeli literature, it had no canon and its filmmakers, like folk storytellers, were often closer to the feelings and needs of the people. I would like to suggest that starting in the early sixties, a period in which Yiddish culture's presence in the Zionist sphere reached a certain peak (Fishman), but in which the Zionist negation of exile ideology and its concurrent institutional oppression of Yiddish was still strong (although weaker than it had been during the 1940s and 1950s), the Bourekas films joined Israeli discourse as an additional textual phenomenon which used Yiddish culture both secretly and reductively.

Bourekas films, in their disguised reconstruction of the classical Yiddish literary shtetl, and their insertion of the traditional diasporic Jew into the Zionist Israeli cultural discourse, are comparable in their function and strategy to other textual phenomena of that period, such as the camouflaged Hebrew translations from Yiddish literature and the comic use of the Yiddish vernacular.

It seems that there is, indeed, a considerable similarity between the Bourekas and these two textual phenomena. The camouflaged translation of Yiddish literature into Hebrew literature offers a literary parallel to Bourekas films. The two textual structures seem to share a function of marinating and preserving Yiddish culture, in the relatively hostile environment of Israeli-Zionist discourse. Both textual structures have their source in Yiddish culture, and both veil these Yiddish sources.

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<sup>255</sup> In *Sallah* Yiddish is used to mock the kibbutz system. When the kibbutz accountant finally agrees to pay Sallah for his daughter, the politically incorrect transaction happens in the cabinet and he counts the money in Yiddish "like letting go of the official ideology" (Weitzner 2002, 196).

One can also point to a considerable similarity between the comic use of Yiddish vernacular by entertainers and speakers throughout the sixties and seventies (in official speeches, theatrical and comic performances, and in Israeli cinema in general), and the use of Yiddish literature in the Bourekas films. Both phenomena were created through the agency of the Israeli Ashkenazim, apparently familiar to a certain degree with Yiddish culture (see the discussion of Kishon in Chapter 2), but living in a Zionist world hostile to this traditional culture.

Both phenomena can also be seen as a reductive use of aspects of Yiddish culture. The comic use of the Yiddish vernacular offers a simplistic rendering of the Yiddish language, while Bourekas films' use of the paradigmatic shtetl representation of classical Yiddish literature to describe Mizrahi neighborhoods and communities, offers a reductive, twisted use of Yiddish culture.

Both phenomena also use projection in the Freudian sense. The speaker who uses Yiddish in a comic way, for laughs, projects the serious use of the Yiddish language on the "other" – meaning traditional, pre-Hebrew Ashkenazim (see Miron); similarly, the Bourekas directors seem to project the traditional, Jewish Ashkenazi culture, as shown, onto the Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family.

In the light of these similarities between the two textual phenomena, I suggest here that the two also share a function. The functions of the comic use of the Yiddish vernacular, as mentioned, are two: first, to use Yiddish culture with a minimum of Oedipal guilt, and second, to ratify and reinforce the desired identity of the Hebrew-Zionist presenter and of his laughing audience. This was possible since this use of Yiddish had the power to distinguish between exilic, traditional Jews, who seriously used Yiddish, and the Zionist, Hebrew Jew who only used Yiddish in a reductive way.

It is suggested here that the adoption of the paradigm of shtetl representation into the Bourekas turned these films into an apparatus which served a similar function – both for their Ashkenazi directors, as part of Israel’s Ashkenazi elite, and for their Ashkenazi audience. Kishon, the director of *Sallah*, testifies in his biography that although he grew up in a family which assimilated into Hungarian culture, Yiddish was still around him. A word of Yiddish was heard sometimes by the kids in his family, and it seems that his grandfathers also spoke Yiddish (London 1993, 10, 17).

I argue that the Ashkenazi directors of the Bourekas, who were raised in a Yiddish-speaking environment, or at least, like Kishon, in a world where Yiddish culture was still present, used the Bourekas – and offered the Bourekas for the use of their fellow members and Ashkenazi Zionist elites – in three ways. First, the Bourekas were a vehicle through which these elites could participate secretly in their rejected, original Yiddish culture; second, the Bourekas served as a vehicle through which they could reduce the Oedipal guilt they felt for abandoning Yiddish culture (since the presentation of Yiddish cultural elements in the Bourekas is reductive<sup>256</sup>); and third, the films were a way to ratify their (and their Ashkenazi audience’s) desired identity as European, Hebrew-Zionist Israelis, by projecting the undesirable Jewish diasporic subjectivity of the exilic, traditional Ashkenazi shtetl Jews on a Mizrahi community.

At the same time, Bourekas films redefined the borders of Hebrew subjectivity, adding some Jewish Ashkenazi diasporic flavor to it. Through presenting mythological or successful Zionist Hebrew figures as having some features of Ashkenazi subjectivity, the Bourekas promoted Hebrew subjectivity as an identity that required some Ashkenazi input. Here are just a few of the many examples from the Bourekas of such figures: the politicians, government officials, and kibbutz

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<sup>256</sup> The fact that Yiddish cultural elements are being projected into a Mizrahi community naturally reduces them (see also our coming discussion on colonial mimicry, pp., 263-266).

members in *Sallah*; the police chief in *Aliza Mizrahi*; Gila in *Charlie and a Half*; Uzi, the engineer, in *Rabbi Gamliel*; and the daughters of Katz in *Katz and Karasso*.

### **The Need to Ratify their Own Modernity**

It seems that recognizing the role which adopting the paradigmatic representation of the shtetl into the Bourekas had in the ratification of Ashkenazi Hebrew Zionist subjectivity would be sufficient for understanding the paradigm's relevance to the needs of the Zionist Ashkenazi elites. However, the Bourekas correspond with the needs of these elites in diverse ways. As emerges from the analysis of *Sallah* (see Chapter 2), one of the most important aspects of this relationship lies in the Bourekas' reflection of the Zionist "modernization approach." Following the discussion of *Sallah*, I suggest here that the adaptation of the paradigmatic shtetl representation allowed Bourekas films to echo, reproduce, and distribute the Zionist "modernization approach" that was at its peak at their time of emergence.

The modernization approach, as discussed earlier,<sup>257</sup> is an academic-institutional theory that dominated the Israeli discourse of ethnicity between 1950 and 1970, and formed the major perspective through which Mizrahim were seen by Zionist institutions and were integrated into Israeli society. Svirski claims that the modernization approach was not a discourse of ethnicity, but of class. However, Avruch (1985, 228-333) seems to refer to the modernization approach as a pseudo-class discourse, emphasizing that it expresses an expectation that through the process of re-socialization and acculturation the Mizrahim would become culturally Ashkenazim, since the latter were presented by Israeli-Zionist discourse as a model of

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<sup>257</sup> See the wider discussion on the modernization approach in the Introduction.

modernity. Avruch also quotes Ben Raphael<sup>258</sup> who claims, in the same spirit, that the progress which Mizrahim were expected to achieve through the modernization project was to become “similar to Ashkenazim” (Avruch 1985, 229).

It seems that the Bourekas, by reusing the classical Yiddish literature representation of the shtetl community as pre-modern and projecting it on Mizrahim, promoted this idea of the similarity between modernity and Ashkenaziness. As indicated by this study’s analysis of *Sallah*, the Bourekas simultaneously represent the Mizrahi community as pre-modern and point to the Ashkenazim as modern. However they also stress the option of "becoming Ashkenazim," through intermarriage, as a preferable solution for the pre-modernity of the Mizrahim, blurring the path between becoming Ashkenazim and becoming modern.<sup>259</sup>

It seems also that through their portrayal of the Mizrahim as shtetl Ashkenazim, the Bourekas films realized – by way of an imaginative presentation – what Avruch and Ben Raphael (Avruch 1985, 229) see as the ultimate goal of the modernization approach: the transformation of Mizrahim into Ashkenazim. To summarize, as the Bourekas reused classical Yiddish literature’s representation paradigm of the Jewish community – in which the Jewish community is presented largely as pre-modern and traditional – and projected this representation onto the Mizrahim, while at the same time presenting the Ashkenazim as modern, these films reflected the modernization approach, and thereby helped to fulfill the needs, and promote the ideology, of Ashkenazi elites – especially the ratification of their modernity.

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<sup>258</sup> A sociologist who reflects a traditional Zionist perspective.

<sup>259</sup> Presenting Ashkenazim as ultimately modern also helped to construct the western identity of the Ashkenazim, taking part in what Chinski called Israeli art's Sisyphean effort to construct the western identity of the Ashkenazi elite, and present them accordingly (Chinski 2002).

## The Need to Maintain their Hegemonic Status

Bhabha (1994, 66-85) claims that the meeting of the colonizer with the colonized is not only an event in which the colonizer constructs the identity of the colonized through a production of a stereotype, but also an interruption that eradicates the ethnic purity desired by the colonizer; it is an event, therefore, that threatens the colonizer's identity.<sup>260</sup> The colonizer is threatened by the difference of the colonized, claims Bhabha, and wishes to return to the primeval fantasy of an idyllic ego. This ego – white and whole – which was violated by the difference reinforced through the appearance of the colonized other, would like his purity and wholeness back; this longing is similar to the child in the pre-Oedipal stage, who desires the purity of a world without differences (since for him the outside world is captured like something that is within the inner self).

Bhabha criticizes Edward Said for ignoring this vulnerable aspect of the colonizer, and of alluding, therefore, to the ambivalent nature of the colonized stereotype produced by the colonizer. By contrast, Bhabha considers the production of the colonized-other stereotype as one of the colonizer's ways to cope with this threatening interruption. As a strategy to cope with this threat to his identity, the colonialist produces the colonized stereotype as a fixed reality that is, at the same time, both strange and well-known. All originality is negated from the colonized, and, at the same time, all that is threatening in his otherness is incorporated within (assimilated into) the known aspect of this likeness, which constructs his stereotype.

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<sup>260</sup> This is a part of Bhabha's ongoing discussion about the use of the stereotyped representations of non-hegemonic communities. In his Introduction to "The Other Question" (1983), a discussion of the relationships between a certain reality and its artistic presentation, Bhabha claims that criticism of representations of a non-hegemonic community should focus on the identification and understanding of the process of subjectification that realizes itself through a discourse of stereotypes (20). Using Bhabha to see textual representations and their authority within the colonial discourse stresses the ambivalence in the production of stereotypes of the colonized by the colonizer. The stereotype, says Bhabha, is an impossible object (1996, 103). Its impossibility comes out of its ambivalence. It is through the stereotype that the colonizer constructs the identity of the colonized other – apparently from a position of power, but this construction is actually the projection of the colonizer's own threatened self.

Bhabha's study of the ambivalence of the colonized stereotype offers an interesting perspective on the Bourekas films and the needs of Ashkenazi elites fulfilled by it. As discussed above, these films were made by Ashkenazi directors representing Ashkenazi elites – who post-modern critics see as the colonizers of the Zionist sphere – and forced on the Mizrahi community a stereotype constructed by a paradigm homologous to classical Yiddish literature's presentation of the shtetl Ashkenazi community. Through the use of this paradigm the Bourekas present Mizrahim as if they were the Ashkenazim of the shtetl. This effort, made by Ashkenazi directors representing Ashkenazi elites, negates all originality from the Mizrahim and at the same time assimilates all that is strange, foreign, and therefore threatening about the Mizrahim into a known entity – the pre-modern, pre-westernized European ancestors of Israeli Ashkenazi elites.

Moreover, for Bhabha there are three stages involved in the colonizer's creation of the stereotype of the “colonized other”: the recognition of differences between the colonizer and the colonized other, their denial, and then the covering of those differences by their formalization as a fetish. One can identify this mechanism in the Bourekas films. The fact that the Bourekas are the first films in Israeli cinema to focus on a community defined as Mizrahi, could be taken as the first stage – the recognition of differences between the Ashkenazim and the colonized Mizrahim. At the same time, the portrayal of Mizrahim in the Bourekas as pre-modern and pre-westernized Ashkenazim could be seen as an effort to negate these differences.

The combination of these two aspects seems to make the Bourekas into texts that create a formalization of differences – a kind of fetish, an unthreatening object through which the otherness of the colonized Mizrahim is presented and perceived. The cinematic production and distribution of this “fetish” makes sense, since

according to Bhabha, unlike the individual fetishist who is driven to hide his secret, the colonizer's drive is to expose and distribute his fetish to support his colonialist power.

This phenomenon in the Bourekas, in which a Mizrahi community is masked as an Ashkenazi community, can be seen also in light of Bhabha's discussion on colonial mimicry (Bhabha 1994, 85-93). Colonial mimicry, says Bhabha is one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. The effect of the colonized mimicking the colonizer is a camouflage, claims Bhabha (following Lacan). The colonized does not harmonize with the new identity (of the colonizer) that he mimics, nor does he totally become it, but rather he partly covers his original identity with it. It is not a situation of completely covering a certain background but of producing a "mottled entity" (Bhabha 1994, 85).

The Bourekas – which define the community presented in them as Mizrahi but portray it as if it was an archaic Ashkenazi one – can be seen as texts through which colonial mimicry is implemented. The impulse of the colonized to mimic is realized through the fact that the Mizrahim's desire to "act like" Ashkenazim is presented in the films as a natural impulse of the Mizrahi characters. The Bourekas display of the grotesque aspects of the Mizrahim – a feature which colonial mimicry always attaches to its performers – seems to flatter Ashkenazi elites, and therefore helps in the process of ratifying their new status as colonizers.

Israeli Ashkenazi elites of the 1960s were not as confident as the British colonizer in India that Bhabha bases his study upon. Only one generation before they served as the internal "others" of Europe and suffered from discrimination, prejudice, and a discourse which presented them as un-European and pre-westernized (Chinski 2002, 63-68). Even after gaining control of Israel and ruling it for more than a decade,

in the 1960s these elites were not sure yet that the colonized Mizrahim would follow them, and mimic their identity. In order to ratify their status as colonizers and strengthen their confidence in their colonial control, these elites created – through the Bourekas, and through the adoption of classical Yiddish literature’s paradigmatic representation of the Ashkenazi Jewish community into the films – a fictional world in which Mizrahim mimic the archaic, pre-modern Ashkenazim.

#### **IV. New Explanations for the Success of the Bourekas**

If the above arguments are true, it seems that Bourekas directors, themselves part of the Zionist Ashkenazi elite, had more than one good reason to adopt classical Yiddish literature paradigmatic representation of the shtetl. However, at the same time this perspective on the Bourekas opens up a whole new range of explanations for the success of these films.

Looking at the Bourekas through these various perspectives offers new explanations to the Bourekas’ success within both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi audiences. My conclusion is that the Bourekas’ success is due to various ideological, sociological, political, and psychological needs, which the films supply to Ashkenazi and Mizrahi spectators separately.

Since the effect of colonial mimicry is a camouflage, and only partly covers the mimicker’s original identity with the aforementioned "mottled entity" (Bhabha 1994, 85, quoting Lacan), it seems that the Ashkenazi characteristics of the Mizrahi neighborhood, community, and family in Bourekas films could be felt (although unconsciously) by both audiences. However this cinematic “mottled entity” could be interpreted by each group of spectators differently, according to its collective psychological and sociological needs.

Ashkenazi audiences might see these films as a fictional territory in which Mizrahim mimic Ashkenazim, whereas Mizrahi audiences might see a universe in which Ashkenazim mimic Mizrahim. Each group of spectators could at the same time accept or reject that fictional presentation of Mizrahim as Ashkenazim on screen, according to their needs.

Based on these initial assumptions, I'll now outline the reasons for Bourekas' success in the 1960s and '70s, among each group of spectators. I'll begin with the Bourekas' success among Ashkenazi spectators:

1. By echoing classical Yiddish literature's presentation of an Ashkenazi shtetl (and thus traditional Ashkenazi community and culture), and then projecting it onto Mizrahim, the Bourekas films confirmed both the Jewish Ashkenazi cultural origins and the contemporary Zionist-Hebrew subjectivity of Ashkenazi spectators. At the same time the films – using a comic mode of representation of the traditional community – assisted them in coping with their Oedipal guilt for abandoning these cultural origins in order to become Hebrew.
2. By reflecting the modernization approach, the Bourekas ratified and distributed the desired identity of Ashkenazi spectators as westernized, modern Europeans and lent moral support to Ashkenazi spectators' privileges in the Zionist sphere relative to Mizrahim.
3. Conscious of Ashkenazi vulnerability as colonizers of the Zionist sphere, the Bourekas also helped Ashkenazi spectators (the colonizers) to cope with the threat of the Mizrahi (the colonized other), by turning Mizrahim otherness into something familiar, something that was known (namely, Ashkenazi Jews of the shtetl).

4. The fictional world of the Bourekas was perceived by Ashkenazi spectators as a universe in which Mizrahi figures and communities mimic Ashkenazi ones. This flattered Ashkenazi spectators and at the same time confirmed their colonial power over Mizrahim.

For the Mizrahi spectators, the success of the Bourekas can be explained as follows:

1. Mizrahi spectators recognized that they were being presented in Bourekas as traditional Jews and were flattered,<sup>261</sup> since this portrayal – in contrast with their more common one, as a group which lost its Jewish identity and assimilated into Arabness (Shenhav 2003, 17-18) – signaled for Mizrahi spectators their acceptance into Israeli society, not as colonized others (Shohat, 119-179), but as an integral part of the nation.
2. Beneath the modernization approach's official call for the Mizrahim to modernize, as a prior condition to their assimilation into Israeli society, lay the demand that Mizrahim become culturally Ashkenazim (Avruch, 229). The Bourekas, by constructing and characterizing the Mizrahi community as if it was an Ashkenazi pre-modern one, encouraged Mizrahi spectators, presenting them as a group which was on its way to completing its assimilation into Israeli society.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Mizrahi spectators didn't have to be familiar with classical Yiddish literature to be flattered. It was enough that they saw themselves presented visiting the synagogue, praying to God in Hebrew (*Sallah, Fortuna*); taking a blessing from the local rabbi (*Rabbi Gamliel, Snooker*); using godly language (*Charlie and a Half, Snooker, The Tsan'ani Family, Slomoniko, Kazablan*); etc. – all of those myriad Jewish elements which are part of the community presentation in Bourekas films.

<sup>262</sup> Evidently, most of Mizrahi spectators couldn't locate precisely the presented community culturally or historically. However, my assumption is that they could tell that these were "others" – as can be seen in the films that Mizrahi directors made about the Mizrahi neighborhood, the self-image of the Mizrahim is totally different than the stereotype attached to them by the Bourekas. And since the Zionist ethnic discourse is binary (Ashkenazim-Mizrahim) they tended to interpret this otherness as being "Ashkenaziness."

3. The very fact that Mizrahim were presented as traditional archaic Ashkenazim in the Bourekas also flattered Mizrahi spectators. Despite negation of exile, Ashkenazi diasporic subjectivity was a necessary component of Hebrew subjectivity and the secret identity of the Israeli elites (Miron 1994, 9-13), and thus the favored cultural-ethnic subjectivity in Israel of the 1960s and '70s (Fishman 1973).<sup>263</sup>

Mizrahi spectators were also flattered because they perceived in the Bourekas a fictional universe in which Ashkenazi figures and communities mimic Mizrahi ones.<sup>264</sup>

## V. Summary and Conclusions

The situation of Yiddish culture in the Israeli discourse of the 1960s and 1970s was complicated. On the one hand, it was affected by the ideology of "negation of exile" (Karkotzkin 1993), and by the westernization project of Israeli Ashkenazi elites (Chinski 2002), which both acted to oppress Yiddish culture. Yiddish was tagged as exilic and anachronistic by state cultural institutions, and was marginalized (Fishman 1973, Chinski 2002). On the other hand, Yiddish culture maintained a hidden but essential role in the construction of Hebrew subjectivity amongst the Zionist Ashkenazi elites of Israel (Miron 2004, 9-13), and thus Yiddish culture survived under the surface of the official cultural discourse. Yiddish found its way to Israeli cinema (Weitzner 2002) and Yiddish literature was composed (Pinsker 2007), published, and even translated into Hebrew (Fishman 1973, 1974).

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<sup>263</sup> Fishman brought the provocative request of the Black Panthers, the militant group that fought for social equality between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in Israel during the seventies, to Prime Minister Golda Meir to teach them Yiddish (Fishman 1973, 29).

<sup>264</sup> To this understanding contributed, no doubt, the fact that Ashkenazi actors often played Mizrahi figures (Shohat 1989, 138-139).

The Bourekas films' secret reuse of elements of Yiddish culture can thus be seen as a cultural product in which the ambivalence of Israeli Zionist discourse towards Yiddish culture was internalized, and became inherent to the aesthetic object. As such, a cultural product designed to ease this tension arose through the vacillation of the Zionist Ashkenazi elites, who simultaneously couldn't completely give up Yiddish culture, and couldn't fully and openly embrace it.

However, Bourekas films also served some more practical goals of the Ashkenazi elites. The Bourekas were a tool in the hands of elites to ratify and distribute their desirable Western identity, and as such were a part of their Sisyphean westernization project. At the same time Bourekas films reflected the Zionist institutional modernization approach by presenting the Ashkenazim as modern Europeans and the Mizrahim as pre-modern. The films thus were a part of a larger effort of these elites to confirm the modern identity of the Ashkenazim, thus justifying the ethnic distribution of wealth and work that in Israeli of the time favored the Ashkenazim. Furthermore, the Bourekas were also hitched by Zionist Ashkenazi elites to serve as a tool through which they – as the colonizer of the Zionist sphere – could symbolically cope with the threat of the colonized Mizrahim, and reestablish their colonial authority.

Using these findings, I believe one can better explain the popularity of Bourekas films among Ashkenazi and Mizrahi audiences. Ashkenazi audiences felt a mixture of satisfaction and relief from their sense of the Bourekas as, at the same time, reviving and projecting parts of their beloved, rejected, "forbidden" culture onto the Mizrahi "other," and from the way that the Bourekas assisted them in ratifying both their Hebrew Zionist subjectivity and their colonial power over the Mizrahim.

The popularity of the Bourekas among the Mizrahim, by contrast, is drawn from the complex relationships they reflect of inclusion and isolation between colonized and colonizer. Despite presenting the Mizrahim from a demeaning perspective, Bourekas films are not totally negative towards Mizrahim. Rather they offer the Mizrahi spectator a complex message, incorporating disparate motifs of inclusion. First, I maintain that Mizrahi spectators strongly experienced the Jewishness in the presentation of the Mizrahi community in the Bourekas, and in light of the rejection they faced during the 1960s and '70s, which cast doubt on their Judaism (Shenhav 2003, 17-18), even this slight sign of recognition may explain the appeal of these films to them.

However, there are more flattering aspects for Mizrahi spectators in Bourekas films. The Bourekas can be interpreted (and I argue that they were actually interpreted by Mizrahi spectators, albeit unconsciously) as texts in which the Ashkenazim mimic Mizrahim, an interpretation which no doubt flattered Mizrahi spectators. One can also see the Bourekas as films in which Mizrahim are presented as Ashkenazi Jews (although pre-modern), that is, as people who are part of the Jewish-Israeli nation even if they still have not accomplished total social assimilation.

It is not the contention of this dissertation to assert without a doubt that Yiddish writers directly influenced the Bourekas filmmakers. Rather, I maintain that it is possible that in order to cinematically represent the Mizrahi neighborhood and community, the Ashkenazi directors of the Bourekas films used representational paradigms that bore a resemblance to those formerly used by the Yiddish classics to represent the shtetl's ontology and community. The directors did so in order to reproduce an image of Jewish life that was part of their cultural heritage, and in order to satisfy certain ideological, sociological, and psychological needs of the Zionist

Ashkenazi elite, of which they were a part. I indicate through this transmission of a representational paradigm, across both generations and genres, a cultural continuity of Jewish Ashkenazi culture.

However, it is possible, that in addition the Bourekas directors were indirectly or directly influenced by classical Yiddish literature, since they had both the opportunity to assimilate such an influence and the reason to do so. The chapter's discussion shows that despite being oppressed and even in a way invisible, Yiddish culture succeeded in maintaining its vitality in Zionist Israel, a vitality that, in fact, peaked in Israel in the early 1960s, just as the Bourekas films began to emerge. The result was a surprisingly prominent place that was given to classical Yiddish literature.

Furthermore, the discussion reveals that Bourekas directors had more than one good reason to assimilate such an influence, adopting into their films the shtetl representation paradigm of classical Yiddish literature. Comparing the levels of receptiveness of all three classical Yiddish writers in Israeli discourse, it seems that Bourekas directors could have been indirectly or directly influenced by the writings of Mendele Mokher Sfarim or Shalom Aleichem, whose reception into Israeli literary discourse was fairly successful.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Afterword – Bourekas Heritage**

In the first days of 2008 I took a part in a conference held in Tel Aviv, devoted to Ashkenazi ethnic identity and entitled "Between Ashkenaziness and Israelism." Among the papers presented was one (by Shachar Pinsker) on Yossl Birstein (1920-2003), an Israeli writer who wrote both in Hebrew and in Yiddish. The paper claimed that some of Birstein's Hebrew stories use Israeli reality, such as the particulars of Jerusalem neighborhoods, to reconstruct the atmosphere of the Eastern European Jewish shtetl.

It seems that nowadays Ashkenazi culture is more seriously and openly discussed in Israel. In the process, rereading texts which employ Ashkenazi cultural agency sometimes reveals hidden evidence of a Yiddish-Hebrew-Israeli cultural hybridity, which produces a mottled, archaic Ashkenazi-contemporary Israeli entity.

In this dissertation, I have offered exactly this evidence: a new reading of the Bourekas as a (culturally) hybrid Yiddish-Hebrew-Israeli text which creates a mottled entity, both and at the same time contemporary Israeli Mizrahi, and archaic Eastern European Ashkenazi. My findings relocate Bourekas films as a stage in Israeli cinema's quest to openly reflect the true range of cultural diversity in Israel. They point to the Bourekas as mirroring a phase in which the Israeli cinema was already prepared to reflect some kind of ethnic diversity, while challenging the borders of the Zionist ethos; but it was still a stage at which Ashkenazi filmmakers, pressured by the

"negation of exile" concept, had to express their exilic Jewish ethnic culture (Yiddish culture) through projecting it onto others, twisting it and demeaning it.

I argue that the Bourekas made way for a successful recent group of Israeli ethnic films of identity by filmmakers who are second-generation immigrants to Israel. Starting in the mid-1990s, these Israeli filmmakers began to openly present their Jewish exilic pre-Zionist ethnic cultures in films such as *Late Marriage* (2001), representing Jewish Georgian culture, *Take a Wife* (2005), representing Jewish Moroccan culture, and *Three Mothers* (2006), representing Jewish Egyptian culture. It would have made sense if the Bourekas had opened the gates to a production of Israeli Ashkenazi ethnic films of identity as well.

However, it seems that the time for that has not come yet. Moreover, as far as Yiddish culture is concerned, negation of exile still holds strong; new mottled films, depicting the mixing of Yiddish and Hebrew/Israeli cultures, are still being produced in Israel, and previously made mottled (Yiddish-Hebrew-Israeli) films maintain their appeal to Israeli audiences.

Bourekas films themselves – in their new video and DVD editions, and through repeated screenings on Israeli national television channels – are still popular in Israel. In 2005, *Y-Net*, the web edition of *Yediot Aharonot*, the most popular Israeli daily newspaper, held a poll among its readers to determine the most popular Israeli films ever made. Among the top ten most popular films ranked three Bourekas films. During my long years as a lecturer in Israeli universities, and recently more than ever, I often have met students who were intimately familiar with Bourekas films. Some of them could declaim segments of dialogue from prominent Bourekas films – such as *Charlie and a Half* (1974) and *Snooker* (1975) – by heart.

Furthermore, the Bourekas formula has not entirely disappeared from current Israeli filmmaking. In the Israeli mainstream cinema of recent years one can observe films that maintain some fundamental characteristics of Bourekas films. These films can be defined as post-Bourekas or neo-Bourekas.

I give the "post-Bourekas" label to such films describing a Mizrahim community using the Bourekas representation paradigm that deliberately and consciously exaggerates or twists one or more characteristics of Bourekas films, reproducing and criticizing the Bourekas at the same time. Among such films are: *Lovesick in Housing Complex C* (1995) and the highly successful *The Band Visit* (2007).

*Lovesick in Housing Complex C* focuses on a radical implementation of the Bourekas paradigmatic representation of the reduction of a romantic ethos in the Mizrahi neighborhood; at the film's center is a hero who is not only un-romantic, but a borderline personality with sexual behavior disturbances. *The Band Visit* focuses on an extreme and slightly twisted representation of two central Bourekas themes: the isolation of the neighborhood/community from its surroundings, and the forced togetherness and blurring of boundaries between the private and the public domains within the Mizrahi neighborhood. The film's narrative is founded on conflicts flowing from a forced encounter between the residents of a remote and isolated little Mizrahi town, in the middle of the Israeli desert, and members of an Egyptian music band who, due to a planning error, are obliged to stay overnight in the small and crowded housing project apartments of the Mizrahim.

The second category, "neo-Bourekas," I apply to films that, at least in part, naively and naturally reproduce the paradigmatic representation of the Mizrahi community in Bourekas films, with some changes to adjust the representation to the

period and place in which the story takes place. Such films include: *Turn Left at the End of the World* (2004), in which the Bourekas paradigmatic representation of the Mizrahi community is implemented to describe the Mizrahi population of Dimona during the 1950s; *Colombian Love* (2004), which describes the Mizrahi family of the hero using the paradigmatic representation of Bourekas films; and *Aviva, My Love* (2006), which transfers the Mizrahi neighborhood of Bourekas films to contemporary T'veria (Tiberius).

I believe that the Bourekas formula will continue to turn up and stay relevant to popular and mainstream Israeli cinema as long as three conditions continue to prevail: (a) veteran Ashkenazi elites are in power in Israel; (b) polarity between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim remains a dominant force in Israeli society; and (c) the negation of exile concept maintains some restrictive power. As long as these elements hold, Ashkenazi elites will continue to manipulate the Mizrahim through the politics of identity, and will be dialectically manipulated by Mizrahim in turn, to strengthen their separate Ashkenazi identity by secretly injecting Yiddish culture – in the form of Yiddish literature's representation paradigm of the shtetl – into Israeli reality on film.

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- Bentulila Asher, *Exile (Galut)*, Israel 2003
- Benchetrit David, *Ancient Winds (Ru'ach Kadim)*, Israel 2002

Bar David Simy, *The South (Ha'darom)*, Israel 1998

Davidson Boaz, *Charlie and a Half (Charlie Vahetzi)*, Israel 1974

Davidson Boaz, *Fifty Fifty (Hatsi Hatsi)*, Israel 1971

Davidson Boaz, *Lemon Popsicle (Eskimo Limon)*, Israel 1978

Davidson Boaz, *Snooker*, Israel 1975

Davidson Boaz, *The Tsan'ani Family (Mishpahat Tsan'ani)*, Israel 1976

Dayan Nisim, *Light of Nowhere (Or Min Ha'hefker)*, Israel 1973

Dreyer Karl, *The Passion of Joan D'arc*, Denmark, 1928

Dickinson Thorold, *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer (Giv'a 24 Eina Ona)*, Israel 1955

Dinar Baruch, *They Were Ten (Hem Hayu Asara)*, Israel 1961

Dror Duki, *Taqasim*, Israel 1999

Eldad Ilan, *Sinaya*, Israel 1956

Elkabetz Ronit, *To Take a Wife (Velakachta Lecha Isha)*, Israel 2005

Fry Peter, *I Like Mike (I Like Mike)*, Israel 1960

Gavison Savi, *Love Sick (Hole Ahava B'shikun Gimel)*, Israel 1995

Golan Menachem, *Aliza Mizrahi*, Israel 1968

Golan Menachem, *Fortuna*, Israel 1966

Golan Menachem, *Katz and Karasso (Katz ve Karasso)*, Israel 1971

Golan Menachem, *Kazablan*, Israel, 1973

Golan Meacham, *Lupo*, Israel 1970

Golan Menachem, *Llupo in New York (Lupo Be' New York)*, Israel 1970

Golan Menachem, *Tuvia and His Seven Daughters (Tuvia Vesheva Bnotav)*, Israel 1968

Goren Amit, *1966 Was a Good Year for Touring (1966 Hayta Shana Tova Letayarut)*, Israel 1992

Gross Yoram, *Only One Lira (Rak Belira)*, Israel 1961

Hasfari Shmuel, *Witchcraft (Sh'chur)*, Israel 1994

Haviv Nuri, *With No Homeland (Be'ei Moledet)*, Israel 1956

Kanot Shay, *Columbian Love (Ahava Columbianit)*, Israel 2004

Kimchi Rami, *Father Language (Sfat Av)*, Israel 2006

Kimchi Rami, *Cinema Egypt (Cinema Mitsraim)*, Israel 2001

Klein Herbert, *My Father's House (Beit Avi)*, Israel 1946

Kolirin Eran, *The Band's Visit (Bikur Ha'tizmoret)*, Israel 2007

Koshashvili Dover, *Late Marriage (Hatuna Meucheret)*, Israel 2002

Kishon Ephraim, *Ervinka*, Israel 1967

Kishon Ephraim, *Sallah (Sallah Shabati)* Israel, 1964

Kishon Ephraim, *The Big Dig (Thealat Blaumilch)*, Israel 1969

Kromgold Josef, *When Curse Turns into Blessing (Kelala Livracha)*, Israel 1949

Larscki Helmer, *Land (Adama)*, Israel 1946

Lights Josef, *Loyal City (Kirya Ne'emana)*, Israel 1952

Lights Josef, *Tear of Comfort (Dim'at Ha'nehama Ha'gedola)*, Israel 1947

Malessa Orly, *Mirrors (Mar'ot)*, Israel 2004

Mizrahi Moshe, *Daughters, Daughters (Abu Al Banat)*, Israel 1973

Mizrahi Moshe, *House On Shlush Street (Habait Be'rechov Shlus)*, Israel 1973

Mizrahi Moshe, *I Love You Rosa (Ani Ohev Otach Roza)*, Israel 1972

Nesher Avi, *Turn Left at the End of the World (Sof Ha'olam Smola)*, Israel 2004

Ofek David, *Home (Bayit)*, Israel 1994

Ofek David and Madmoni Yossi, *The Barbecue People (Ha'mangalistim)*, Israel 2003

Oizerman Ben, *Not a World to Morganstein (Af Mila Le'morganstein)*, Israel 1963

Ovadia George, *Ariana*, Israel 1970

Ovadia George, *Midnight Entertainer (Badranit Ba'hatsot)*, Israel 1977

Ovadia George, *Nurit*, Israel 1972

Ovadia George, *Nurit 2*, Israel 1983

Ovadia George, *Sharit*, Israel 1973

Piler Lao, *A Miracle in Town (Nes Ba'ayara)*, Israel 1966

Revach Ze'ev, *A Bit of Luck (Tipat Mazal)*, Israel 1992

Revach Ze'ev, *Only Today (Rak Hayom)*, Israel 1976

Shor Renen, *Summer Blues (Blues Lahofesh Hagadol)*, Israel 1978

Steinhardt Alfred, *Slomoniko*, Israel 1972

Steinhardt Alfred, *You Can Work It Out, Slomoniko (Yih'ye Tov Slomoniko)*, Israel 1975

Zarhin Shemi, *Aviva My Love (Aviva A'huvati)*, Israel 2006

Zilberg Yoel, *Kunileml in Tel Aviv (Kunileml Be'Tel Aviv)*, Israel 1976

Zilberg Yoel, *My Mother the General (Imi Ha'generalit)*, Israel 1979

Zilberg Yoel, *Rabbi Gamliel (Hacham Gamliel)*, Israel 1975

Zilberg Yoel, *Shimhon Family (Mishpachat Shimhon)*, Israel 1964

Zohar Uri, *A Hole in the Moon (Hor Ba'levana)*, Israel 1964

Zohar Uri, *Fish, Football and Girls (Ha'shchuna Shelanu)*, Israel 1968

Zohar Uri, *Peeping Toms (Metsitsim)*, Israel 1972

Zvi Riklis Dina, *A Story Which Begins at a Snake Funeral (Sipur Shemathil Belevaya Shel Nahash)*, Israel 1994

Zvi Riklis Dina, *Three Mothers (Shalosh Ima'ot)*, Israel 2006