

Identity, Status, and the Shadow of the Holocaust in the Work of Second-Generation Mizrahi Writers

Batya Shimony

In recent years, a new voice has made its way into literature on the Holocaust and Holocaust memory. Alongside the literature of the first and second generations, which has been defined and studied extensively, works with new characteristics are now appearing. This is literature written by Mizrahi writers, the second generation of the immigration of the nineteen fifties, whose parents came to Israel from Arab countries, North Africa, and Greece. These writers comprise a literary generation that represents a sub-group in Israeli society. Dan Miron defined a literary generation as "the most conscious, aware, and articulate part of a broad social stratum at a certain historic moment," adding that this select group "has the power to express the sensitivities of this stratum in a sharp and vibrant manner, and by doing so, to position them at the center of the public agenda and public debate."¹ While Miron referred in his definitions to "generation" in its broadest sense, as representing the "whole of the national intelligentsia," the generation whose poetic characteristics I outline below represents a very particular group in Israeli society – the Mizrahim.

The term "Mizrahim" is relatively new, and was created in the early years of Israel's statehood, with the arrival to Israel of many immigrant groups from countries with Eastern orientations. This inclusive concept embraces a wide variety of ethnic groups with different cultures and customs, and is actually intended to differentiate the new arrivals from the veteran Israelis, who came

¹ Dan Miron, *Bodedim Bemoadam* (When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987), 134-135.

from Europe and who formed the founding echelon of the country. Mizrahi immigrants were perceived by the Ashkenazi Jews who received them as having an inferior and primitive culture, and were treated with an arrogance whose colonialist characteristics were clear.² As a result, socio-economic and cultural tension was created between the groups, and expressed in social gaps and a continuing sense of exclusion on the part of Mizrahim, both in the first generation of immigrants and among their children and grandchildren.

Secular-sabra-Israeli identity was created by veteran Ashkenazi immigrants³ who arrived in Israel in the framework of the early Zionist *aliyot* (immigrations) and became the dominant identity into which the new immigrants from the East were required to assimilate. During the early years of the State, their Arab identity was denied and suppressed by the society that absorbed them. Thus, for example, in the preface to his book, Yehouda Shenhav notes that:

Contrary to the norm, Grandma did not see Jews and Arabs in two categories that cancelled one another out. She continued living in Israel as a devout Jew, but never denied the identity and culture of the Arab. I do. As a child, I struggled against my parents and their culture, which I perceived as a hostile Arab culture [...] despite the fact that my Mizrahiness and that of my family very much concerned

² Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Hama'avak Hamizrahi Beisrael: Beyn Dikui Le-Shihzur, Beyn Hizdahut Le-Alternativa 2003-1948* (The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel: Between Oppression and Liberation, Identification and Alternative 1948-2003). (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004); Batya Shimony, *Al Saf Hageula: Sipur Hama'abara Dor Rishon Vesheni* (On the Threshold of Redemption: The Story of the Ma'abara, First and Second Generation. (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2008).

³ See: Oz Almog. *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

me, I didn't give it any freedom. For me, it was not a successful entry ticket into Israeliness.⁴

The gaps and tensions between the two groups are clearly apparent in everything that has to do with the Holocaust discourse in Israel. Until the nineteen eighties, Mizrahim were largely absent from the public and historical consciousness of the Holocaust, which was perceived as the exclusive trauma of European Jews. The Mizrahim themselves were also alienated from the story of the Holocaust. Until the nineteen sixties, they saw the Holocaust as the "day of mourning" of the *Ashkenazim*. Thus, for example, Balfour Hakak relates the following in the introduction to the booklet "Holocaust in the East": "The street gang counselor related that on Holocaust Day, as he approached his charges, he heard them whispering: 'Guys, be sad today, the counselor has Holocaust Day today'."⁵

The relationship between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim created a conflict between the hegemonic identity, in which the Holocaust was a dominant factor, and the identity of the Mizrahi minority, which occupies a marginal position in society, and which seeks to break through to the center by means of the very same factor, the Holocaust. Shimon Adaf ⁶ points to fact that Mizrahim have been pushed out of collective Israeli identity:

The new myth is a nightmare—the Holocaust of European Jewry. The perfect cross for the perfect victim, one whose cruelty is nothing but an act of self-defense. Therefore, he

⁴ Shenhav, Yehouda, *Yehudim-Aravim, Leumiut, Dat Veetniut* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), published as *The Arab Jews - A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). This quote appears only in the Hebrew original of the book on page 11. (translated by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir).

⁵ Balfour Hakak, *Shoah Bamizrah*. (Holocaust in the East), (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1981) p. 1. (translated by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir).

⁶ An Israeli poet and author, a native of Sderot (a town in southern Israel).

can also protest all the problems that disturb him, including the nagging, irritating question: **and what about the sectors of society whose years of struggle for identity drove them out from under the wings of the myth? What of the segments of the population who are not gathered there due to the absence of an appropriate genetic lineage?**⁷

This troubling question was answered in two ways in Israeli society. According to a study by Hanna Yablonka, policy makers were also bothered by this question, specifically by the destructive potential of the alienated position of the Mizrahim towards Ashkenazim due to the perception of the Holocaust as a dominant factor of identity. As a result, beginning in the nineteen sixties, and increasingly in the eighties, an institutionalized process that sought to gather the Mizrahim under the "wings of the myth" was initiated, and transformed the Holocaust from a dividing factor into a uniting one. Throughout these years, school curricula were intensified and emphasis was placed on transmitting the Holocaust story as a story about all Jews, and not as a story about the Jews of Europe only. Every student now became a potential victim, which allowed everyone to identify with the story of the Holocaust. Since the mid-nineteen eighties, the process of bequeathing the Holocaust myth has been considerably strengthened, as reflected in trips to Poland. Anthropologist Jackie Feldman interprets these journeys as modern pilgrimages that aim to strengthen the memory of the Holocaust as a central memory in the ethos of the civil religion of youth. Participants in the trips go through the experience of

⁷ Shimon Adaf, "*Hashoah Bere'i Hasifrut Hamizrahit*" (The Holocaust in the Mirror of Mizrahi Literature), *Yediot Ahronot* 19/4/2004. Emphasis mine. (translated by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir)

victims, becoming victim-winners who "re-immigrate" to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel); thus they collectively repeat the experience of Holocaust survivors and continue the journey to Israel as witnesses, reinforcing in this way the narrative according to which a strong Israel is the ultimate answer to the Holocaust. We can learn about the success of this process from a 2008 study conducted by Yair Auron (2010) among Jewish students, which examined the relationship between subjects' identity and various events of Jewish and Israeli history. Mizrahi students expressed the highest degree of agreement with the question "Should every Jew see himself as a Holocaust survivor?."

The institutional response to the exclusion of Mizrahim from the Holocaust story was, then, to "brand" the Holocaust onto Israeli DNA, as Yablonka⁸ puts it, in order to unite the factions, a move which has been successful from the dominant point of view. How did the Mizrahim themselves respond to this process? Here we arrive at the second answer to the same question - **what about the segments of the population that are not gathered into the myth due to a lack of suitable genetic lineage?**"⁹

As we shall see, the broad public identification with the Holocaust narrative as a unifying narrative is markedly different from the responses found in the literature of the second generation of Mizrahi immigrants. As mentioned, this is a literary generation with shared biographical and poetic characteristics. From a biographical perspective, they were mainly born in the nineteen sixties, the children of Mizrahi families, who grew up in peripheral neighborhoods populated by new immigrants, whose fundamental childhood and adolescent

⁸ Hanna Yablonka, *Harchek Mehamesila, Hamizrahim Vehashoah* (Off the Beaten Track- The Mizrahim and the Shoah). (Tel Aviv: Miskal-Yedioth Ahronoth Books, 2008). final chapter, "Tzrivat Hazikaron" (The Branding of Memory).

⁹ Shimon Adaf, "Hashoah Bere'i Hasifrut Hamizrahit" Emphasis mine. (translated by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir)

experience was one of exclusion and marginality relative to the Israeli cultural, social, and economic center. The mid-nineteen nineties saw an increasing preoccupation with the subject of the Holocaust among this group. This obsessive preoccupation corresponds to and stems from the general activity in Israeli society from the mid-nineteen eighties aimed at preserving the memory of the Holocaust and turning it into an active agent in shaping the unifying consciousness of Israeli identity. Despite the considerable success of these activities, the literary corpus also testifies to a growing breach between the various factions of Israeli society, a breach expressed all the more forcefully in everything connected to the use of Holocaust memory.

In the writings of these authors, among them Kobi Oz, Dudu Busi, Yossi Avni-Levy, Yossi Sucari, Haim Sabato, and Herzl and Balfour Hakak, two prominent trends are evident. The first trend, the more minor one, is one of total identification with the Holocaust narrative and its application to Mizrahim as a disciplining framework of their identity and their belonging to the Israeli ethos. The second, more dominant, trend reflects a dual stance of identification and yearning for a unifying narrative alongside intense feelings of rejection and anger. These writers expose the full dimensions of the identity crisis that began with the absorption policy of the nineteen fifties and the suppression of their parents' identities.¹⁰ Actually, it is possible to see the use of the unifying discourse of the Holocaust as a sophisticated expression of the oppressive policies that operated in the nineteen fifties through the melting pot model. In the first years of statehood, immigrants were required to assimilate into the indigenous sabra elitist model, while suppressing their cultural heritage of the

¹⁰ For a discussion of the identity crisis of the first generation of *Mizrahi* immigrants as it appears in literature, see Batya Shimony, *Al Saf Hageula*.

Mizrahi diaspora. On the other hand, beginning in the nineteen eighties, they were required to identify themselves with the ultimate victim, which had acquired a sacred status in the Jewish ethos, a fact that facilitated easier and more immediate identification. The new model— of identification with the victim—goes far in explaining the extreme positions expressed in the works of this generation.

As mentioned above, it is possible to identify two extreme approaches to the shaping of Holocaust memory in the Mizrahi literature of the second generation. The first is characterized by a naive internalization of the unifying Holocaust discourse, while the second trend reflects, using grotesque "mimicry," an ambivalent position regarding the memory of the Holocaust in Israel: adopting the victim's narrative while simultaneously rejecting it. At the margins of this trend is an even more sharply critical approach that compares the absorption of Mizrahi Jews to the Holocaust. The process described here has become increasingly strong since the nineteen eighties, reaching its peak in the first decade of the current millennium.

The position of naive identification is very common among the general public, and appears in a minor way in literature. Two of its most prominent representatives are Balfour and Herzl Hakak, identical twins, poets and writers. One of the most remarkable features of the story of these two writers is the construction of their personal biography as a national biography anchored in central Zionist symbols. Thus, for example, they tell of the circumstances of their birth: "Herzl and Balfour Hakak were born in Baghdad three weeks before independence was declared by David Ben-Gurion. They were born to a father who was active in the Zionist underground in Iraq. Their father, Ezra, chose to

give his twins symbolic names that are connected in terms of meaning: Herzl dreamed of getting the charter, and Balfour was the one who gave the charter."¹¹ From here on, the symbolic plot of their lives unfolds, inextricably connected to the pogroms and the Holocaust. Only after they were grown did the children learn of the tragic event that had befallen the family, the mother's two brothers were killed in the *farhud*.¹² Following the disclosure of the secret, they recall, "we went on a journey to collect evidence. We read material about that period, the period of the Second World War, the period of the Holocaust in Europe, and found that this Holocaust had reverberated into Baghdad."¹³ The story is shaped by a pattern common in the fiction of members of the second-generation of the Holocaust—the murder of the sons, the birth of twins as compensation, years of silencing, the accidental exposure of the secret, which opens the Pandora's box of memories, the desperate attempt of the second generation to collect evidence and reveal the past, and the impact of trauma on family life.¹⁴

It should be noted that the identification of the *farhud* as an integral part of the Holocaust is not accepted by all scholars of the history of the Jews of Baghdad. Thus, for example, Yehouda Shenhav notes that: "the use of the Holocaust and the explicit analogy between the *farhud* and the extermination of

¹¹ From the twins' internet site: <http://www.hakak-twins.com/articles/bikur2.asp>. Accessed 1.2.2012. It is worth mentioning that the date of the site's launching is an historic one, November 29, as they note on the homepage. On the site, they provide symbolic-mythical interpretations of the names of all their family members, including their wives and children.

¹² Pogroms directed against the Jews of Baghdad during the Shavuot holiday, June 1-2, 1941. Over the course of two days, approximately two hundred Jews were murdered, two thousand were injured, and Jewish homes and businesses were looted. Police intervention stopped the slaughter. The murdered were buried in a mass grave in Baghdad.

¹³ The description is taken from the article "*Shoat Yehudai Iraq Beshiratenu: Hafarhud*" (The Holocaust of Iraqi Jews in our Poetry: the *Farhud*), by Herzl and Balfour Hakak. <http://www.emago.co.il/Editor/literature-2313.htm>. Accessed 1.2.2012.

¹⁴ On this model, see Iris Milner, *Kirey Avar: Biographia, Zehut Vezikaron Besiporet Hador Hasheni* (Past Present: Biography, Identity and Memory in Second Generation Literature). (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003).

Jews in Europe are not accidental. They express the deep desire of the Mizrahim to take part in Israeli civil religion, of which the Holocaust is a critical element." He adds that: "The realms of memory of Zionist historiography contain the *farhud* as another chapter embedded in the story 'from Holocaust to revival' and reaffirm its structure. [...] The long and complex history of Jewish-Muslim relations in Iraq is reduced to a 'poster' description of two days in June in 1941."¹⁵

Balfour Hakak explicitly declares his affiliation with this trend with the publication of his booklet "*Shoah Bamizrah*" (Holocaust in the East).¹⁶ By means of this booklet, he accepts the trend of unification that education and humanities professionals sought to promote through the initiative of the Ministry of Education. Its stated purpose is to provide to educators a collection of literary works that describe Mizrahi Jewry during the Holocaust as an effective tool with which to introduce the unifying discourse, and to demonstrate to their students that the Holocaust was shared by Mizrahi Jews and that Jews have one destiny. The bulk of the booklet contains testimonies and poems that address the *farhud*.¹⁷ The two brothers wrote poems about the events of the *farhud* and their uncles, and some of these are included in the booklet. Herzl Hakak writes: "I see them through dusty eyelashes/They are reading the Book of Ruth with their grandfather. They kiss his hand/noble grandfather. The peppermint on his fingers is strong. They remember the laboratory and the modern literature in their room./They do not know that at this moment the fire was touching everything." And "my eyelashes recoil and I see them

¹⁵ Yehouda Shenhav. *Yehudim-Aravim, Leumiut, Dat Veetniut*, 154-155. The quotation was translated from the Hebrew version by Hannah Komy Ofir.

¹⁶ Balfour Hakak. *Shoah Bamizrah*.

¹⁷ Many of these were written by the Hakak brothers.

wallowing/trembling/Jewish brothers/Dying as Jews." And "their learned Muslim friend who borrowed beautiful books at the club/their friend stabbed them with the dagger."¹⁸ Hakak mentions the educated background of both the killers and the victims as though to emphasize the fact that this is not a backward, primitive culture (as Arab countries and their cultures were once perceived to be in Israel), but rather a modern and progressive country (like Germany) that was affected by pro-Nazi propaganda. The educated Muslim friend murdered them because he was influenced by pro-Nazi brainwashing, and for no other reason.

The second trend in Mizrahi writing about the Holocaust is a trend of grotesque identification, mimicry tangled with rage and pain. This approach can be found in later writings, beginning from the mid-nineteen nineties, and especially at the beginning of the current millennium. During this period, a number of texts written by authors with shared biographical characteristics appeared almost simultaneously. Writers such as Dudu Busi, Kobi Oz, Yossi Avni-Levi, Yosi Sucari, and others belong to the second generation of the great immigration of the nineteen fifties. Their parents came to Israel with the establishment of the State from Arab and North African countries. When they first arrived, these immigrants were housed in transit camps or peripheral neighborhoods. Some transit camps later became development towns in Israel's periphery. The second generation grew up in these peripheral areas as Israel's cultural "Others." Their worldview was shaped from within the awareness of their marginality as compared to the elitist, Ashkenazi Israel. These biographical elements are of great significance with regard to the shaping of Holocaust memory in their work.

¹⁸ Balfour Hakak, *Shoah Bamizrah*, 26-27. Translated by Hannah Komy Ofir.

As children in the school system, they absorbed the Israeli Holocaust experience, whether in history, literature, and homeroom lessons, or in official school ceremonies. The narrative of the Holocaust and its victims became an obligatory narrative of identification and pushed aside all another stories, including, for example, the legacy of their parents. The Holocaust's prestige in Israeli society grew, turning it into powerful symbolic capital during these years. In Baruch Kimmerling's words, "the private and collective mark of Cain of the survivor has been removed, because, indeed, 'the whole people' is required to see itself as a Holocaust survivor [...]. Moreover, to be a survivor or the relative of a Holocaust survivor, or a member of the 'second generation' of Holocaust victims [...] became a source of prestige and power in Israeli society."¹⁹

At the beginning of the millennium, a group of texts that share similar poetic characteristics appeared at around the same time. *Avaryan Tza'atzua* (Petty Hoodlum),²⁰ *Doda Farhuma Lo Hayta Zona* (Auntie Farhuma Wasn't a Whore after All),²¹ "Anus Mundi,"²² and *Pereh Atzil* (Nobel Savage)²³ all tell the story of the social margins of the State of Israel. One of the important features of these texts is expressed in the fact that the events described in them take place in the here and now of Israeli society. All of the protagonists are first- and second-generation Mizrahim who live in the periphery and are struggling for visibility in Israeli society. The stories address Holocaust consciousness against the background of fundamental questions of identity and status, of hegemony

¹⁹ Baruch Kimmerling, *Mehagrim, Mityashvim, Yelidim* (Immigrants, Settlers and Natives: The Israeli State and Society between Cultural Pluralism and Cultural War) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004).

²⁰ Kobi Oz, *Avaryan Tza'atzua* (Petty Hoodlum), (Tel Aviv: Keshet, 2002).

²¹ Yossi Avni. *Doda Farhuma Lo Hayta Zona* (Auntie Farhuma Wasn't a Whore After All). (Tel Aviv: Am Oved. 2002).

²² Yoav Alvin. "Anus Mundi". in *Marak* (Soup), (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002).

²³ Dudu Busi. *Pereh Atzil* (Nobel Savage), (Jerusalem: Keter, 2003). (All the translations from this book that appear in this article are by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir.)

as opposed to Otherness and marginality. The aim of the authors is not to describe the Holocaust itself, the events that occurred on European soil in the nineteen forties, but rather Israeli society's use of Holocaust memory, and ways in which Holocaust consciousness is absorbed and processed as a high-status phenomenon by Mizrahi protagonists.

As a result of this, in all the works mentioned here, there is a recurring motif of transformation or over-identification of one of the protagonists with the Holocaust and survivor status. But as the plot progresses, it turns out that this is not about emotional empathy, but is rather a distorted complex that originates in the sin of the nineteen fifties. Let me illustrate this by means of a brief discussion of this subject in *Pereh Atzil*. This novel describes the character of Yomtov the painter, a member of the second generation of immigrants from Iraq. Yomtov, who grew up and lived all his life in the *Hatikva* neighborhood of Tel Aviv, obsessively draws Holocaust pictures. In the process, he is drawn into the experience, and fully identifies with the subjects of his paintings. He stops eating, loses a great deal of weight, to the point where he resembles a *musselmann*, and wears pajamas that resemble prison garb. At the peak of this process, he tries to inhale gas, and explains to his son: "True, it's not Zyklon, but somehow I had to feel the feeling they felt in the last moments. I had to!" (269). At the end of the book, his son says: "If some miracle doesn't happen, I'm almost convinced that he won't survive this Holocaust. The Nazis, may their name and memory be erased, can take credit for another dead Jew after sixty years. The first Iraqi victim" (270). It is interesting to note that Busi chose to describe in detail precisely the grotesque Holocaust mimicry of Yomtov, a man whose biography has nothing to do with the Holocaust, and not the second

generation trauma of another character in the story, Sima the Greek, whose parents survived the death camps.

Yomtov's Holocaust obsession is the result of an acute identity crisis that dates back to his parents' loss of identity. The author draws an analogy between two identity rituals that Yomtov conducts. One ceremony symbolizes his sanctification of the Holocaust: "at the start of the work day, he lit six memorial candles in memory of the six million, and then he worked for hours and hours while sad Yiddish melodies emerged from his portable stereo tape recorder" (43). When he paints, his head is shaven, and he wears striped pajamas onto which he has sewn a yellow star and eats little in order to feel the hunger suffered by the Jews in the ghetto.²⁴ The second ceremony is designed to purge the severe feelings of guilt that weigh on his conscience due to his repudiation of his Iraqi father and his legacy. This ceremony, too, is accompanied by a series of actions that recur weekly: Yomtov travels to his father's grave, lies down on it, "and plays for his father the best songs of Filfel Gourgy and Milo Hamama, which Lilo loved so much, and which Yomtov really despised" (61). Then he goes home, takes a shower, "closes all the windows, turns off the light and lights sixty-one Sabbath candles, a candle for each year his father lived. While the room is entirely bathed in candle light, Yomtov sits on the floor, Gourgy and Hamana playing alternately in the background, and puts away three or four shots of Smirnoff" (ibid.).

The protagonist is subject to the performance of two compulsive rituals at regular intervals, the first daily, the second weekly. In both, he mimics a series of regular and banal actions that reconstruct familiar patterns of

²⁴ Yehiel Dinur, *Ka Tzetnik*, wrote his stories immersed in the Auschwitz experience—wearing his prisoner's suit, and not eating or showering for many days.

identity—on the one hand the identity of a survivor, and on the other, Mizrahi identity. This is a series of actions and gestures that are written on the body. Through them he seeks to establish a sustainable identity for himself, but because the rituals actually mark two identities that cancel each other out, the failure to establish an identity is exposed. Moreover, the two rituals are actually mourning rituals, a fact that casts the protagonist's attempt to establish his identity by performing them in an ironic light. In the end, the protagonist comes to a dead end, a total loss of identity, causing him to eventually attempt suicide.

Another aspect of this literature reflects a more extreme and one-dimensional approach according to which the difficult absorption experienced by the Mizrahim upon their arrival in Israel, an experience that erased their identity and consciousness, is analogous to the Holocaust that destroyed the Jews of Europe. An example of this position, consciously militant and political, is a poem written by Claris Harbon, a Mizrahi activist. In her poetry, she scathingly employs terminology associated with the Holocaust to describe the fate of Mizrahi Jews in Israel. Thus concludes the poem addressed to "my brothers, the Ashkenazim":

I do not forgive you
Not yet
Look in the mirror and discover how ugly you are
You greedy ones, how you took us like sheep to the slaughter
To the ringworm, the poverty, dependence, to the evacuation of our homes
To our Holocaust—the Arab-Jews
[...]
You Holocaust deniers

When will my grandmother have a number on her arm, too?²⁵

The motivation for the writing of second-generation Mizrahim is not an attempt to deal with the Holocaust as a traumatic event, to grasp and understand this exceptional event, or to formulate new ways of writing that are appropriate for dealing with it, but rather an ongoing identity crisis that dates back to the nineteen fifties. The myth of the Holocaust is digested by these writers in order to dismantle it by trivializing Holocaust symbols and linking them to everyday situations through a grotesque, carnivalistic shaping that allows for the exchange of identities and the mixing of sacred and profane, and by shaping the Holocaust as an acquired rather than a genetic element of identity.²⁶

As a generational phenomenon, we can mark here a change from the previous identity struggle of the Mizrahim. The literature of the first-generation is characterized by the shaping of the trauma of immigration to Israel; at its center stands the sense of exclusion and marginality experienced by immigrants upon their arrival to Israel and the transit camps. This was seen as literature of protest against discrimination. The second generation attacks the central stronghold of the dominant identity, the myth of the Holocaust, and while it embraces it as a means of transformation and repetition, it also dismantles it

²⁵ Claris Harbon. "*Hazaaka—lo Od*" (The Cry—No More). *Hakivun Mizrah*. 18 (2009), 20. Translated by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir.

²⁶ This aspect appears mainly in Avni (2002), where the author describes the reading obsession of the narrator protagonist from the day he first discovered the Holocaust. He reads intensively even books on the Holocaust not meant for his age, and thus acquires a great deal of knowledge that allows him to be part of horrible world to which he yearns to belong. On the other hand, as mentioned above, this is a world that rejects him and marks him as a "*vilde hayeh*" (in Yiddish, "wild animal"), which is what he is called by the grocer, a Holocaust survivor called Zona Kusman, whose name carries a clear and coarse sexual connotation in Hebrew, and is intended to put her character in a grotesque light and to desecrate the sanctity of her being a Holocaust survivor with impurity and vulgarity (ibid., 105).

from the inside and desecrates it in a carnivalistic manner. These two opposing movements, appropriation and dismantling, which exist reciprocally, exemplify the position of Mizrahi Jews on the map of Israeli identity, inside and out at one and the same time.