

# ‘Eyb, Ḥeshumah, Infajrat Qunbula: Towards a History of Mizrahim and Arabic

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## Alif – ḤABIBAH

[...] And some go from Iraq to America  
And some from Lebanon to Nicosia  
And some from Israel to Palestine  
And some from Israel to Israel to Israel to Israel  
And finding naught, for Israel in Israel is absent  
You, who wanted to be free in your home  
Prepare the vessels of exile [...]

Am I not a man robbed of words  
Expelled but not in exile  
But in my country, among my people  
Interred but not in the desert  
In the redundant is my coffin  
An exile not away [...]

For now, it's true, I'd rather inhabit a word  
Another home does not exist yet  
I doubt it ever did  
Within my Hebrewness my blindness my Arabness  
For it is music played out only in the mind  
My lips are moving  
But my voice is not heard  
For it's the language in which the great did curse and love  
From which I was expelled to redeem Hebrew-speak-Hebrew  
In spite of all this the Orient now cries out

(from "Man Walking," Ḥaviva Pedaya, *Ḥadarim* 11, Summer 1994)

## Bā' – Agayoff

In one of the opening scenes of the film *Everlasting Joy or the Life and Adventures of B. Spinoza as Reported by His Vigilant Neighbors (Osher le-lo Gevul)* Dir. Yigal Bursztyn, 1996), about the life of philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), we witness a neighbors' quarrel, typical of an early 1990s Israeli Mizrahi slum (already invaded by all sorts of students and artists, now the local Mizrahim's neighbors). The quarrel is between Jacky (Danny Steg) and Agayoff (Yigal Adika). Jacky, a drummer, has just finished making out with Ulla (Shira Ferber), a Swedish tourist he's picked up somewhere. He is now playing his drums, waking up Agayoff, who was trying to sleep in the adjacent apartment after a long night at work. While Agayoff is shouting, Jacky explains to Ulla in poor Israeli English: "That's Agayoff, he Iraqi, he work for SHaBaK, translate for interrogators from Arabic to Hebrew." What has Agayoff to do with Arabic, the viewer may immediately wonder. Agayoff is a Bukharian name, not Iraqi, and Bukharians do not speak Arabic... This sense of curiosity fades as the chubby, short, dark, back-bent Agayoff, who has a fat wife who begets him many children emerges as a sort of generic Mizrahi, whose cultural geography extends from Afghanistan to Iraq; from Morocco to who knows where. Thus he obviously speaks Arabic. Agayoff is merely an interpreter in the Secret Service. To make sure this point is not lost on us, the camera pans over to the next roof, where two "real" SHaBaK agents are seated -- white, slim, wearing sunglasses -- keeping watch over Baruch (the emphasis in pronunciation is on the first syllable – in Ashkenazi pronunciation) Spinoza's home, wherein Spinoza (Ariel Zilber) is writing a short article about man and his happiness.

In the following scene, one of the SHaBaK agents draws a pistol and shoots, from an immense distance, at the hand of an Arab about to throw a grenade. He accurately hits the base of the Arab's hand. Later on Agayoff finds himself in danger, in the occupied territories. His car hits a bed of nails (a Palestinian ambush) and he is forced to pull over to replace a tire. Masked men approach, Agayoff draws a pistol, the pistol won't fire, and soon the masked men are bending over him with stones and knives in their hands. At this point Agayoff begins a monologue in poor and convoluted Arabic, alternating with equally poor Hebrew. He produces a pay slip and addresses one of the men in ski-masks: "Shūf! Shūf!" (*i.e.* "Look," or, if you prefer, "See"), "You think this is easy, that I get paid anything for all these interrogations?" Agayoff's speech is compelling. He moves on to complain about life, and diapers, till at last the Arab relents and relinquishes the murder plan. The next scene shows the masked men crouching together under Agayoff's wreck of a car, fixing his tire.

Agayoff, the Mizrahi, is in a blurry no man's land, somewhere between the space called Ashkenazim, and the one called Palestinians. The two are well defined: a grenade against a pistol. The Palestinian grenade poses a very palpable threat. The Ashkenazi pistol fires from a

distance and makes an accurate effective hit, whereas Agayoff's pistol won't fire; there's a malfunction. Agayoff's life is saved by his very moving speech that transports both him and the Palestinians from the "national" situation -- which posits them as enemies -- into a class situation, wherein, at least apparently, both are on the same side. No matter what language he speaks, Agayoff is compelling when he waves the pay slip and says "Look, I'm also screwed." Agayoff delivers his poorly articulated monologue in a patched-up language, the Arab-Hebrew / Hebrew-Arab monologue most appropriate as illustration of the relation of Mizrahim to Arabic, and Arabic's relation to them. Supposedly, it's the Arabic that saves Agayoff's life. On the other hand, it is due to the Arabic that he has to perform "This shitty job." Agayoff, the Arab-Jew, who is Hebrew-Arab, finds himself in a foggy zone in between the two languages: Hebrew on one side, and Arabic on the other. In the dominant centers of these two languages are Ashkenazim and Palestinians respectively, both speaking clearly and grammatically, while Agayoff is a lame speaker in both, and appears to be aimlessly wandering in that zone, where the history of these languages has kept him stuck ever since 1948.

This zone, and in particular the travels of Mizrahim within it are the subject of this short article about the history of Mizrahim and the Arabic. This article proposes that such a zone exists, is "alive," and has a history. It also wishes to demonstrate that Mizrahim's relations with the Arabic language are as problematic as their relations with the Arabs, perhaps even more so. One may assume, indeed many do, that such a history does not exist, that there is no need to write the history of the relations of the Mizrahim with the Arabic language, because the Jews of Arab countries, with their migration to Israel, migrated also from Arabic to Hebrew, thus ending this linguistic aspect of their history. This article differs, and aims to show that the Mizrahim's relations with the Arabic language -- unlike those of Israelis with the Arabic language -- are an important, central aspect of the Mizrahim's cultural history, a history still waiting to be written.<sup>1</sup> I will not present here a referenced documentation for this history, only seek room for it, highlight its problematics, and formulate a preliminary validation, in the hope that all this may be used in the future as a frame for a wider discussion. The validation I propose is neither continuous nor coherent, nor does it add up to a full picture. It is but the means through which I wish to demonstrate the existence of such a history. The different stories which comprise this article can therefore be likened to roof-tiles which only partly cover the roof of a house. Some are adjacent, some overlap, all touch each other. I use Ḥaviva Pedaya's poem, "Man Walking" (see above) as a roadmap of sorts, and would like to have it serve as outline for what follows.

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<sup>1</sup> Many aspects of this mutual history are introduced by the short overview by Raymond Scheindlin, "Merchants and intellectuals, rabbis and poets; Judeo-Arabic culture in the golden age of Islam", in: David Biale (ed.) *Cultures of the Jews. A New History*, New York 2002, pp. 313-186.

**Tā'** -- "I shall write it in the language of Ishmael too, in Arabic" [from: Salmon ben Yeruḥam's *Sefer Milḥamot ha-Shem* (*The Book of the Wars of God*, 10<sup>th</sup> century).

Thus, "in the language of Ishmael too," did the Jews of the Muslim-Arab region write over many a long century. It is almost superfluous to mention here the great philosophical, polemical, literary and halakhic works that inhabited the Arabic language, were nourished by it, and, at times, nourished it as well. It is almost superfluous to go over the immense debt of Hebrew grammar and grammarians to the busy Arab grammarians who surrounded them. Words such as kitāb (book), šarḥ (translation), and tafsīr (interpretation), were naturalized in the Hebrew vocabulary, just as Jews were naturalized in the Arabic languages of their various locations, from the outer edge of Iran to Andalusia. Behind those words stood great names such as Sa'īd al-Fayyūmī, Sa'adya Ga'on, Baḥya Ibn Paquda, al-Maymūnī, Yehuda ha-Levi, and a long line of authors, some more celebrated than others. The same goes for the translation of work from Arabic into Hebrew. People such as the members of the Ibn Tibbon family, who lived on the borders of Ashkenaz and translated such works as *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn* (*The Guide of the Perplexed*, hebr. More Nevukhim) and *Kitāb al-hidāya ilā farā'id al-qulūb* (*Guide to the Commandments of the Hearts*, hebr. Ḥovot ha-Levavot). for the benefit of Arabic-ignorant Ashkenazim won eternal fame in the world of Jewish creation. And we talk not merely of the distant past. At the end of the 19th Century, and in the early 20th Century, Ben Ish Ḥai, Ḥakham Josef Ḥayyim (1832-1904) wrote many essays in Arabic, and even prepared various Tiqqunim for women whose command of Hebrew was limited. In his book *Leshon Ḥakhamim*, e.g., we find various Tiqqunim for women who have violated the Rules of Niddah, where the prayers and utterances are presented in Arabic. The last, I believe, of this glorious tradition, Rabbi Josef Kafah, who translated many works into Hebrew, passed away but a few years ago. To this rich tradition one must add the documents of the Cairo Genizah, written in Jewish Arabic, a written expression of the day to day life of the Jews of Arabia. To a great degree, one can see the deluge of literary works, newspapers, and other writings published in modern Arabic and in Arabic script as the modern day-heirs to these traditions, both religious and non-religious. Such publications began to appear by the end of the 19th Century, at the very same time that modern Arabic was born. Jews studied it in modern schools. With caution, one should mention also those who Judaized Arabic not just by using it in a pronounced Jewish context, but also by bringing Jewish traditions to the world of Islam. From among the many examples of this practice we will name just two. First is the Yemenite Ka'b al-Aḥbār, a contemporary of the prophet Muḥammad, one of the first to convert to Islam, who is considered in Islam as the father of Isrā'īliyyāt, the Muslim traditions concerning the Jews. Second is Rashīd ad-Dīn, a Persian physician (1247-1318) who converted to Islam during the rule of the Mongol Ghazan Khān (died in 1304), and wrote under his patronage the great historiographic work *Jāmi' al-Tawārīḥ* (*Compendium of Histories*). In writing *The history of*

*the Jews*, Rashīd used the Muslim source, the Isā'iliyyāt, as well as Jewish sources. The Jāmi' al-Tawāriḥ was indeed composed in Persian, but the author took care to have large parts of it translated into Arabic during his lifetime.

Arabic has, therefore, lived (also) with the Jews, and the Jews lived (also) within it. Once the revivers of Hebrew showed up and determined that the very "revival" of one tongue, together with the emergence of modern Jewish nationalism, necessarily required the death of the other, the Jews of Arabia exiled Arabic and were exiled from it, and Arabic exiled / was exiled from them. The history of the Mizrahim and Arabic begins with that exile, and has existed ever since in the physical and cultural space created as a consequence of it. This space is different from other spaces created when Jews exiled / were exiled from other languages. It is different, since in the land of "living Hebrew" there were live Palestinian Arabs, and still are; It is different because Arabic surrounds Hebrew, in a geopolitical way; It is also different because of the power relations that existed, and still exist, between Hebrew speakers and speakers of Arabic - both Palestinians and Arab-Jews -- the relations of the dominating, the less dominating, the dominated, and the even more dominated. In a global context one may add that, at least in Israeli eyes, Hebrew is a Western language -- while its Semite sister is an oriental language, and therefore inferior. At the end of each line rests the simple, and cruelest truth: for the state, Arabic is the language of Arabs, and Arabs are the enemy. The very fact that with the establishment of the state Arabic was pronounced a second official state language emphasizes, beside the inferiority of Arabic, the forced disconnection of Jews from it. For the founding fathers had two groups in mind: Hebrew speaking Jews, and Arabic speaking Arabs. Nothing was supposed to exist in the middle, between the two groups, and it was in this "in-between" that Arabic speaking Jews found themselves. They broadened and redefined this "in-between" over and over again. These are some of the principal dimensions of the problematics of the question of Mizrahim and Arabic -- an essentially different issue from the relation of Jews to other languages -- and these are the principal factors in its history.

### **Tā' – Filfil and the Qur'ān**

For Mizrahim, the immediate meaning of this linguistic exile was that Arabic had to become the language of the private sphere. Hebrew is spoken outside, in the public sphere -- with the clerk, the teacher, the boss, the landlord, the doctor, the government. Arabic is spoken at home, with the parents, the relatives, the grand parents, perhaps with the neighbors as well. But this division was not absolute. The private sphere had a "public" dimension, and the public sphere had a "private" dimension. In fact, here's how it may be presented: When we sat down, at home, on Friday night, and watched "an Arabic film" with our parents, the "public" (The Israeli Broadcasting Authority in Arabic) was present in the private realm and becoming part of it; On the other hand, when we went out and sat for a *ḥaflah* with our neighbors, the private

was, and became part of the "public."

Some can recall how each year, on the eve of the blessed month of Ramadan, Israeli television used to screen a reading of passages from the Qur'ān. Even fewer are aware that those passages were read aloud by a Jewish musician, poet, and singer, Filfil al-Gorjī. Abraham Badur, who wrote about Filfil in a text that accompanied a CD of his recordings (MAGDA 2000) notes that Filfil had "a poetic talent and a blessed voice," and that "millions of viewers" in the Arab world used to listen to his Qur'ān readings. The story of Filfil's road to the IBA's Qur'ān began in radio in Baghdad. In 1950 he successfully passed screening tests to work in radio, and even got the chance to sing there, for a short while. His migration to Israel disrupted his musical career and he could no longer rely on music for a living. He worked various jobs during the day, but at night he began to shine as a singer in *ḥaflahs*. Like many other Mizrahi musicians he found a job with the Voice of Israel in Arabic, which ended up appointing him to read passages of the Qur'ān for the IBA. He died in 1983, at the age of 53, and in 2001 a CD of his songs -- *ad-dunyā farḥāna* -- was published with much help from musician Yair Dalal. Filfil's story is typical of many Mizrahi musicians, and demonstrates the harsh dilemmas that tore Mizrahi artists who created in Arabic. Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas, for example, who began their writing careers in Arabic, tell of a crisis they went through after arriving in Israel, and of the conscious decision to switch to writing in Hebrew. Dozens, possibly hundreds of other artists simply disappeared, and were forgotten. A few, such as Filfil, found room in the Arabic sectors of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, and hundreds of other instrument players and radio workers followed them. Many others moonshined in local Mizrahi *ḥaflahs*. Few writers, such as Mousa Khoury, found refuge in such places as *al-Itiḥād*, the communist party paper. Mizrahi creation in Arabic in Israel was therefore random, local, and entirely dependent on the artist's determination and his luck.

Above all else, a continuity was at work. People kept celebrating, marrying, and having children. Musicians were needed for the wedding, the bar mitzvah, the cafe, and the HFALAH. Filfil is but one case. Between the IBA in Arabic and the private *ḥaflah* in front of the house, others managed to make a living: Sami al-Maghibi, Raymond, Milu Hamama, Café Noah, Zuzu Musa and his orchestra, Faiza Rushdi, The Kuwaiti Brothers, and innumerable others whose home recordings await a redeemer. I would give much today to recall the names of the *qānūnjī* (*qānūn*-player, e.g. zither-player), the *kamānjī* (*kamān*-player, e.g. violinist), the *ʿūd*-player, and the drummer who performed in my bar mitzvah. But I have a recording on an old magnetic reel. A visitor to the Voice of Israel in Arabic who stops to chat with the Arab music archivist -- who happens to be a novelist writing in Arabic -- is destined to find a host of hidden treasures. Some recorded here, and some brought from "there." Supposedly, due to the passage of time and the forgetting of Arabic, we should have seen this culture pass away with the artists

themselves, with Filfil's death. But in the 1990s some of the space was redefined, and dressed up. The CD -- the final episode in Filfil's story, joins several small, sweet, belated victories enjoyed by such artists in recent years. Filfil was made present again in our life by Yair Dalal, a musician born in Israel. At work was, I assume, not only Dalal's desire to return to his Iraqi origins. In the background is the indirect influence of the "Globalization" of music markets in the Western world. That is to say, Filfil is now a sort of local version ("Glocal," according to the new jargon) of "world music" sold in Israel. In the same way we were recently introduced, on film, to Felix Mizrahi, the man who taught Zehava Ben to sing in Arabic, and thereby contributed to the short-lived Kulthumization of Israel (a topic that just begs to have a book written about it). In both instances, the role of creators in Arabic varies in local and world contexts. Yair Dalal with Filfil al-Gorjī, Zehava Ben with Felix Mizrahi, redefine the musical part of the cultural space of which I talk. In one corner stands a Mizrahi musician, connecting to his Arab origins in his own work, as well as in the revival of an Arab-Jewish artist of the preceding generation. In another corner stands a Mizrahi singer that sings, for the most part, in Hebrew, helped by an Arab-Jewish musician of the preceding generation to learn to sing in Arabic. In both instances the role of creators in Arabic shifts in accordance with the shifting local and international contexts. Dalal's complex political-artistic stand can only emerge in an era of a "peace process," when the Ashkenazi nature of established Israeli culture is loosened, and that culture opens up to other voices, which do indeed come from the West, but are not necessarily Western (that is why Yair Dalal's audience is also mixed). *Inta 'Omri* performed by Zehava Ben also reflects a deep change, a more local one, the Arabization of Mizrahi singing in Israel. After decades of singing in Greek (or in Hebrew Greek), in Turkish (or in Hebrew Turkish), the time has come for Mizrahi singers to sing in Arabic too, the very same Arabic they were avoiding all these years). In the 1990's we witnessed a brief (but relatively loud) wave of "whitened" Arab music, the sort of music Ashkenazim also like to hear. It is interesting to note the role played by the Mizrahim and Arabic in the case of Zehava and Phelix. Zehava reaches Umm Kulthūm (1904-1975) "via" Felix; her audience reaches Um Kulthum "via" Zehava.

Filfil Al-Gorjī's winding career, from Radio Baghdad to reading Qur'ānic passages on television, to the posthumous production of his CD, two years ago, is a good reflection of the main chapters in the history I put forward. From the point of view of the Jew who sings on the radio in Baghdad -- looking westward from the East -- the chapters after the exile from Arabic seem almost impossible: What has a Jew to do with the Qur'ān? On the other hand, from the Israeli television's point of view -- looking eastward from the West -- the reading of passages from the Qur'ān is highly plausible: Filfil knows Arabic and needs a job, so he prepared "the vessels of exile", and built another home to "inhabit a word."

## Ĝīm -- the roof's blacked-out side

One day, when I was at the end of 11th grade (in that reputable Jerusalem high-school and boarding-school about which so many articles have already been published, and some films have been made) a male and a female officer of the Intelligence Corps entered the class. The male officer, who was the younger and lower in rank, called out: "All Egyptians, Iraqis, Moroccans, etc..." (*sic*. -- I can't forget) "Out! Intelligence exams!" I did not leave the class. What did I have to do with the Intelligence Corps? But I was taken out. The officer was astounded: "What? Don't you want to join the Intelligence? Intelligence is Arabic!" "I don't know Arabic," I lied. "Never mind," said the officer, "you have the ear." (Someone later told me, and I am not sure this is accurate, that Mizrahi kids are wanted in the Intelligence Corps not only due to a knowledge of Arabic, which is no longer unique to them, but for their ability to make out linguistic nuances when they listen to Arabs – for “the ear”).

"An ear." If the meaning of the exile from Arabic was that a person only uses it in particular contexts (such as the private sphere), it also carried this meaning: that Arabic was exiled to particular body parts -- the ear, as well as the eye. And that's what we did in the most private section of the public sphere in Israel -- we listened to Arabs.

This chapter too begins after 1948, and just as in the former stage, the use of Arabic is the axis upon which a historian will find both continuity and rupture. As Gil Eyal has demonstrated recently (*Theory and Criticism* 20, pp. 137-164), a need to update the ranks of Israel's Intelligence community arose after 1948. If during the "pre-state" days, the “Mista'arvim” (who were mostly Ashkenazi) were enough to understand goings-on in the neighboring Palestinian village, after 1948 a larger and more sophisticated body was needed to listen and to observe happenings in Arab societies more complex and larger than the village (which probably no longer existed). With this in mind, an entire establishment was created in Israel whose occupation was the knowledge of Arabic. It was headed by the chiefs of Intelligence, and later by the chief (Ashkenazi) orientalist in academia. At the bottom were Mizrahim, reading, listening. In the entire public sphere in Israel Jews were forbidden to be Arab. The Intelligence Corps, its various branches, was the place where a Mizrahi could continue using his Arabic -- that is, “continue” being Arab, licensed by the state of Israel. Here Arabic was an occupation, a chance for a job, a chance for promotion; and paradoxically, a chance to be Israeli. Thus our first generation joined the Intelligence, and the Mossad, and other authorities that yearned for Arab speakers to rule the Palestinian population. And we did all sorts of things there, not just heroic operations like that of Eli Cohen, who arrived in Israel an Egyptian, and was asked to become a Syrian. Uncle Nājī, for example, a tender man who taught English in Baghdad, spent years sitting at the post office reading letters in Arabic that came out of and into Israel. He did not write the letters, he just read them. There were those who sat in the transition camps and

reported to government bosses about the atmosphere in the camps -- this too required Arabic. Uncle Ḥabīb made a career with the Income Tax extracting taxes from Palestinians. (At the office they called him "Uri"; at home he was "Habib" again). Others were city governors in the occupied territories, Mossad agents, Secret Service agents, HQ officers in the Military Administration, and later in the Occupation administration in the Territories. The Arabic language was the thread connecting all these occupations.

An important part of this cultural history was played by the teachers of Arabic, another important Mizrahi occupation which only appeared to be part of the education system. The Arabic teacher was sometimes the only Mizrahi among the teachers. This, combined with the "inferior" subject s/he taught, made Arabic class at school a class one could afford to disturb, a subject one could afford to fail. Moreover, sometimes there was shame in being good at Arabic at school. Only not for the Arabic teachers, at first educated men who came from "there," then their daughters (the sons joined the Intelligence Corps) who graduated from university with a B.A. in Arabic, and went on to teach and fight with naughty pupils. The Arabic language was the most practical thing one could learn in high school -- that is, if you weren't assigned to a mechanics school. The professional infrastructure for Intelligence-men-to-be was already laid out in junior high. Arabic textbooks attest to that. If you look at the Arabic textbook for the 7th and 8th grades, by Shlomo Alon and Yeḥyā Dehān, the very first pages will reveal brief passages about *Infajarat qunbula* (*A bomb exploded*), or *Helikūbtar min Tīrāz "Sikurski"* (*A Sikurski type Helicopter*). No special intelligence is needed to figure out what these particular words – and not, say, poetry by Nizār Qabbānī, are doing in a textbook for 12-year-olds. When I talk to the child I used to be, who read those words and was too shy to ask the teacher (An Iraqi woman, like so many of them) to translate a al-Naẓm al-Jazlī song he'd heard at home, I tell him: "Now you can not understand, Ḥabībī, what these words are doing here. But when you grow up, and get a job somewhere, and they'll call you Abū Shawkī,' or 'Captain Yossi,' or Kamāl Amīn Thābit,' then you'll understand." It is by pure error that the book is entitled "An Introduction to the Literary Arabic Language"; it should have been entitled "An Introduction to the Security Arabic Language." Agayoff, from the Spinoza film, is just a caricature of this story. He is presented in the film as Ashkenazim might have seen him, and the Arabic teacher, all these years. In life it was more serious, and much sadder. As in the story of music, here too, one can never estimate the amount of literary work in Arabic written by Mizrahim in Israel and never published. Nor can one estimate the amount of literary work that would have been written had writers not ceased to write, and began instead to read and listen. The Security Arabic is the Arabic-speaking Jew's "vessels of exile," and the Ministry of Security is the "other home" he set up to reside in a word, as the poem suggests. The story of his relations, as well as those of his sons and daughters with this Arabic - the major part of which still lies in total obscurity - is an important dimension of the cultural history proposed here.

This chapter too, as a part of the cultural history of Mizrahim, was redefined in the 1990s, although in contrast to the case of music, this story is much harsher. At the heights of the orientalist establishment in Israel Mizrahim have a place among others, and Arabic is not only a Security language, but a literary language as well. People such as Professors Shmuel Moreh and Sasson Somekh and others translated poetry and Arab literature and publish them in Hebrew. A story by Samir Naqqash (1938-2004), one of the writers who insist on writing in Arabic, was translated into and published in Hebrew, and Naqqash, like Filfil Al-Gorjī has gained some acclaim.

### **Ḥā' - the neighbor's roof**

Instead of spreading the story further I wish to turn my gaze now to the other side of the history of Mizrahim and Arabic. The story is shorter there; right now it looks as though there's not much to tell, but without examining what took place in the Arab world this story will be incomplete.

Unlike Filfil al-Gorjī, some "remained" there. Those who refused the exile into Hebrew and chose to keep singing in the Arab world, in what became known as "across the border." The two examples that stand out are the Egyptian Layla Mourad, and the Iraqi Salima Mourad (Pasha). Both became mega-stars in the Arab countries. Their careers began soaring before 1948, and by that time they already had a lot to lose by coming "here." But although a physical exile did not occur in their case, another exile did take place. If the price in Israel was the loss of being Arab, the price in the Arab world was the loss of being Jewish. True, no one forgot that Layla and Salima were Jews. But the fact was blurred as much as possible. Arab nationalists -- and this should come as no surprise -- behave just like the twin brothers of Jewish nationalists. Perhaps for this reason -- and that's the story's literary aspect -- Jewish authors who write in Arabic, like Samir Naqqash, Morris Shams, Naḥum Sha'ashu'a, and many others, are not well known, and are not published in the Arab world. Aḥmed Sawssan, the Jewish intellectual who converted to Islam, whose life story inspired Shimon Ballas' novel *Outcast*, published several books, but only after, and only because, he had converted to Islam. Here too, in order to inhabit a word, "another home" had to be constructed. How ironic that Layla Mourad converted to Islam in order to keep singing in Egypt, and Filfil al-Gorjī made a living by reading the Koran in order to go on singing in Arabic in Israel.

### **Ḥā' -- towards a history**

As a chapter in the history of Mizrahim, the history of the space that was created in the expanding and contracting zone between Mizrahim and Arabic holds a special charm: If you think of it carefully you'll find it has both rupture and continuity with the Arab-Jewish past; On the other hand, within it, Mizrahim play a pronouncedly active role. All this in spite of the

cultural vise applied to them from both sides. Perhaps it is here, of all places, that the historian may find a basis for the writing of a Mizrahi “non-lachrymose” History (to use a term coined in 1928 by historian Salo Baron). The "usual" terms -- "disenfranchised," "oppression," "victims," and recently also "resistance" and "subversive" -- which commonly appear in the historiography of Mizrahim, take on a more complex and ironic appearance when applied in the context I have tried to present here. Such a history of the Arabic language forces us to look at the entire Arabic-speaking space, not solely at "Israeli Society" as the exclusive theater wherein Mizrahi history takes place.