**The Ecology of Pornographic Literature in Israel in the 1960s**

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**Introduction**

Performed by the Tarnegolim troupe in the early 1960s, Haim Hefer’s song *Shir Hashehuna* (Neighborhood Song) caused public outrage and in turn, a temporary ban on its broadcasting. The song dealt with the behavioral codes of youths from wealthy or “good” families and included references to violence and sexuality (“she’s developing up front/she’s already wearing it”). This outrage was an expression of the moral discourse, if not the moral panic, surrounding the behavior of youths in the young state of Israel, which paralleled the moral discourse in many western countries at the time.

One of the major manifestations of this moral discourse was the debate on the obscene literature’s consumer culture which in turn, instigated episodes of “moral panic.” The term “obscene literature” was used in reference to paperbacks containing pornographic content, which were either penned by Israelis or imported from abroad and translated (partly) into Hebrew. The attitude toward this literature and its readers is epitomized in education scholar Malka Kaneti’s firm contention that “the use of pornographic content is limited to moral outlaws and perverts.” The aim of this article is to determine the main attribute of this literature’s consumer culture and the discourse surrounding it in the second decade of the state of Israel (henceforth “second decade”).

In what follows, I will address the various aspects of this literature’s origins and the means of its production and consumption, while focusing mainly on the official debate on Israeli pornographic literature and the struggle against it within the framework of the moral discourse on 1960s youth culture. This paper is divided into four parts. The first provides historical, methodological, conceptual, content-related, and cultural-social background on the focal point of this study, i.e. the atmosphere of moral panic that evolved in Israel concerning the consumption of pornographic literature. In addition, it discusses the relevant characteristics of Israeli culture and society in the 1960s, the term “moral panic” as a methodological framework, the linkage between “moral panic” and the development of youth culture in the West and in Israel, and definitions of the term “pornographic literature” within the broader context of popular literature. The second part deals with the literature’s consumer culture, the cultural profile of its producers, consumers, and where it was consumed, and its structural and visual features. The third part deals with these paperback’s contents, that is, their textual-aesthetic and political-ethical underpinnings. As a case study, I conduct an in-depth analysis of the “Stalag” fiction sub-genre in an attempt to understand the motivation behind its writing and the secret behind its allure. This reading is conducted against the context of the discussion on popular fiction in the previous section. In the fourth section, I illustrate the discourse pertaining to these paperbacks, their authorship, and consumption by way of protocols from the Committee for the War on the Distribution of Obscene Literature, which operated between 1964 and 1967. I describe the deliberations within this committee and the practices it developed to evaluate each book’s moral standard. To conclude, I attempt to situate the findings of this study within Israel’s shifting cultural climate prior to the Six Day War.

**Background**

**Major cultural and societal trends in Israel of the Second Decade**

In the Israeli historiography there is near consensus regarding the prolific success, achievement, and development during the second decade (1958-1967), compared to the hardships of the first decade. These accounts highlight the consolidation of Israeli society, its emergence from the previous era, which was dominated by the spirit of the Yishuv—a spirit of pioneering and the realization of the Zionist ideal, the abandonment of patterns associated with the founding of the state, the weakening of the ideological imperative, and the exposure to the western world.

Thus, the second decade came to be perceived as the decade in which “the Israelis began to ‘bourgeoisify,’” in Anat Hellman’s words, at least in the country’s central region. After years of political, economic, and social turbulence and instability, Israel experienced accelerated economic growth and a gradual shift toward becoming a market economy, achieved relatively homogenic demographic and educational status, opened up to the West, and was subject to a rapidly growing process of Americanization in its cultural and societal spheres. Like the European bourgeoisie, Israel’s new middle-class based its cultural values on traditional, pioneering principles, but at the same time adopted bourgeois social and economic practices.

Concurrent with their interest in key factors involved in the formation of the dominant social classes, today the primary focus of many scholars is on the perpetrators of the budding social and cultural unrest in the 1960s: young immigrants from Asian and African countries, and more relevant for the purposes of this study, Israeli born youths whose parents were born either in Europe or in the pre-state Jewish Yishuv. The latter sought to detach themselves from the Zionist-pioneering ideology of their parents’ generation by consuming all forms of western culture. The discourse of “moral panic” developed around these two groups.

**Methodological-historical background: “Moral panic” pertaining to “perverse” youth cultures in Israel and the West**

To describe the reaction to the pornographic literature and its consumer culture among youths, I will employ the term “moral panic,” which was coined by British communication scholar Stanley Cohen in the context of his work on youth cultures and the responses to them in 1970s crisis-ridden England. The term plays a key role in conclusions drawn by Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University based on their analysis of English youth cultures on the eve of Margaret Thatcher’s election as Prime Minister and the first years of her term. The media and dominant groups in capitalist society, whose role is to establish or tighten social supervision, identify, in their own words, “perverse,” “sick,” “odd,” and “problematic” elements, mainly among rebellious youths who challenge society’s traditional values and its supervising agencies. First, the struggle against these youths involves their negative labeling (“punks,” “espresso generation,” “rail sitters,” in Israel; “Teddy boys,” “skin heads,” and “rockers” in England). In the second stage, the media, in coordination with the state’s social supervising organizations, adopt this labeling, thereby tarnishing the youths’ public image. In turn, they create “moral panic” among social groups, liberal and conservative, by warning them against the youths’ propensity to harm the society’s values and threaten its stability. Next, the state and its social supervising agents form mechanisms designed to restrain and supervise these youths in legal, educational, and welfare frameworks. Finally, once the panic subsides, certain values of the rebellious youth’s culture infiltrate the dominant culture and generate gradual change in the societal values.

The term “teenagers” which carried negative connotations, appeared in the United States during World War II. The new consumer habits adopted by these youths were disseminated throughout the world by American soldiers as well as through demographic and social changes—the rise in childbirth (“baby boom”) and the post-war standard of living, and the creation of the consumer culture. Thus, during the 1950s and early 1960s, the emerging rebellious youth cultures caused moral panic in the “parents’ culture”—a term that relates both to biological parents and to the dominant social and bureaucratic systems. In Britain, the Angry Young Men, Teddy Boys, and Mods, were collectively referred to as “folk devils.” In Germany, the *Halbstarke* were often described as Hitler Youth successors; in France it was youth groups, such as *Zazou*, *Yé-yé*, or *Blouson noir* who were perceived as *enfants terribles*. In Czechoslovakia, the *Mánička*; in Argentina, the *Cordobazo*; in Mexico, the *La Onda*; in Israel, the “salon society” and “espresso generation,” and in China of the “cultural revolution,” it was in fact youths who were recruited to fight their parents’ cultural “perversions.” Notwithstanding distinguishing local factors, all of these sub-cultures emerged amidst the “baby-boomer” generation that rebelled against their parents’ conservative culture. Apart from the Chinese, they worshiped American and British consumer culture. As is well known, this process peaked at the end of the 1960s.

Music played a central role in this defiant culture with lyrics expressing its underlying angst in songs such as The Who’s *My Generation*, Bob Dylan’s *Like a Rolling Stone*, and Serge Gainsbourg’s *Les Sucettes*. In Israel, the Tarnegolim’s *Shir Hashehuna* was one of the most blatant expressions of the discourse surrounding “perverse” youths, and although banned for broadcast due to sexual innuendo, its lyrics spoke to a loud, violent, and Westernized consumer youth that defied its parents’ generation and its sexual puritanism.

In the early days of the second decade “bourgeoisifying” (Hellman) Israel, in which former youth movement and Palmach members had matured into the new, technocratic, consumerist, and cosmopolitical middle-class, islets of social and cultural unrest germinated. These pockets of discontent were manifested in various aspects of the phenomenon of “uncommitted youth”: a massive departure from youth movements, the consumption of pop music records and “advanced” technology, such as transistor radios and motorbikes, the adoption of visual expressions of the counterculture in art and cinema, provocative fashion, civic organizing (“salon society”), and the violence of youths from “good” homes. Like in the US, Europe, and Britain, the response to these phenomena was moral discourse, which labeled these practices as anti-social behavior, that is, behavior that transgresses accepted cultural codes. If in other western societies these phenomena pertained mainly to the “perverse” behavior of non-productive groups—youths who had been expelled from the education system at a young age, drifters, sick and unemployed individuals, and those incapable or unwilling to work—in 1960s Israel, they related to youths who were not committed to the social-Zionist ethos. The establishment and the dominant social groups—European-born Israelis or Sabras of European origin—expressed growing concern in face of the younger generation’s lack of commitment to all aspects of the Zionist enterprise. Moreover, they believed that the youth’s violent behavioral patterns and pursuance of “entertainment and fun” would lead the state toward a dangerous threshold. The moral panic was supported by the media (particularly *Haolam Haze* weekly).

In their seminal articles, Ben Aharon and Dan Horowitz expressed the view that the “end of the revolution” and the tendency toward and desire for normalcy carried with them hope (Horowitz) but also apprehension (Ben Aharon); whereas, in his “espresso generation” speech of 1958, Smilansky cautioned against the weakening of the pioneering spirit among the youth and their desire for a comfortable, uncommitted life. The fear was that the worshipping of technology and foreign cultures would come at the expense of worshipping the previous generation’s values and Zionism. Like in the first decade of the state of Israel, in the second as well, appeals were made in articles, books, and op-eds by public figures, and by Knesset members, ministers, journalists and ordinary citizens for the youth’s recruitment to national enterprises and the enforcement of discipline lest the Zionist project and the young state face demise. The novelty in the moral panic of the second decade was that the [claimed] increase in violent crimes and sexual crimes, and the expansion of delinquent and corrupting sexual-moral behavior, occurred within an atmosphere of relative economic fortitude and political and social calm. The parents’ generation gave these phenomena, i.e. “the recreational-activities [...] of an aggressive nature whose main purpose was to satisfy sadistic or masochistic impulses” (in educator Carl Frankenstein’s words) and those who participated in them, derogatory names, such as “salon culture,” “obscene literature,” “skidders,” “golden youths,” “espresso generation,” “rail sitters,” “emigrants,” and “Tango and Shake dancers.” From their point of view, these youths symbolized the “beginning of the end.” The Sabra slang was perceived as a manifestation of the youths’ struggle against cultural correctness, the imperatives of etiquette and solemnity, and their parents’ generation’s commitment to the state and its values. The increase in crime among youths from “good” homes was “hair-raising” (Aharon Yadlin), evidence of the demise not only of the “succeeding generation,” but also of flaws in the parents’ generation, which in the eyes of many public figures were even more alarming.

In the following pages, I will deal with the ecology of Israeli pornographic literature in the 1960s by way of adopting Avidav Lipsker’s historiographic model which he coined “ecology of literature.” This model treats literary texts as items within a broad cultural system that is not necessarily literary, but also visual, historical, and cultural. The ecological discourse on literature aims to describe the writer’s literary competency as an “ecological niche,” in other words, as a form of qualification uniquely tailored to the cultural conditions in which they write and create literary texts. It does not provide a comprehensive account of the literary processes we seek to comprehend, but rather aims to assemble under its wings a line of discourses from different areas “and create a more encompassing narrative, which will be able to encase them” within the cultural ecosystem. Alongside Lipsker (who draws largely on literary critic Israel Cohen), one should note the way in which literature and language scholar Alexander Beecroft employs this term. Beecroft does not adhere only to the systems of literary production and consumption and its poetic components, but rather relates to all the cultural systems surrounding the entire circulation of literature: readers’ expectations and behavioral patterns, sites of distribution and readership, and the establishment’s attitude toward the literary discourse in the context of the conditions of the nation, state, religion, economy, technology, and political domain.

In the following section, the ecology of pornographic literature in Israel of the 1960s will emerge by way of exploring the struggle against this literature, the discourse that developed around it in the framework of the moral discourse on youth culture in the 1960s, the literature’s structural and production-related characteristics, and mainly in terms of the analytical dimension that will quote and illuminate the semantic, linguistic, and poetic linkage to the literature and culture of the time.

**Sources for discussion on Israeli pornographic literature**

The few studies on Israeli “obscene” paperbacks in the 1960s and the struggle against them deal mainly with the books’ content and with the impact of translations from English into Hebrew on the genre. The studies deal less with the genre’s productive aspect, its writers and distributors, and the paperbacks’ consumer culture. In terms of the writers and publishers, Nitsa Ben-Ari, Rachel Weissbrod, Motti Neiger, Amit Pinchevski, and Roy Brand rely mainly on later-date interviews with prominent figures in the field, such as publishers Uri Sheleg and Ezra Narkiss. In addition, they rely on innuendo that appeared on the website of Eli Eshed, an independent scholar of the Israeli paperback genre. In contrast, the current article widens the scope in terms of methodology and content. Methodologically, it draws on court rulings in suits brought against against paperback producers, reports from the Committee for the War Against the Distribution of Obscene Literature, police and Ministry of Education reports found in the state archives, and newspaper articles. In terms of content, this study explores the phenomenon in the conceptual-historical framework of the “moral panic” instigated by the Israeli youth culture, and this culture’s place among similar youth cultures in the West during the same period. In addition, this paper deals with the consumption culture of obscene literature—who read the paperbacks and where, the readers’ response, and sales data—in an attempt to locate more reliable sources. Finally, this paper attempts to explain the phenomenon of the Stalag genre, beyond Pinchevski and Brand’s readings, that links Israeli pornographic literature to the Eichmann trial. By way of these trajectories, this work aims to shed light on a phenomenon which so far has not been studied comprehensively and in-depth against the context of Israeli popular culture in the 1960s.

**What is pornographic literature?**

In the modern scholarship, pornography is defined in terms of its role or in terms of the social regulation it is subject to. Following Lacan, Slavoj Žižek argues that the perversion of pornography is not constituted in the fact that “it goes all the way and displays dirty details,” but rather in that it “forces the viewer to occupy a perverse position,” to identify with the perverse act. Žižek’s approach will be employed in the discussion on Stalag literature. David Loth defines pornography in terms of social supervision: “Anything that has been defined as such by the authorities or an influential group and is persecuted based on the argument that it is a corrupting and value-defiling factor.” This traditional view, which sees in pornography a representation of the policing of sexual representations in the service of the public morality and reflects the dispute on where to draw the line between pornography and art, is relevant to debates within the Israeli public sphere and public committees’ activities pertaining to the consumption of obscene literature. Sociologist... defines a pornographic book in terms of its role “as a book that explicitly intends for the reader to engage in masturbation. Pornographic texts spur and sexually arouse a viewer, the lonely male. Their main purpose is to arouse and generate sexual desire in individuals without partners.” In contrast, Nitsa Ben-Ari sways toward the traditional approach: “The definitions of pornography are contingent on time and place. The distinction between erotic literature and pornography depends on subjective evaluation and is not functional.” Rachel Weissbrod argues that “pornographic literature is characterized by its exploitation of different models to in some way forge a connection between descriptions of sexual acts and the breaching of various taboos.” Feminist definitions view anything that impinges upon women’s rights as pornography, and pornographic literature as “literature written for the purpose of arousing sexual drives and self-gratification.” In this vein, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin view the the contents of pornographic literature the graphic and explicitly sexual subjugation of women by means of images and/or words. This last definition “calls attention to the implied equation of women=sex and views pornography as a central discourse of male dominance.” At a later stage, I will discuss legal definitions and those employed by Israeli committees that debated specific books, both of which are aligned with Loth’s definition. Robert Darnton notes that different definitions for prohibited or pornographic literature reflect different attitudes toward the severity of the publication on the state and among the people. According to Darnton, the police defined “bad literature” as obscene literature that damages the society’s aesthetic morality, and as a result the authorities confiscated the books. In contrast, by coining this literature “mundane philosophical literature” or “philosophical writings,” its distributors were in fact referring to any publication, including pornography, that opposed the elements of the old regime. Darnton underscores this literature’s folkloristic foundation, and argues that action taken against it reflected the old regime’s fear of opinionated women and of any threat to the aesthetic French society. Free love, free thought, female *philosophe*, the fantasies that appeared in gossip narratives, songs, tunes, printed matter, and jokes terrified the regime. “They transported the readers to grey areas in which they could contemplate a different social order,” Darnton claims. His argument was later echoed in the Committee for War on the Distribution of Obscene Literature—“After all, we are a cultured, moral, and restrained nation”—whose members, representatives of enforcement authorities in Israel, assimilate the position of the “old regime” in France beforehand.

**Popular literature, bestsellers, and pornography**

As mentioned, the research on the phenomenon of paperback pornographic literature in the 1960s was conducted mainly in the broader context of pornographic literature and its tradition in the Hebrew culture. Likewise, the research so far has framed it as obscene literature, thereby emulating the establishment’s position against it, and analyzing it in terms of the argument that it is a “corrupting and value-debasing factor” (Ben-Ari 23-25). In addition, the research is based on the essentialist definition of pornography as an inferior literature “intended to be read with one hand” (Albroni), literature for the gratification of the desires, needs, and aspirations of the male sex. Ben-Ari reviews the history of the struggle against obscene literature. Her study effectively describes the production domain of pornographic literature in the context of its historical moment (Ben-Ari, Weissbrod, Eshed), and from the vantage point and terminology of its contemporaries— “pocket-books” or “mini books” by the publishers and readers, and “obscene publications” and “prohibited literature” by the establishment. Pornography is a modern phenomenon (171), and from the beginning of the twentieth century, was perceived as a marker of an uncivilized society (179). The establishment’s normative approach saw this literature as reflecting a moral defect or psychological abnormality in its readers. The police were of the opinion that it was related to a tendency toward sexual delinquency and disruption of the public order (180 in relation to England in the mid twentieth century). The legal system perceived it as a source of corruption and exclusion from the righteous path, a source of social violence (Smith, 180).

To discuss the significance of the pornographic literature phenomenon, especially in view of its wide distribution, and to situate it in the framework of contemplating bestselling popular literature, with emphasis on its wide distribution in the 1960s. Although these books were recognized in public as pulp fiction and shared its circumstances of production, distribution, consumption, and that the establishment considered them obscene literature that did not pass through the book industry’s formal channels, the issue was undoubtedly their popular readership, given their continuously growing market. Note: today alternative distribution channels are more prominent on internet sites and by independent publishers. How can the widespread readership reflect the cultural undercurrents explored and is it capable of reflecting pornographic literature in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and do we aim to delegate to popular culture the trait of reflecting cultural trends.

To answer these questions, the sources for our approach in the following discussion on the social and political contexts within which the pornographic literature evolved in this period is based are first, the popular literature system, in particular, the pulp fiction sub-system. The innovation here is the perception of the system as a market and of the books as merchandise, especially the bestseller phenomenon. Second, the discussion is grounded in approaches rooted in postmodernism and cultural studies, which are indifferent to the distinction between high and low, do not contain a normative baseline, and refer to genres of high and low literature as a single entity.

**Popular literature.** The point of departure to this literature is the popular literature system in terms of its relative position within the literary system—note: Ben-Ari and others based their studies on these definitions. In the classic definition of literature’s polysystem theory, the term popular literature refers to a sub-system within literature’s polysystem (Even Zohar) whose products are situated in the cultural system’s margins and considered antithetical to the formal and canonical culture. Given this marginal position, these products lack prestige and are rejected by the official institutions governing the channels of cultural production. (According to Zohar Shavit, the terms popular and non-canonical are identical). The popular system, which is also referred to as the non-canonical in terms of this theory, is inherently inferior to the canonical literature in aspects of content, style, and readership given that it is a sub, rather than primary and productive, system. The non-canonical literature sub-system is stratified as well and contains both center and margins, which separate between high-level and low-level popular commodities. In other words, products considered valuable or, alternatively, lacking cultural or literary value. (Even Zohar’s theory does not deal with the market economy but rather with the dynamics of the repertoire of literary devices).

Indeed, popular literature constitutes an essential foundation of counterculture due to its marginal position. By not being obligated to aesthetic and ethical expectations, by renouncing them, and by crossing the boundaries of what is acceptable in high culture (Schickmanter, 31), popular literature presents the opposite of good taste and/or norms of cultural thought and can be radical and without boundaries.

The current discourse on popular literature particularly emphasizes the latter point, in terms of which it refers to popular literature as subjugated to the economic logic of supply and demand, much more so than to creative impulse. Given that (160) the productive field of popular literature is completely enmeshed in commercial considerations and not in the writer’s vision, structural or creative innovation is exempt from the constraints and restraints of good taste. Furthermore, because popular literature is reliant on the reader audience that consumes it, it is essentially capable of expressing the conscious undercurrents of the masses teeming beneath the official culture’s surface.

These foundations, which characterize the popular sphere of literary consumption, spawned the term bestseller, which epitomizes perception of the book as a consumer product. Botting notes that “bestseller” is not only a particular sub-category in popular literature, but rather that it carries additional distinctive characteristics and qualities, first and foremost of which is the appearance on bestseller lists (Botting 160). This is a literature that is aware of the commodities market, audience expectations, and its images, aspirations, and ways of life. A bestselling book is measured in terms of sales, and although the term “bestseller” marks an extraordinary number of sales, this is not the only criterion; it is a genre literature and the book is perceived as a commodity and consumer product. A bestseller epitomizes and optimizes the basic logic of popular literature—in popular literature the writing is professionalized and authors function in the framework of an understanding that they are part of, not above, commercial exchange relations. The concept of bestsellers contains within a world of merchandise, production, and consumption, a world that operates in terms of quantifiable measures and measures of cost and profit, which in turn, serve as ammunition against aesthetic and critical scrutiny (Botting 161). Indeed, the discussion on bestsellers is not grounded in an aesthetic-literary discourse.

The contemporary concepts employed in literary criticism do not maintain a distinguishing line between the high and the low; the current approaches are neither normative nor do they determine tastes or morality, and they are indifferent to the distinction between high and low culture (Hume 1984; Jameson, 2006; McHale, 2015; Vint, 2014; Rowland, 2001; Glover and McCracken, 2012; Bradford, 2015; Illouz, 2016). These approaches refute the incubation of the principle of high aesthetics or high literary value. Instead, they present a more complex, non-hierarchal, and interactive approach to the relationships between different types of writing. They do not associate popular genres with mass culture or the proletariat but rather with the fact that they enable a new space for imagination, negotiation, and opposition (Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*). High and low cultures are part of one system and the relationships between them are founded on interdependence.

According to Botting (161), high culture defines itself in terms of the threat posed by mass culture and popular culture (distinguish between them in Wieseltier book), the latter of which is always described as a sort of “deluge” or “monster” that jeopardizes the more sophisticated and humanistic values and practices. Botting quotes Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel who argue that the high culture is nearly as formulary as the cultural forms it criticizes in which power is always ascribed to the elite as opposed to the borrowed mass production of uniformity, distorted perceptions of reality, tainted sensitivity, destruction of the past, promotion of mediocrity, and escapism. The criticized objects change but the criticism is the same.

In actuality, the relationship between high and low culture is one of interdependency in which there is a dynamic exchange in the demarcating of the boundaries between them. In principle, high literature needs low literature to secure its supremacy.

**Cultural Studies.** From the vantage point of cultural studies, high and low culture are not essentialist terms but rather exist only in the form of a relationship (25). Cutler Shershow quotes Jameson (*The Political Unconscious* 85-87) in reference to the idea that what is defined as popular culture serves as a methodological imperative aimed at rejuvenating the suffocated “high” culture. Popular culture is the voice of that which is most often stifled, marginalized, silenced, unheard, or re-appropriated, in its turn, by the hegemonic culture—in fact, rescued by it (30). Shershow argues further that elitist or popular culture do not exist as autonomic or self-containing entities. All types of representation and taste infiltrate one another and consolidate into one field (43). Thus, scholarship should not aggrandize the popular voice, but rather chart the history of the social structure in which the popular has always existed (43). Cultural distinction, moreover, is not a tendency into which it is easy to sink as if it was substantial and extant—it is not. Shershow maintains that a popular subculture is the voice of the cultural opposition of what was tainted by history, the discourse, and power (41)—and this is the subject of cultural studies. He argues that popular culture reflects the equivocal power relations and the symmetry that the contradictory modes, high and low, construct and reflect upon one another (42).

Over the past decades, studies on popular literature have included mainstream and pulp fiction genres in this category. From the viewpoint of the commodification of the book and with emphasis on the serial production of genre literature, the difference between mainstream literature and pulp fiction is that the latter radicalizes the commercial aspect of the book, which is “hastily written for money and is perceived as being of poor quality” (Humble, 15). Moreover, given that it sways toward more sensationalist genres, such as pornography and crime stories, it is also considered unrespectable. In popular literature genres “the types of narrative, such as the detective novel, adventure story, sex novel, science fiction, even spy novel” (Nigel Cross quoted in Nichola Humble, 29). Similarly, Catherine Hume, Botting. (note: Smith describes soft cover or paperback literature in the US from the 1930s to the 1950s, in terms very similar to Israel, including a struggle against the establishment 153-55) (Note: Botting’s article reviews the development of the book’s professionalization and commercialization in the nineteenth century, in which its commodification accelerated).

The term “pulp fiction” emerged at a time when there was an impenetrable barrier between official and unofficial literatures. From its inception, pulp fiction was intended as a bestseller in the literal sense, and this was its sole purpose. Like bestsellers, in the domain of pulp fiction, the book is judged by its cover, which in turn, constitutes its primary sales point. If in popular literature the author is significant to a degree, mainly as marking a reading experience that the readers have come to expect, in the framework of pulp fiction system, the book’s title or the name of the writer are not consigned to memory either because they are not worthy of mentioning, and therefore pseudonyms can be used. Pulp fiction is a literary genre, the writer constitutes no more than a guarantee for the provision of a certain type of commercial product. In the bestseller case, the author’s name appears prominently on the cover to attract an audience that expects a particular reading experience. According to Botting, for literature with a wide readership, whether bestseller or pulp fiction, which is evaluated in terms of sales rather than content, large sales numbers are highly significant (165). He writes:

Botting 165

**Pulp Fiction.** The case of pulp fiction further radicalizes the market logic and the perception of the book as a commercial object. Pulp fiction is in its own right, a sub-system with the sub-system of popular literature and culture. It appeals to an audience different from that of the popular system, an audience defined as lowbrow (Humble). Nichola Humble distinguishes between reading audiences—

Within popular literature, pulp is a distinctive category, as Smith defines it: “English source” (156-57). Contrary to readers of bestsellers and popular literature, pulp fiction readers are subjected to public-institutional denouncement. However, in constituting a distinctive and unapologetic sphere of consumer expression that inherently subverts the mainstream culture, constitutes in its very existence evidence of opposition to the official culture’s imperative. Humble’s conclusions challenge the common perception of the reader as passive and lacking reflexivity. While acknowledging that popular culture is usually associated with danger, corruption, loss of control (86), and that the reader is imagined as a licentious loner, Humble argues that the “popular reader’s” lived experience points to something different: a more sophisticated, sensitive, critical, and distinctive connection with the text. This connection, she adds is manifested not from a standpoint of loneliness but rather from a position within an active community of readers.

While pulp fiction, as Smith argues, is indeed not an authentic expression of the mass culture, it is also not a manipulation of the masses: pulp fiction is a site of cultural struggle. Smith bases her argument on Danning’s pioneering work on pulp fiction in which he demonstrated that it was read disproportionately by young people, working classes, and immigrants. Accordingly, Danning concludes, this literature is inevitably entwined in class politics, and it is in these terms that it manages to circumvent the official culture and its demands. For these readers, who are unwittingly in a constant struggle against the establishment, pulp fiction is a sphere of distraction. These readers are, in Humbles terms, lowbrows. Humble distinguishes between three categories of readers: highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow. She argues that following Marxist literary theorists who viewed popular literature as the lower classes’ reading materials, since the 1960s lowbrow literature has received serious scholarly attention (92). Lowbrow cultural products and the people who enjoy and appreciate them are devalued (94) and perceived as lower and less serious.

The existence of a popular literature system parallel to the official system is indicative of the civil culture’s free market in which the individual is free to select the cultural products they consume. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu presents the mechanisms that activate taste as a social orientation that leads members of different social strata to social spaces as a way to separate them from “lower” strata. Although protectors of the threshold of high culture despise low culture, in the twentieth century, according to Humble, popular culture distinguished itself not as an antithesis of highbrow culture but rather despite it. The highbrow who reads high literature appoints them self as guardian of the threshold threatened by pulp fiction—radio, cinema, television, pulp, and magazine (note: also against the invasion of the middlebrow into the territory of superior taste and value). Bourdieu argues that middlebrow cultural products are not legitimate not because of their internal aesthetic characteristics, or lack thereof, but rather because they accommodate the middlebrow’s taste. Humble distinguishes between high and middle; the highbrow reader identifies their self as belonging to the intellectual class and as being under constant attack by the consumer culture, mass culture. The middle, in contrast, is less identified ...

Note Smith 143: pulp fiction developed from the nineteenth century as a genre of crime stories, the lives of bandits and criminals. The writers were anonymous and wrote under a single pseudonym. They wrote according to criteria of speed, quantity, and formulation with emphasis on maintaining the formula, a type of production line of written materials. This world of cheap excitement was completely set off from the world of the middle classes’ sentimental literature and from the highbrow literature studied in college.

**Pornography.** The standard profile of pornography is of a formulaic text written by an anonymous writer, serially produced as a consumer product lacking individuality or uniqueness. To adopt the terms used so far, we can say that pornographic literature is a form of underground/subversive bestsellers. The bestseller is a form of popular literature with a middlebrow audience, while pulp fiction appeals to a lowbrow audience given that it challenges the guardians of the threshold of hegemonic values in the domains of morality and sex, which are contingent on context and time (Smith 153).

Kathryn Hume classifies types of literature according to their relationship to reality—note four types. She classifies pornography in the literature of illusion category—together with the romance novel, the pastoral, and the... According to Hume, contemporary pornography, like all literature of illusion, invites its readers to escape reality by offering them content that is demonstratively detached from reality and that does not respond to its limitations. Pornographic literature often presents taboos and repressed practices, which although components of sexuality, remain on the level of fantasy. Thus, the fact that pronographic literature is denounced by the critics is evident in that do not subject it to sophisticated analysis or literary criticism. The resistances to the gravitational force of sex and violence are very often are grounded in the sense that this force encourages readers to sink into behavior depicted in pornography. However, as Hume notes, “very few great novels and very little didactic literature can be credited with this kind of power to influence the audience’s behavior” (59).

Note: from a contemporary and non-historicist point of view, contemplation of pornographic literature cannot be normative as obscene literature. Studies of the recent decades, particularly following the inception of neo-Marxist criticism and minority discourse, and more so the literary facts and cultural products, have taught us that looking at pornographic literature as obscene literature is an obsolete practice. Over the past decades, sex, violence, and non-conventional ideas are the benchmark of contemporary art and the critical consideration of pornography and the like is conducted from within a legitimate position. This is not to say that there is consensus on this issue—for those who are moral—or that there is not an exploitative, objectifying, and instrumental foundation to pornography. However, the label of obscene literature, as Ben-Ari and Weissbrod defined it, is a historicist label and one would be advised against employing it to avoid it in order to prevent inaccuracies. One must separate the genre itself from the way in which it is perceived in a cultural system contingent on time and space. That is, if we aim to understand the full significance of the phenomenon, we need to detach it from critical, aesthetic, and moral rationales.

In Pornography, 141. It has always been the case that the writers of pornography were denunciated as inferior, the readers as partly literate, and the texts as obscene due to their overt sexual and sensational content. Therefore, we must separate between the terms which are sometimes congruent:

Pulp fiction is defined in terms of the medium of its production and distribution, which is conducted outside the institutional and politically recognized channels, and which constitutes a type of independent corporation of the cultural machine.

Pornography is a generic definition based on the books’ content. This is, for the most part, the normative definition. From the feminist viewpoint, pornography presents a picture of domination over and oppression of women. Marcus Wood notes that “porn is about power and sex as weapons...the message of violence, control, and showing respect” (93, qtd. in Dalnape 148).

Popular literature is defined according to a relative position within the cultural system, distinct from high literature.

Obscene literature: a normative definition that is legally validated in accordance with the books’ contents, which reflect moralistic positions.

Pornography: the very same “disreputable paper backs,” as Smith (153) refers to them. In the past, these stories were considered scandalous in that they contain depictions of transgressive sub-cultures, such as criminals, juvenile delinquents, and lesbians, and that the characters were not always punished for their perversions (153).

Today, pornographic literature has transitioned from subculture to mainstream. Even if it is not appropriate for all audiences, its presence in the popular culture (cinema, television...) is unrestricted and not subject to criticism. Pornography’s current positioning in the popular culture is due to its postmodern appropriation by the highbrow culture—which became its stylistic marker and benchmark standard.

Given its content and the circumstances of its, pulp fiction is perceived in the current scholarship as a conduit to the study of popular positions.

Note: Smith describes a positive contribution of lesbian literature to the initiation of lesbian women, in that it has helped create an imaginary community of readers who share a collective sexual identity. In Israel as well, these is research on this topic—In contrast to the personal sense of sin, which could have been manipulated for political purposes. Thus, although these books may be formulaic, exploitive, and perhaps homophobic, according to personal testimonies, in the 1950s they played a significant role in the initiation of lesbians.

Post-feminist criticism on pornography views it as a decadent literature, whose sole aim is the gratification of its readers’ voyeuristic drive. Pornography in the postmodern world is a symptom of a pornographic society and as a genre, this is precisely what it is (149-150). The current postmodern world is one in which very few boundaries remain intact—a world haunted by an unrepressed drive to show all and see all—a high dose of sexuality is present at every street corner in a society in which everything is visible (Fanny Dalnape, *Phallic Eye*, 152). Dalnape also quotes Christian Gutleben (150) who argues that pornography is a culture of the obscene.

Add...

**Pornography and the modern youth culture**

The debate on the corruption of youths by pornographic literature was neither new nor unique to Israel in the 1960s. The rise of the new youth culture throughout the West at the time was supplemented by the adoption of new and “daring” sexual codes. In the US, Britain, Germany, and France, the “parents’ generation” tried to prevent what they perceived as sexual corruption and deterioration, of which one expression was the writing and consumption of popular, “low,” and erotic culture and literature, and to enforce the Victorian moral values still deeply engrained in many countries at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. In the years following World War II, the reading culture in the West and in Israel underwent significant changes: the education systems went through processes of democratization, teens and young adults became a distinctive consumer category, and technological advancements eased the process of producing popular printed materials, which in turn, made them more accessible to the general population.

The literature of cheap paperbacks, referred to as “pulp,” began flourishing in the US at the beginning of the 1950s. Although already in the 1930s, pulp fiction that dealt with science fiction had begun to be published, the genre prospered only two decades later. The content of this literature was characterized by crime, passion, and violence, and in this way dealt with the social and political concerns derived from the woman’s role and status in American society, homosexuality, communism, and the internal and external threats on the American way of life. The paperbacks were wrapped in newspaper (hence, “pulp”) and their covers featured luring illustrations, bombastic headlines, unusual fonts, and often, the image of a half-naked woman subjected to a male threat. In the US, they were sold at bus stops, supermarkets, and newsstands, and toward the end of the 1950s, even arrived in Israel, mainly in Tel Aviv.

In addition to the changes that occurred in the West, in 1960s Israel, other factors facilitated the penetration of “immoral” popular culture: ideological decline, the entrenchment of openness to American culture, and demographic changes as a result of waves of immigration from a variety of countries, which engendered a versatile and heterogenic culture. The weariness from the recruited literature and the appearance of new movements in Hebrew literature influenced the popular literature. As a result, a new reading culture of young and heterogenic readers emerged in which pornographic paperbacks constituted a commercially significant share.

Ben-Ari adds another explanation for the appearance and success of Israeli pornographic pulp fiction: During the 1950s a vacuum was created in the margins of the Hebrew culture, given the mainstream status of “Sabra puritanism,” both as image and practice. In the margins of this culture, an attempt was made to fill what was absent. According to Ben-Ari, “Due to the lack of available and accessible models, things needed to be started from the beginning, that is, to both construct or adopt repertoire models, that are in fact formulas or prescriptions, and to realize them by producing texts.” This cultural construction was implemented at the level of the word, metaphor, phrase, sentence, and in the cases of portrayals of intercourse, descriptions of the body and sexual acts, as well. Moreover, at the time, this construction could occur only in the margins of the institutionalized culture of the Hebrew book. It was only there that it was possible to build a “stratified inventory of types of erotic writing, of literary devices with different functions and in various combinations. The development of an available repertoire of models for the description of sexual attraction, intercourse, orgasm, masturbation, mature or adolescent experiences, healthy and joyful sex or perverse sex, conversation during the sexual act or after—all these could develop in a literature that did not ignore or repress them.”

In the Hebrew language and Jewish tradition, hardly any pornographic or erotic literature developed that could serve as a source of inspiration for the young Sabras, students, and soldiers who were involved in the writing and translation of obscene literature for their own pleasure and livelihood. Therefore, the formation of a Hebrew sexual repertoire in the context of 1960s relatively puritanical Israel was a complex undertaking of which one outcome was the linguistic meagerness evident in the pornographic literature discussed here and which was noted by the various committees that scrutinized and supervised its appropriateness and distribution.

**The Consumer Culture of Pornographic Books**

**The consumers: The discourse on readers’ identity, usage sites, and reading books**

Estimates regarding the identity of readers of pornographic paperbacks are often derived from rumors, prejudices, and political biases. These should be read while acknowledging the social context of the 1960s when Israeli society was experiencing a wave of criminal activity the likes of which had not been seen since the founding of the state. Associated with these criminal phenomena were youths from “good” backgrounds, that is, youths born in Europe or Israeli born youths from European backgrounds. Others who engaged in delinquent behavior were referred to as “violent criminals,” the majority of which were described as youths from Middle Eastern or African-Asian descent. This duality, of ascribing negative social phenomena to socially marginalized groups, as opposed to the fear of their “penetrating” the ruling elite, characterizes the discourse regarding consumers of pornographic literature.

In an interview given to Nitsa Ben-Ari, Ezra Narkiss said that he identified “a target audience of youths from undeveloped countries [...] for whom the mere thought of women’s bare legs was cause for arousal.” The picture arising from reports, legal committees, and newspaper articles, partly support Narkiss’s statement. The report of the Committee for Pornographic Publications argued in 1968 that “usually foreign language books do not find their way to the youths, and pornographic paperbacks in Hebrew are not distributed in large quantities” (28). “However...given the youths education and general outlooks, these stimuli [of the pornographic literature] have a severely negative emotional charge...this is true for a public in transition from a traditional society to modern society: in this kind of public...extreme positions and actions in personal and social areas may be expressed...there are ‘at risk groups’ for whom exposure to sexual stimuli may lead to momentary intensification of sexual drives and the breaching of inhibitions, which are weak to begin with especially in these groups...For other groups there presentation constitutes the symbolization of freedom of expression, and as a result, a positive emotional charge...It should be emphasized that the positive role of pornography in facilitating the sexual gratification (particularly in perverse activity) as well as the socialization of individuals in society: their becoming accustomed to stimulating situations without the immediate response of spontaneous action, and the transference of drives to ‘permitted’ channels” (36-37). It appears that in its cryptic language, the committee claims that Arab and Jews from African and Asian countries represent the majority of the consumers of this literature. The Knesset’s Committee for Internal Affairs was also of the opinion that “only a small part of the youths are healthy...and they could not be damaged with the help of pornography.” The Committee for the War on the Distribution of Obscene Literature assumed that among the readers “we have a large group that is on the threshold of criminal activity, on the verge of violent activity, aggressiveness, and sex.”

Another group with traditional values among the consumers were Arab youths, as police commander Kroati claimed in an interview to *Maariv* reporter Dov Goldstein: “Among young members of minority groups, who throughout their lives were indoctrinated with attitudes of secrecy and mysteriousness in regard to sex, and who now in the city, encounter sexual perversions more and more as a result of their seeing nude picture, bare arms...”

However, according to multiple testimonies, many of the consumers were Sabras, Israeli born from European backgrounds whose parents belonged to the middle-class. In a letter to the Minister of Education, a school janitor in Tel Aviv claimed that the students at a prestigious high school read pornographic literature in the lavatories. In a scene from a radio sketch, *The Simchon* *Family*, the father, Noah Simchon, catches his daughter Nava reading a Stalag paperback under the table during a meal. Dalia Rabikovitz wrote: “The crowds that wandered around the Van Gogh exhibit abstained at the same time from reading *I was Colonel Shultz’s Bitch*,” and critic G. Merav argued that “those who know only the twist, rock ‘n roll, and cheap cinema will eventually get to the Stalags.” Some newspapers claimed that children in elementary school aged 10-12 were among the readers.

Finally, it appears that religious youths did not abstain from browsing and perhaps even reading this literature. From a letter by a religious boy, Abraham B., it is apparent that many of his friends read the “literature we hide under our mattresses [and] have a pretty good idea about what is written in the Stalags. More than once, I have seen a teenaged boy wearing a kippah standing by a bookstand.” To summarize, while we can assume, however not unequivocally prove, that the literature was written primarily by men, Israeli born Sabras or young immigrants from European countries, their target audience was all levels of Israeli society without ethic-national distinction.

The books’ covers were an immediate attraction for the youths. The books were printed on cheap paper, with nude photographs most of which were copied from American paperbacks and magazines, alongside which was copy such as “The nakedness of life...the best of stories from the life of hum [sic]...in picture and story.” Obviously, the disclaimer “For Adults Only” appeared on every book. There was not always a connection between the book’s content and the image on its cover. Given the lack of copyright limitations, many of the covers were copied from foreign books, mainly American. The covers were purposely colorful and brash to attract youths “in terms of the stimulation of passions that guarantee thrilling experiences and the discovery of the most intimate secrets.” Occasionally, the Committee for the War on the Distribution of Obscene Literature came across books whose content was “kosher,” but whose cover promised an exhilarating experience, and vice-versa. Welk argued that they should relate to the cover and book in the same way and that they should not be considered separately. The committee’s solution was to either demand from the distributor to change the cover, or “work according to the situation in countries similar to ours...preferably that the criterion for evaluating a book be artistic ...playboy unacceptable, in nudist magazines there is no stimulation because there things are presented in a natural fashion.”

As mentioned, many of the covers were copied from similar American paperbacks or from images that appeared on movie posters. Few were designed by Israeli illustrators. Rachel Weissbrod noted that “the illustrator was usually Ariyeh Moskowitz, who illustrated many of the books published by publishers Ramdor and M. Mizrachi.” Illustrator Haim Kano also illustrated many books. In an interview with Eli Eshed, Kano recounted how he was inspired by American popular literature and B movies, which sometimes made their way to movie theaters in Israel.

Thus, in summary we can say that while the consumerist aspect of these paperbacks was a key factor in the publisher’s considerations, and in the cultural translation, both in terms of language and visuals from English to Hebrew, the publishers were aware that Israeli youths from all ethnic groups and social strata were thirsty for and open to western culture, mainly American. An interesting and important aspect that both Ben-Ari and Weissbrod underscore in their studies, but which is not the focus of this paper, is the impact of the Romance paperbacks as well as porn paperbacks on the established book market, which toward the end of the 1960s, began adopting, with caution, literature containing erotic content. Weissbrod notes that this was evident mainly in official publishers’ interest in this literature. Ben Arie also sees in the adoption of certain words from the “low pornography” genre in the “dime-novels” of established publishers proof of the practical conclusions that the established literature arrived derived from the popularity of erotic and romance paperbacks.

**The Books’ Content: Interpretation and Aesthetic, Political-Moral, and Historical-Social Aspects**

The pornographic literature of the 1960s was divided into a number of groups: Books in English that were distributed in Israel (such as the *Bordertown Lust* or *Hotrod Sinners*, which were described as having a sexual atmosphere that could “harm teenagers, mainly those who are mentally unstable”), books that were translated into Hebrew, and books written by Israelis under pseudonyms. Here we will focus on the last two types.

We will begin by saying that in the Hebrew language and Jewish tradition there was hardly any development of pornographic or erotic literature that could serve as an inspirational source for Sabras, the students and soldiers who were involved in writing and translating obscene literature for their own pleasure and livelihood. Therefore, as both Ben Ari and Ariel Hirschfeld have mentioned, the construction of a sexual repertoire in Hebrew and in the relatively puritanical Israel of the 1960s was a complex undertaking. Indeed, the linguistic sparseness is evident in the pornographic literature discussed here, and even the different committees that examined its contents recognized this.

Ben Ari distinguishes between two models in the repertoire of the erotic and pornographic books that appeared in Israel at the time. The first is positioned on the axis of “love and life,” in which sex and the joy of sex are part of life’s pleasures. The second deals with “sex and death,” in which there is no positive representation of sex and in which sadistic or sado-masochistic descriptions fill a key role and lead to violence, death, necrophilia, and physical perversions. The second genre, “sex and death,” was at the crux of debates, legal suits, and court rulings that were widely publicized in the Israeli public sphere. Those who facilitated their writing and the circumstances in which they were written are also extremely interesting.

Indeed, the booklet *In the Captivity of Nymphomaniacs* describes the recurrent sexual and physical abuse of a counselor captured by a group of lust thirsty girls in an abandoned cabin nearby a summer camp. Sexual “perversions” do not appear in the text; however sadism and extreme violence are plentiful. The sexual depictions are quite implicit: “I’m bursting for a man, Barbara! I’m bursting” (65) or “She started feeling a part of his masculinity awaken in him” (68). Concurrently, sadistic violence plays a major role when the woman is presented as violent. The violence against women in terms of which sexual penetration is often perceived as violent, is replaced here with the penetration of the male’s body by sharp and painful objects. “The two burst into the kitchen with the weapons in their hands and the sharp edges of the broken bottle was very close to Jimmy’s side (91), “Remember, I’m not holding on to this syringe just for fun. I’ll stick the needle deep inside you, just ‘ask’ for it. (109). In another instance, the tip of the needle that is about to be stuck in Jimmy’s back is described in terms of male genitals stuck into a woman’s body. “‘I’m...I’m crazy for a man, Barbara,’ Olivia whispered, her voice shaking, ‘Forget that now,’ Barbara whispered into the Blonde’s ear as she neared the point of the needle to his back, “I’m going to stick the needle in your spine right now and paralyze you for the rest of your life’ (116). It seems that what committee member Hedva Ish Shalom found more appalling than the depictions of relatively normative sexual activity was the female sadism. To compel the other committee members to support her recommendation to sue the book’s distributors, she fashioned the imaginary link between violence and sexual perversions, and sadism and public sexual intercourse.

The Stalag sub-genre developed on the fringes of the second model (“sex and death”). This was a literature that combined sadistic content with sex, violence, and Nazism. These paperbacks were written, under pseudonyms, by Israelis, including Eli Keidar and Uriel Meron, and drew special attention in the media and law enforcement agencies. Some included sadistic content, and descriptions of extreme violence and unconventional sex performed by Nazi women who sexually and physically abused British and American captives in German POW camps, or Stalags, as they were called. Others dealt with Japanese or North Korean war prisons. A small number of booklets, despite their title ‘Stalag,” dealt with Nazi Germany or post-war Germany and included portrayals of violence, however, they did not feature the combination between sex, violence, and POW camps. One can surely ascribe them to the “love and life” model, given that they included love stories seasoned with sex scenes between German officers and British secret agents, or to spy stories taking place on German soil. Still, the majority of the paperbacks that were geared toward the male audience intermixed many various influences, direct and circuitous, from rumors about the female guards in Nazi concentration camps, Ilse Koch and Irma Grese from Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen, respectively, who sexually abused prisoners, through male sexual fantasies influenced by the years-long popular German tradition referred to as *Weiberherrschaft* (female dominance), which may have infiltrated Israel as a result of the immigration from Germany in the 1930s, to American sexist magazines, such as *It’s a Man’s World* and *Man’s Story*, available at kiosks in Tel Aviv. Other influences worth noting are the films about the escape of pilots of the Allied Forces from German POW camps, the facts of the Eichmann trial and the trials of concentration camp guards held at the time in Germany, and finally, as I will demonstrate later, the writers’ masculine experiences in the Israeli army. The Stalag sub-genre in Israel was part of a wider phenomenon in the western world, that “took refuge” in the shadows of the cold war and the fear of nuclear disaster. The atmosphere in the West, including Israel, at the time when most of the Stalag paperbacks were published, was of a lifting of the taboo on discourse regarding Nazi Germany. The paranoia in the West, mainly during the Cuba crisis in 1962, spawned a popular horror literature and many other popular publications that combined portrayals of sex and sadism, mostly on part of the Communists, Russians, and Chinese. I will expand upon these influences at a later stage.

The presence of American culture in Israel began in the 1950s and increased in the 1960s. The Stalag literature in Israel was influenced by men’s magazines in the US, whose stories featured violence, sadism, and sex. Part of the characters wore Nazi uniforms and filled the role of concentration camp guards. The Israeli Stalags’ illustrations were copied from the American (see example above, *The Breakout from the Nazi Bitch Camp* in the book series *True Men Stories* was meticulously copied by an Israeli designer for *Stalag 13*). The most popular book in the series, *I was Colonel Shultz’s Private Bitch*, of which the identities of its authors has not been ascertained till today, is a prominent, bold, and provocative example of this literature. Finally, additional influence and inspiration for texts in which women, sexuality, and violence are foregrounded are rooted in the writers’ experiences in the Israeli army. These writers simulated in the Stalag books a world of images and expressions from their experience in their army units. I will elaborate on this point later.

According to Eli Eshed, the plot of *I was Colonel Shultz’s Private Bitch* was different from any “other Stalag ever written, and in fact transformed the classic Stalag story, that predominantly deals with the abuse of men by a group of dominant women, from which it was derived. This story is also a lot more realistic. It describes a Nazi officer’s sadistic sexual abuse of a young French woman in occupied France. This abuse includes forcing her to participate in horrendous orgies described in unprecedented detail in the literature in Hebrew, shackling her permanently to an iron link chain, and imprisoning her with the colonel’s ferocious dog. The colonel treats her as a ‘bitch’ in every sense of the word. Even as the abuse continues, the woman gives birth to the colonel’s child. The book’s final chapters describe the woman’s shocking act of revenge when she captures the colonel by herself after searching for him after the war, and repaying him with the same cruelty with which he treated her. She imprisons him, shackles him in iron chains, like he did to her many months before, and finally kills him.”

“‘Now look here, Shultz my friend,’ I said, ‘after all, you managed to turn me into your bitch’...Shultz looked at me with eyes that seemed to scatter horror, but before he could say a word, I lunged on him, I put my teeth on his throat and bit it, as if I was a dog out to kill a man. I felt the blood bursting out of the artery in his neck and filling my mouth, but for some reason the blood tasted heavenly...I waved my whip. ‘Bark,’ I commanded him in German, ‘Bark! Now!’ The colonel did not hesitate and opened his mouth barking pitiful barks” (*I was Colonel Shultz’s Private Bitch*...). The representations of horror and sadistic sex characterized other Stalag books, such as *Stalag 13*, the first of the Stalags to be written when the Eichmann trial began in 1961 by Eli Keidar (under the pseudonym Mike Baden, which is also the name of the captive American pilot in the book). “The SS female held out the handle of her whip and touched McPhearson’s genitals, he was as hot as a deer in heat. McPhearson howled with pleasure when the handle rubbed against his genitalia.” And elsewhere, “Sally tied the small bag around his thighs. Only then did he scream...with everything he had...when he realized the bag contained wasps” (*Stalag 13*, 108, 131).

To a certain degree, the depictions of the relationships between the female SS guards and the prisoners, as well as the internal dynamics between the prisoners, can be read as reflecting the military culture that was familiar to the writers from their experiences in the Israeli army. The books were written by men in their twenties and thirties who had served in the Israeli army or perhaps even in the Palmach at the beginning of the 1950s. The portrayals of the female guards in Stalag literature is similar to the way in which soldiers perceive female fighters: in *Stalag 13* (68, 79), *Stiff-Neck* (Stubborn) *Stalag* (60), and *Stalag of the She Wolves* (144, 161). “The Nazi guard’s breasts are her personal weapon. Her thick thighs a sign of murderousness. The braless guard is the daring of them all, the curvy buttocks under riding trousers caused the ‘horny’ prisoners to stare” (*Stalag 13*, 68). The shared male experience of soldiers in all armies, and most certainly in the young Israeli army, was of objectifying and sexually gazing at the woman. In army unit anthems, sexual drawings, and campfire chat, female soldiers are presented as a sexual object, sometimes threatening (the commander) or promiscuous (the platoon clerk). Liora Sion adds another category, “the seductress,” a woman perceived as a sexual object over whose services the men compete.

The desire for the daring, fighting woman who blends callous sexuality with dangerous combat is one of the most common fantasies among soldiers in both frontline combat and rear units. The women in the male-military domain and their representation in the Stalag books are full of lust and insatiable (“After, she fell on to the bed and cursed in rage...because she had not been fully satisfied” [*Stalag 13*, 108]). The soldier’s fear that he “will not have an erection, that he will not be perceived as a man, and not satisfy the female soldier or his girlfriend at home,” is also represented in the Stalag books. In *Stalag 13*, the prisoners inspect at their own and their friend’s genitals during lineup and are afraid of the reactions of the “starved” female guards upon seeing a downcast (humiliated) male genital (63). Finally, the abuse and rape of female prisoners, whether civilians or soldiers in the enemy army and sometimes from the same unit, are common in the male-military culture. The woman needs to be conquered, sexually as well as metaphorically, while her body serves as a battlefield on the map. In most Stalag books there is role reversal. The woman rapes the man under the threat of arms, whip, and harsh sadistic torture. “The screams of pleasure emerging from the throats of the blood thirsty SS bitches in response to the prisoners’ gasping and groans of pain” (*Stubborn Stalag*, 40); “The whip carved strips of blood on him...one day I’ll get my hands on that bitch...I’ll rape her with a white-hot spear” (*She-wolves Stalag*, 90); “Gustav was amazed by the assertiveness with which she spoke...when suddenly she entered the room...in her hands ropes and a strange leather mask” (*Murder in the Stalag*, 101); “He would dream about her in the nights...binding him in handcuffs and whipping him...hanging him by his feet from the ceiling and skinning him alive” (*All the Gestapo People*, 125).

I will conclude this section with the most significant male-military experience, combat camaraderie. In all of the Stalag books, the British and American prisoners are presented as being loyal to their friends. They take care of a prisoner who was raped by the sadistic female guard, “They rubbed his body and massaged his muscles” (*Stalag 13*, 96); “He will remain shackled to the fence until sundown. A murmur of protest spread among his fellow prisoners.” (*The Return to Stalag 13*, 86). They sometimes demonstrate erotic attraction to their suffering friends, or to those living with them in the same quarters (*Stalag 13*, 19). Even the “unit ‘rat’” appears in the Stalag books and he is subjected to hazing by his bunkmates. “‘Let me leave,’ Burt [the traitor] screamed in terror. ‘Let me out, god damn it’...Someone leaped on him and grabbed his throat. Burt choked and was strangled” (*Stubborn Stalag*, 58). Finally, they escape together from the camp and stay together despite knowing that the chances of their surviving as a group are slight (“To abandon Homburg meant to abandon the rest of the scouts” [*Shultz’s Bitch*, 175]).

The characters and the spaces in which they operate in the Stalag books are harvested from a world of images prevalent in 1950s Israel regarding the Germans, Nazism, and the SS. In her monumental essay *Fascinating Fascism* (which we discussed at the beginning of this paper), Susan Sontag argues that the power of Nazism is constituted in the combination between power, fortitude, death, and aesthetics. Based on this formula, post-war Nazism was rendered as an image of power, passion, and aesthetics. Moreover, Sontag and others claim that there is a natural affinity between Nazism and sado-masochism. Authority-subjugation relationships supplemented by threatening yet at the same time aesthetic, attractive outfits (The SS black uniforms) generate sexual fantasies not only among post-war contemporaries but also within societies that experienced the war firsthand. This image is substantial as well in the Stalag books. Additional images were adopted from memoirs of concentration camp survivors, which began to be published in increasing numbers during the 1960s. In her memoir, Hannah Levy-Hess, a prisoner in Bergen-Belsen, described the behavior of a guard who deliberately spins into theatrical onslaught of rage, spews horrific threats, and beats the prisoners mercilessly. The prisoners jokingly called her the “grey rat” in reference to her chilling beauty.

The typical Stalag presents the image of a Nazi woman, a SS guard. She is outstanding for her beauty and cruelty. She is usually blonde, voluptuous, and wearing a black uniform. As Sontag mentions, the contradiction between the opulent bosom and blond hair, and the black uniform creates a woman who is an object of desire for men, who, in these Stalag camps, are the prisoners (“Although her upper body remained naked and stood out in its whiteness as opposed to the color of the pants” [*Stalag 33*, 148]). The Nazi characters, male and particularly female, have sexual appetites that are constantly in need of satisfaction, usually in a perverse manner. The sadism and cruelty which we discussed earlier contribute to the representation of Nazi sexuality as deviant and bestial. In the Israeli society of which we have spoken at length, this contributed to the distancing and dismissal of sexuality from the Israeli collective consciousness, which at the time was characteristically puritanical. On the other hand, depictions of Nazi sexuality nourish sexual fantasies about breaching social restrictions.

We have already discussed the “inspirational” role that figures such as Ilse Koch and Irma Grese played for the Stalag writers. In *Stalag 13*, Berta Huber, the wife of camp commander Kurt, is presented as habitually skinning animals to make lamp shades or covers for the prisoners from the skin. In *The Prisoners Didn’t Cry*, Ilse Koch appears under her full name. *Stalag of the Devil’s Daughters* features a character based on Irma Grese from Bergen-Belsen. Every one of her appearances in the confines of the camp leads to a wave of violence (*Stalag of the Devil’s Daughters*, 63).

Such one-dimensional and shallow characters are typical of the majority of the paperbacks; however one should mention a few exceptions. In *Stalag 217*, Lili Matrenich, a bored, beautiful, and sensual young woman who does not support the Nazi movement, is looking for a job, and she is hired to work at POW camp 217. There she learns how to derive pleasure not only from sex, but also from cruelty. Lili falls in love with American pilot Victor Bolder (this is also the writer’s, most probably Uriel Meron, pseudonym) “who starts to discover the gentle and beautiful soul hidden underneath the cloak of Nazi wolf-ness” (*Stalag 217*, 127). Lili faces numerous conflicts: tenderness versus sadism; passion and sexuality versus cold and rational considerations. At the story’s ending, when Lili is ordered to pour acid over her pilot lover, she cannot do it. “‘Either you or him,’ her commander said, ‘and do it quickly’” (190). Her solution is to pour the acid on his face but not on his eyes, knowing that the face can be reconstructed. As a result, “Vic fainted, and Lili too” (190).

Like Lili Matrenich, who suffers from “split personality,” other Germans are sometimes presented in a more positive light: Karl Schteibel, the German pilot whose father and two brothers were executed by Hitler (*Stalag 217*, 58); Mariana, the German nurse in *Stalag 33*, who sent sick women to their deaths “knowing that in this way she was perhaps saving a woman whose chances for recovery were better” (79); Clement, a German officer in a POW camp who takes pity on and tried to rescue female prisoners who have been buried up to their necks and whose faces are covered in red jam so that ants gnaw at their faces (*I was a Stalag Commander*, 101, 112); and finally, Gustav, a double agent, General Oberhoizer’s double, and his wife’s first lover, who attempts to save pilot Albert Ford who is imprisoned in Stalag 14 (*Murder in the Stalag*, 125).

The phenomenon of Stalag paperbacks in its Israeli context, is still awaiting authorized and comprehensive analysis in terms of both its sociological and psychological aspects. I have addressed the reasons and circumstances of its appearance at the beginning of the discussion. I will now note, however will not elaborate upon, the following significant points. According to the common explanation, the Stalag sub-genre is related mainly to the budding discourse on the memory of the Holocaust and the attitude toward the Germans and Germany during the 1960s: the Eichmann trial, the impression it left on the Israeli public, especially on youths, the image of the new Jew, i.e. the Sabra as opposed to the diasporic Jew, the dissociation from the diaspora that went like flock to slaughter, the question of the relationship with a “different Germany,” and finally, the extreme and perverse response to the repulsive coverage in Israeli newspapers of the trials of concentration camp guards and commanders. Concurrently, one should note the impact of the desire to breach sexual taboos in a society that was beginning to retreat from its puritanical characteristics, the identification with female dominance alongside fear of it and the desire to retain control in male hands, experiences of military service and its sexual context for some of the writers, and the influence of American cinema, newspapers, and pulp fiction that increasingly infiltrated the Israeli market from the late 1950s, upon Israeli youths. I will attempt to address several of these explanations.

A Lacanian explanation for the phenomenon claims that identification with the murderer and the interlocking of gazes between the murderer and victim creates a perverse pleasure for those observing or writing about the murderous act—“Sadean perversion,” as Lacan coins it in his book *Kant with Sade*. In Slovaj Žižek’s explanation to Lacan’s Sadean perversion, the pervert tortures the victimizer and does so on behalf of the victims, as their loyal servant, as fulfilling their will. It is the “masculine” mystic for whom the very interlocking of gazes with the murderer escalates him to a powerful position, a god-like viewpoint, and thereby guarantees his participation in perverse pleasures. In the case of the Stalag paperbacks, the Israeli writers, the majority of which were men who served in the military and even saw combat, create a perversion in which their gaze interlocks with that of the female guards and commanders in the Nazi camps, enjoys and identifies with them. On the other hand, they are the “male mystics” who not only take pleasure in the perverse sex that they fabricate and adopt but also guarantee for themselves a position of power that was harrowingly lacking among their biological parents and among all the prisoners of concentration camp who went like “flock to slaughter.”

This psychological-Lacanian explanation may also illuminate the motives of a group of young Israelis, whose parents survived the Holocaust in different ways and who were curious about what took place in the camps. Ben Ari notes, and rightly so, that “[in all of the psychologistic explanations] there is surely a kernel of truth, and their integration in the Jewish-Israeli context provides a comprehensive picture, however it does not explain everything.” Indeed, it does not seem to me that the phenomenon should be associated only with its German-Holocaust context, but also with the flourishing of the “sex and death” model. As we have seen, the sadistic and often “perverse” descriptions were characteristic not only of the Stalag paperbacks, but also of many other paperbacks lacking the Nazi context. Ben Ari refers to this phenomenon as “translators from the underground,” “mass culture in the periphery,” and “Anti-Sabra culture.” In her opinion, it is only in the margins, in the underground, and in the cultural periphery that a literature that depicted such bold sex and horror could grow. Finally, and in addition to all the above, the Stalag literature reflects the confusion in Israel at the time in terms of comprehending Nazism and Germany after 1945. On the one hand, the Eichmann trial aroused fear and terror, while, on the other hand, the “other Germany” was perceived as a legitimate place for tourism, science and cultural liaisons, and of course diplomatic relations. The walls of Israeli puritanism that began to crack at the time facilitated the production and consumption of violent pornographic material associated with a nation and state that were both enemies and allies—a nation of frightening culture and morality upon which Israeli social prohibitions and chilling fantasies could be projected.

**Conclusion: The Place of “Obscene Literature” in the Israeli Culture of the 1960s**

The phenomenon of paperback books in the 1960s, the discourse around it among the establishment, and attempts to fight it, reflect the crisis of values that befell Israeli society at the time and the moral panic that accompanied it. As a consequence of the rise in the standard of living and the relative economic prosperity in Israel, an unofficial culture began developing, which was free of social and artistic pretensions. Contrary to the official culture’s steadfast grip on old norms and nostalgia for the pioneering days, the new culture was more permissive and western. A gap formed between the formal institutions and functionaries and the actual cultural manifestations. This was the pretext for the desire to restrict, prohibit, and supervise the development of anything socially or culturally deviant. Also within the official, formal, and national culture fissures appeared when the new generation of young authors, the “generation of the state,” turned to writing influenced by western culture and which dealt with topics that did not align with the recruited literature. Itamar Even Zohar views the 1950s as a diffuse marker in the cultural history in Israel, in which the affinity with the East European culture was diminishing, and at the same time, a local-indigenous culture was growing, alongside its becoming closer to American culture. In this process, certain elements and images from the American culture were disseminated among and absorbed by Israeli youths. Some were adopted in full, others only partly and combined with Israeli images. Thus, as Chemi Sheinblatt writes in his review of the Tarzan and Bill Carter dime-novels, a cultural hybrid was created between the former and latter. The American individualism, the lone hero who relies only upon himself, assimilated and merged into the local-Israeli collective. “Israeli made America, or American Israel.”

Against this background, second decade Israel experienced moral panic caused by statistics on the rise in crime among juveniles, including youths from “good homes” of European origin, the decrease in reading “good” literature, limited reading on topics connected with the history and literature of the Jewish people, the attraction to western culture and all its “temptations,” the organization of groups of youths outside the youth movements (“Salon societies), and may other phenomena that sparked warning lights among the “parent generation.”

The establishment’s discourse on obscene literature reflected its ambivalence toward the cultural change in 1960s Israel and was expressed in the economic, political, and social domains. The desire to break free from the puritanical, pioneering, and ideology-fulfilling atmosphere that characterized the lives of Israelis until then, was countered by fears and anxieties in face of new, unfamiliar, threatening, modern, liberal-western ideas. The contradiction between the desire to enable a measure of freedom and to avoid unnecessary restrictions, and the fear of unwanted “moral influences” and the damaging of the youths’ souls, is one aspect of this ambivalence.

“...” (Darnton). Several general questions regarding the society in which “immoral” literature is read arise from this question and from the study presented here: to what extent do these consumer patterns reflect change in the reading culture in general and the sexual behavioral patterns of youths and young adults? Did these changes, if they existed at all, contribute to or cause changes in the popular culture and in the youth culture in general? Finally, did the struggle against the consumption of this literature reflect power struggles within the dominant cultures?

Eva Illouz (2016) argues that extremely popular books, which become bestsellers, are those which formulate the cultural constructs in the society in which they are circulated (22). She writes, “Literature—good or bad—puts into form what is often at the level of inarticulate social experience” (21).

(In her study on *Fifty Shades of Grey* that aims to establish the connection between bestsellers and fundamental rationalities of society, she exemplifies by way of the success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This is a novel which, in the years discussed in this paper, would have been defined as obscene given that it contains elements which, had they been subjected to scrutiny by the committee, would have been censored). The phenomenon of bestsellers is spontaneous quantitative evidence of the fact that the book captures the taste and imagination of the masses in a certain time and space. The bestseller audience, Illouz claims, constitutes a meeting point between two separate spheres: it is simultaneously both the consumer in the market sphere who is free to choose from a selection of cultural products and a member of a civic society in the sphere of public opinion (8). Therefore, in constituting merchandise, the book freely occupies the markets and is purchased by the wide public, and the reading consumer’s freedom to choose reflects the focal interest points and cultural sensibilities of which they are a product. The bestseller provides, more than anything, the present cultural sensibilities. The sales rates are indicative of the high demand among consumers.