**‘Why Were Our Yemenite Brothers Insulted?’: *Love as Strong as Death* as a Prequel to a Mizrahi Presence in the Israeli Theatre**

**Abstract**

The focus of this article is Aharon Pollack’s biblical play based on Song of Songs titled *Love as Strong as Death*. The play was first performed in Eretz Israel in 1940 and then again in 1942. In both instances, it was directed by Moshe Halevy and performed by an ensemble of Jewish Yemenite actors. Tracing the circumstances of the play’s production and reception reveals a relatively early case in the history of Hebrew theatre in which both the theatre hall and public discourse functioned as spheres where the power struggle between Ashkenazi Jews (of European descent) and Mizrahi Jews (from the Middle East and North Africa) surfaced and was contested. Moreover, it was in these spheres that the circumscribed place of Yemenite Jews, actors and spectators was negotiated in both the theatrical world and political-cultural context of Eretz Israel. Put differently, the play and its reception anticipate the ethnic identity politics in Israeli theatre and shed light on central conflicts that would occupy centre stage only a few decades later.

***Love as Strong as Death* and the Search for a Hebrew Biblical Theatre**

The Hebrew Bible was an instrumental text for Zionist culture’s broad project of rejuvenating Jewish life through the return to the landscapes and language of the Bible.[[1]](#endnote-1) Hebrew theatre took part in this reclaiming of the Bible for the sake of the Zionist nation- building through various plays that dramatized key biblical stories and made the Bible live again on stage.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Of the many biblical texts that inspired Zionist theatre, Song of Songs was particularly fundamental for Zionist culture, mainly due to its elaborate descriptions of landscapes and nature. Song of Songs was also a major thematic feature in visual art of the early twentieth century, and later in popular music, professional dance, and folk dance.[[3]](#endnote-3) It was in this context that Pollack wrote *Love as Strong as Death*, which is one of several early attempts in the Hebrew language to deal with the dramatic potential of Song of Songs and develop from it a play based on a narrative storyline.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Following the tradition of pastoral theatre, Pollack’s play focuses on the contrast between nature and city, while favouring the simple and idyllic lives of shepherds over urban sophistication.[[5]](#endnote-5) The plot dramatizes Song of Songs as a story about three characters, King Solomon, the beloved woman, and her lover, the shepherd, entangled in relationships of love and power. The play’s opening and ending in King Solomon’s palace in Jerusalem frames its pastoral plot of a shepherd’s life. In keeping with the pastoral tradition, the city and palace are characterized both as a space of hedonistic Zionism and as representing a listless and apathetic view of love as acquired through money or power. Solomon is represented as a tyrant, who by this time echoes Ecclesiastes and sees in everything ‘vanities of vanities’. When a debate arises regarding the question of whether true love still exists in Eretz Israel, the king is told about the love between Shulamit and Eitan, the shepherd. Solomon orders his aids to bring Shulamit to his harem, and this leads to the play’s tragic ending: Eitan is killed in an uprising against the king’s men, and Shulamit commits suicide. In the final scene, it is revealed that Solomon had long forgotten about Shulamit – all that had transpired was in vain – and his nihilistic Ecclesiastical tone reverberates to the very end.

The play was first performed in 1940 by a group of Yemenite actors directed by Moshe Halevy, founder of Ohel theatre. Halevy, who immigrated to Israel from Russia in the early 1920s, founded the theatre with a vision to create a socialist proletarian theatre which would also produce biblical plays inspired by the landscape of Eretz Israel.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Already in the 1920s, Halevy declared to his actors that performing biblical plays is part of an attempt to ‘re-kindle the glorious past, with all its beauty, its heroism and creativity [...] Until finally – the vision of the future, the vision of the rebirth and renewal, a return to the earth and our re-awakening; a return to a life of creativity and vigour’.[[7]](#endnote-7) According to Halevy, biblical theatre is part of the Zionist mission of Jewish national rebirth. Pursuing this mission, Halevy staged several biblical plays in the ‘Ohel’ theatre, such as *Jacob and Rachel* (1928), in a quest for the proper theatrical language to convey his biblical vision.[[8]](#endnote-8) As part of his work on *Jacob and Rachel*, Halevy also turned to the liturgical cantillation in Yemenite synagogues as inspiration for the proper ‘biblical’ pronunciation of Hebrew onstage.[[9]](#endnote-9)

In *Love as Strong as Death*, Halevy takes this theatrical affinity between the Yemenites and the biblical a step further. Now they are not only a source of inspiration for the ‘proper’ pronunciation of Hebrew but also become actors who physically embody the biblical world. Indeed, in his autobiography, Halevy writes that, for him, working with the group of Yemenite actors was a virtual return to the Bible:

The Yemenites drew attention by virtue of traits inherent in their blood and education, their correct Hebrew accent, the Eastern cadence and melody in their speech, unique plasticity of their movements, and in their warm and easily excitable temperament. They saved me a lot of trouble and work, which I would have had to invest in putting on a biblical play with Ashkenazi actors. However, they lack the experience and elementary knowledge in acting theory, and as a result, I worked with them on the same play for an extended period of time, a year and a half, trying to get them to do the best they could.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The association between Yemenite Jews and the Bible is not unique to this play, or even to the theatre at large. As we will see in a moment, although this linkage is a fundamental element in the Zionist cultural discourse of the early 1900s, the very existence of a Yemenite theatre group in the 1940s involved social and political struggles between Yemenite and Ashkenazi Jews in Eretz Israel. In order to fully understand the different contexts within which *Love as Strong as Death* was produced and performed, we need first to take a broader look at the place of Yemenite Jews in the social, political, and cultural spaces of the Jewish community in Eretz Israel during the first half of the twentieth century.

**Yemenite Jews: Natural Worker and Biblical Jew**

From the end of the nineteenth century, Ashkenazi pioneers motivated by a Zionist socialist ideology began immigrating from Europe to Eretz Israel. At the same time, Yemenite Jews, whose messianic religious beliefs encouraged them to immigrate, settled in Jerusalem and the Zionist agricultural settlements of Rehovot, Rishon LeZion, Hadera, and Petach Tikva. Constituting a source of ‘cheap labour’, the Yemenites were employed by Ashkenazi farmers and relegated to a life of poverty. Ironically, this modest way of life fed into the stereotyped perception of the Yemenites as humble people satisfied with what they had. Thus, they competed with the cheap Arab labour in the Zionist effort to ‘conquer labour’ and create a purely Jewish economy. The incorporation of Yemenites as cheap labourers encouraged Zionist institutions in early the 1900s to increase Jewish immigration from Yemen; however, it was this enterprise that forged the orientalist distinction and justified the preference of Ashkenazi workers over Yemenite workers. The Yemenite was perceived on the one hand, as a ‘natural worker’, satisfied with what they have and accustomed to hard work, but on the other hand, as lacking education and ideological consciousness, as opposed to the Ashkenazi ‘idealistic worker’, who was cultured and ideologically motivated, and therefore deserving of more resources.[[11]](#endnote-11) This attitude included the allotment of land to the Ashkenazi pioneers for building agricultural settlements and becoming, in time, what David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir, referred to as the heroes of the meta-Zionist narrative. In contrast, the Yemenites were relegated to the margins of the Zionist narrative where they attained neither symbolic capital nor the prestigious labelling as pioneers and national leaders.[[12]](#endnote-12)

In line with the concept of ‘natural worker’, the Hebrew Zionist culture constructed the Yemenite Jew’s image in terms of the orientalist stereotype. The Yemenite was presented as inferior, primitive, and chauvinistic, but also as industrious, ‘content’ and suitable for agricultural work. This justified not only their low wages and meagre living conditions, but also their employers’ patronizing and condescending attitudes toward them. Unlike the secular Ashkenazi pioneers, Yemenite Jews were religious and knowledgeable in Jewish scripture. Their accent, traditional clothing, and overall appearance were perceived as ancient. Thus, the Hebrew culture viewed then as agents of the preservation of the biblical Hebrews’ ancient authenticity’.[[13]](#endnote-13) The Yemenite Jew was perceived not only as the bearer of ancient Jewish knowledge, but also as personifying, in their Hebrew accent, bodies, and traditional song and dance, the ‘ancient Hebrew;’ as if they had emerged from the biblical stories themselves. In other words, because it was allegedly static and had not changed for generations, the Yemenite Jews’ unique legacy was not viewed as significant in and of itself, but rather as a medium frozen in time through which the biblical Hebrew could be restored and justify the Zionist return to the historical homeland. Thus, the Yemenite stereotype was based on two foundations: the inferior primitive and the original biblical Jew. In his analysis of the Yemenite character in the Hebrew theatre throughout the twentieth century, Dan Urian found that in the first half of the century, this double stereotype was consolidated in comical plays and skits in which the Yemenite is presented as either grotesque and ridiculous or as a source of inspiration for biblical plays.[[14]](#endnote-14)

This dual stereotype facilitated the Yemenite Jews’ positioning at the lowest rung on the social ladder and the blocking of their social mobility. Still, the Yemenites took steps to change this status quo. For instance, Zeharia Glosca, Avraham Tabib, and Shalom Cohen, who were amongst the founders of the Histadrut (General Organization of Workers in Israel), soon came to realize that the organization would do nothing to preserve the Yemenite workers’ rights. Consequently, they left the organization and founded the Yemenite Association as a means to promote the Yemenites’ economic, social, and cultural rights in all aspects of life:

The Yemenites themselves were so keenly sensitive to this attitude that one of their contemporary leaders complained at the 18th Zionist congress [in Prague] in 1933 that the members of his community were still second-class citizens in Palestine, like non-Aryans in Germany.[[15]](#endnote-15)

However, these efforts, including active participation in decision-making in the national institutions, were rejected. The institutions saw in the Yemenites’ political organizing a threat, and consequently employed two basic strategies to disassemble the Yemenite Association: first, by instigating disputes within the association, interfering in official appointment processes, and in fact, creating a divide between members of the association and ‘Yemenites associated with the Histadrut’. The second strategy was symbolic, but even more effective; it involved the stigmatization of the Yemenite Association as ethnically isolationist, as suffering from an inferiority complex, and, mainly, as posing a threat to national unity. This vilification was particularly cynical given that the Yemenite Association called for the Yemenites’ integration in national institutions, the realization of Zionist solidarity, and the provision of ethnically unbiased and equal opportunities to all nationals.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Even drama and theatre were part of the negative stigmatizing of the Yemenite Association. The most blatant example of this was M. Kedmi’s play *The Yemenite Congress* (1934), a grotesque comedy about an unruly congress of leaders and representatives of Yemenite workers and tradesmen that gets out of hand to the point where police are called in to disperse the crowd. The congress delegates are tradesmen of ‘Yemenite’ trades of low social status: bakers, shoe polishers, matchmakers, falafel vendors, floorers, and porters. According to Dan Urian, this text features all of the stereotypical characteristics of Yemenites: primitive, dirty, and cultureless, speaking defective Hebrew, argumentative and rude, falteringly religious, lacking Zionist ideological awareness, and susceptible to political manipulation. Not only is their speech heavily accented and rude but, as is evident in Kedmi’s comments to the playscript, they are typified by coarse gestures as if they were apes.[[17]](#endnote-17) While ostensibly a political satire focused on the general phenomenon of political organizing, *The Yemenite Congress* nonetheless echoes the national institutions’ negative stigmatizing of the Yemenite Association. Put differently, while the objective of satire is to criticize and undermine the existing order, this play sustains and justifies the national institutions’ orientalist racism toward Yemenite Jews. As detailed below, this negative branding not only informed the press’s reception of *Love as Strong as Death*, but also framed the discourse surrounding the play: the actors were labelled as ‘natural’, but not professional and the Yemenite spectators were described as primitive. In addition, a letter sent by the Yemenite Association to the editor of a newspaper that had featured a review of the play protesting the writer’s stereotyping of Yemenites was partially censored and framed by the editors as evidence of an inferiority complex.

At the same time, the Yemenites’ presence in the performing arts during this period was heavily charged with their affiliation with the ‘original’ biblical Jew. Preceding the appearance of the Yemenite ensemble at the focus of this paper, which was one of the first in the Hebrew theatre, was the ‘Shulamit-A Mizrachi Theatre Group’, led by Shlomo Ben-Menashe and founded by the Histadrut’s cultural committee. The latter’s interest in founding ‘Shulamit’, as was the case in its supporting Halevy’s group, was linked to its objective to encourage Yemenite workers to join its ranks as part of its struggle against the Yemenite Association. In 1937, ‘Shulamit’ produced *A Visitor from the Land of Israel in Yemen*, a folkloristic play featuring traditional Yemenite customs, blessings, stories, song, and dance.[[18]](#endnote-18) It is important to emphasize that the group’s name, ‘Shulamit’, is inspired by one of the names used for the heroine in *Song of Songs*. This in itself marks the connection between the performance of Yemenite Jews and the Bible, in general, and to *Song of Songs*, in particular – a linkage that was later deepened in *Love as Strong as Death*. In her theatre review, poet Leah Goldberg’s attitude toward the group is ambivalent. On the one hand, she is impressed by the folklore – ‘the primitive is communicated so naturally, with such charm’ – while on the other, she claims that this is not high theatre – ‘still, one cannot assume that from this a new theatrical art for

m will grow. We have come too far with our Europeanism and will under no circumstances renounce the lesson we learned in the West over two thousand years’.[[19]](#endnote-19) As we will see in what follows, Goldberg demonstrates a similar ambivalence regarding *Love as Strong as Death*.

Similar attitudes where shown to Yemenites in other forms of the performing arts. For example, Goldberg found in Rina Nikova’s Yemenite dance troupe merely the natural charm of primitive dance.[[20]](#endnote-20) Viewed through a similar prism were Yemenite female singers, who appeared regularly – in full traditional costume and with distinctive deep voices – in the marginalized satirical theatre. However, despite their frequent performances, singers such as Bracha Zafira, Shoshana Damari, Esther Gamlielit, and Hana Aharoni were nonetheless perceived as exotics echoing the Hebrew biblical world on stage. Song of Songs was a central theme in song and dance as well. In particular, the repertoire of Shoshana Damari, one of the most celebrated female singers in pre- and post-State Israel, was filled with allusions to Song of Songs. In dance, Sarah Levy-Tanai’s choreography mixed traditional Yemenite dance movements with texts from Song of Songs.[[21]](#endnote-21)

All of the above formed the background against which *Love as Strong as Death* was produced. Unlike ‘Shulamit’s folkloristic play a few years prior, *Love as Strong as Death* had a literary quality, which at the time was perceived as the standard of professional artistic theatre. Nonetheless, the reactions of both critics and the public to this shift were complex and contradictory and raise the question as to the place of Yemenite Jews in Palestine’s cultural arena.

**‘The same people who did not experience the cultured and insane Europe’: *Love as Strong as Death* between East and West, Between the Biblical and the Professional.**

*Love as Strong as Death* is an interesting example of a performance based on a play written by an Ashkenazi Jew which assumes additional meaning by the very fact that Yemenite actors perform it. Although the original play does not explicitly relate to the ethnic identity of the characters on stage (indeed, they are all viewed as ‘Hebrew’, and of an era preceding the ethnic diversification of diasporic Jews), it is possible that the casting of Yemenites added additional levels of significance. Thus, for example, Shulamit’s first words in the play, spoken from backstage prior to her entrance, are ‘Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun’ (Song of Songs 1:6).[[22]](#endnote-22) This direct quote from Song of Songs characterizes the biblical beloved as ‘black’, and while she bids the audience not to take note of the color of her skin, the fact that she speaks these words before appearing on stage obviously causes the spectators to focus on this aspect of her appearance. In this particular performance, Shulamit’s labelling as ‘black’ highlights the extent to which the casting here differs from traditional casting and from the Hebrew-Ashkenazi theatre’s customary ‘whiteness’ at the time. In this case, the non-traditional casting of Yemenites constitutes a case of ‘conceptual casting’ in which ‘the director intentionally uses the identity of the actor and connects it to the character in order to provide a more complex interpretation of the play’.[[23]](#endnote-23) Thus, the conceptual foundation of the non-traditional casting here is not only related to Shulamit’s specific image, but to the broader issue pertaining to what type of body is most suited to represent Song of Songs (and in fact, the entire Bible).

The Yemenite aspect of the play is manifest as well in Genia Berger’s stage and costume design.[[24]](#endnote-24) Shulamit’s costume features a traditional Jewish Yemenite head dress, while in some scenes, the characters sit on divans smoking a narghile. Similar costumes and props appear as well in *A Visitor from the Land of Israel in Yemen*. The Bible, to conclude, is visually imagined not only in terms of the actors’ unique Yemenite physicality but in the stage and costume design sourced from Yemenite culture.

Yemenite culture also informs the music and dance in the play. Although of Ashkenazi descent (like playwright, Pollack, director, Halevy, and designer, Berger), Mark Libri’s[[25]](#endnote-25) contribution as composing the play’s musical score was overlooked in reviews, that merely noted that ‘there are performances of Yemenite singing and dancing in the play’.[[26]](#endnote-26) In the newspaper *Davar*, Yonah Wahab gives credit to an additional individual whose name has disappeared from the promotional material, noting that the ‘music is mostly sourced from Jewish Yemenite songs and liturgical melodies sung in the synagogue, beautifully adapted by Libri and Adaki.[[27]](#endnote-27) Yemenite singer and composer Yehiel Adaki’. Adaki (1903–80) was highly invested in the preservation of traditional Yemenite song in Eretz Israel and fought to establish its cultural status at a time when it was perceived as inferior and ludicrous. He composed at least one of the songs preserved from the play, ‘Azi VeZimrat Ya’ (The Lord is my strength and my song), which later became a popular folkdance.[[28]](#endnote-28) It should be noted that the only critic who equates Adaki with Libri is herself of Yemenite origin.

This fact is significant on two levels: first, it is indicative of the extent to which the actual documentation of the theatrical performance (and accordingly, the possibility of reconstructing it) is a battleground of sorts in which the opposing voices of various stakeholders, agendas, and worldviews struggle for dominance. These conflicts will extend even further, underlying the documentation of the play’s reception as well. Second, the question of Adaki’s artistic status, reflected in the fact that his work was not credited, is symptomatic of the deep-rooted tension underlying the production – the hierarchy between the Ashkenazi creators who are perceived as professional artists and the Yemenite actors who are presented as amateurs with no artistic training.

Halevy’s brief statement regarding the production, quoted earlier, situates the play between two poles with an inherent tension between them: the perception that the Yemenite Jews ostensibly facilitate direct access to the biblical past, on the one hand, and the view that that are not ‘developed’ enough in Western theatrical terms. Halevy notes the ‘characteristics embedded in the blood and education’ of the Yemenites and how they drew his attention by way of their accent, the melodic Mizrahiness of their speech, the plasticity of their movement, and their warm temperament. At the same time, he views the group’s theatrical performance as strongly tied to the Yemenites’ bodily-biblical knowledge, that is, as literally embodying the Bible.

It should be noted that in the discourse surrounding the play, Halevy is not alone in purporting these views. At the play’s premiere gala, which was sponsored by Yemenite Youth of the Histadrut in Tel Aviv, several speakers highlighted this unique connection between the Yemenites and the Bible.[[29]](#endnote-29) Notably, the Yemenites themselves seemed to adopt and promote this image. For instance, in her review in *Davar* newspaper, Yonah Wahab, emphasizes ‘the fresh connection between the actors and the biblical literary material. Yemenites based their lives on the Bible, and it was their Jewishness’.[[30]](#endnote-30) At the gala, Israel Yeshayahu, director of the division for Yemenites and Middle Eastern and North African Jews at the Histadrut’s Executive Committee, ‘highlighted the importance of the concept and the implementation of presenting biblical characters by Yemenites who did not wander from one diaspora to the next [...] and therefore preserved Hebrew originality in their speech, music playing, movements, and overall character’.

Halevy’s argument, however, gives rise to another innate conflict, that is, the tension between the ‘biblical knowledge’ – which the Yemenites apparently embody and which, from the hegemonic viewpoint, was lost to Jews arriving from Europe – and a different bodily knowledge, the knowledge of ‘acting theory’, which, given its roots in European culture, is knowledge the director had acquired. In Halevy’s opinion, work on the performance lasted eighteen months precisely because the Yemenite actors lacked ‘the elementary experience and knowledge in acting’. The ‘hard work and effort’ saved by working with non-Ashkenazi actors on biblical material was, in fact, spent on transforming Yemenite Jews into theatre actors.

The inherent tension was between two types of embodied knowledge, biblical knowledge and theatrical knowledge. The first is identified with the past and the East and is embodied in the Yemenites. The second is identified with the present and Western culture and is embodied in professionally trained actors (Western-Ashkenazi). This tension forges a ‘Catch-22’ for the Zionist theatre project of a return to the biblical past constituted in the necessity to work with untrained actors as a means to create an authentic embodiment of the Bible. This inner conflict stems from the Yemenites’ double labelling, as mentioned earlier: on the one hand, as representing the biblical past to which Ashkenazi Zionism strives to return; and on the other hand, their inferior cultural status which prevents them from performing that very biblical past on stage.

This dichotomy also characterizes Leah Goldberg’s relatively sympathetic review of the play. Stressing that it would be a mistake to have high expectations of or expect to encounter ‘real theatre’ from an amateur group would be a mistake, Goldberg writes, ‘it is hard to speak of individual acting here’ and recommends that the Yemenite ensemble focus on ‘more group scenes’. Moreover, she regrets the ensemble’s propensity for being ‘overly “dramatic,” even though the time has not yet come’, and calls for ‘more simplicity and innocence’ in the play.[[31]](#endnote-31) Tracing a distinct border between artistic professionalism and the Yemenites’ stage work, Goldberg expects the Yemenites to maintain their innocence and simplicity within their amateurish domain, implying that turning professional would undermine their collective national role as representing the biblical past uncorrupted by the diaspora, modernity, and the West.

Other critics expressed a similar view. In their review published in *9 BaErev*, a critic who identified as M. Pb. praised the play’s folkloristic style but at the same time noted that it ‘is not a product of pretentious and elaborate “high art” [...] and […] is often even awkward’. Like Goldberg, M. Pb. stresses that ‘it is not our aim to critique the individual acting abilities of each participant. They are, after all, amateurs’.[[32]](#endnote-32) While in his comparatively enthusiastic review of the play, *Haaretz* critic, Emil Feuerstein also notes a lack of ‘real talent’ amongst the Yemenite actors, he at the same time states that ‘if the Yemenite youths will continue to be treated properly, this too will eventually materialize’. The principal value of the Yemenite actors, according to Feuerstein, is indeed the fact that they are ‘the closest to the spirit of the Bible, that they were not subjected to cultured and insane Europe which would have certainly distanced them from their true environment, that is: the East’. This dichotomy of a patronizing attitude on the one hand, and admiration for the Mizrahi (Eastern) ‘simplicity’ which the Europeans had lost, on the other, is echoed once again toward the end of Feuerstein’s review in which he praises the play as ‘a promising beginning in the development of the art of primitive acting (in the good sense of the word) ’.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Returning to the pastoral form at the foundation of *Love as Strong as Death*, we can say that the Yemenite body performing Song of Songs in itself becomes a space of interwoven tensions and fantasies between urban Europe and untouched biblical ‘nature’. This pastoral polarity between nature and city is materialized in the Yemenites’ bodies: the Yemenite who knows in their body an ancient biblical world (hence, ‘natural’) as opposed to the European who brings with them urban body knowledge of the art of modern acting. Taking note of this pastoral blueprint, *9 Baerev* critic M. Pb writes: ‘We, city dwellers for generations, have been granted a Hebrew shepherds’ play’.[[34]](#endnote-34) The European aspires, through the Yemenite body, to relocate and return to the source while at the same time striving to acculturate that body by way of the art of Western acting. However, every attempt on part of the Yemenite actors to act and become ‘real theatre’, in Goldberg’s words, is perceived as damaging to their ‘simplicity’ and ‘innocence’. The Zionist project of a return to the Bible and the Yemenites’ theatrical embodiment of Song of Songs renders the pastoral’s conventional movement from culture to nature a tense encounter between East and West – an encounter disclosed as laden with power struggles and internal conflicts, and which inherently affixes the Yemenites’ place in it.

It is worth noting that Halevy himself took steps to promote the Yemenite actors’ artistic professional status. In his autobiography, he writes:

There were a few young men and women in the group with obvious natural talent, and they played with the idea of becoming a permanent theatre. However, while I would have tended to help them achieve this goal, ‘Ohel’ vehemently opposed this new enterprise and demanded that I stop working on the play. It went as far as an inquiry at the Histadrut’s executive committee, which ruled that I should be allowed to finish working on the play *Love as Strong as Death*, on condition that I do not do any further work with the same group. Without me, the group could not survive and dissembled. What a pity! Now, with the establishment of the State and the influx of immigrants from the Eastern countries, this kind of group would undoubtedly be of much use, and its work, a blessing not only for the new immigrants but for the entire Yeshuv.[[35]](#endnote-35)

Obviously, this institutional struggle played out at the expense of the Yemenite group. Ohel’s demand that Halevy abandon the project in conjunction with committee’s ‘compromise’ ruling, set a distinct and effective boundary between professional and amateur theatre and between East and West. In fact, the institutional objection to the very possibility of professionalizing the Yemenite group brought about its demise.

**‘What Insulted Our Yemenite Brothers’: The Audience in the Eyes of the Critics**

Despite Halevy’s commitment and considering historical circumstances that are not entirely clear, the play was produced again in 1942 by a Yemenite group. This may have been the same production that kept running, or some remake of the show. In that year, the tension surrounding the production erupted particularly sharply.

A report by G. Z. on the performance of the play in Jerusalem was published in *Haboker* newspaper under the title ‘Hamama and Yihiye Sharaby Go to Edison’.[[36]](#endnote-36) A centrally located Jerusalem movie theatre, Edison occasionally functioned, as was customary at the time, as a theatre. The names Hamama and Yehiye Sharaby are used not to identify a specific couple, but rather as generic and stereotyped names for Jews of Yemenite origin. The title, therefore, reflects the underlying theme of the article, which barely deals with the play itself and focuses instead on describing the Yemenite audiences who had come to see the play. The article opens with the following statement:

Theatre folk, stage enthusiasts, backstage dwellers, and simple audiences, if you want evidence of the value and influence of art on the lives of the masses come to Jerusalem and stroll through the poor neighbourhoods. Go to the downtrodden ‘shantytown’, walk through the filthy alleyways [...] it is there that you will feel the beating of the heart of ‘the theatre’ and all this thanks to the Yemenite group that performed *Love as Strong as Death*.

Against the background of these distressed neighbourhoods, which are proof of the power of the art of theatre to influence the lives of the masses, G. Z. describes in great detail the excitement in the Yemenite neighbourhood in anticipation for, during, and after seeing the play. G. Z. juxtaposes the Western audience that is accustomed to theatre – ‘dressed in tailcoats and fancy dresses’, and the Yemenite audience, most of whom ‘had never been to a theatre in their life’. For the latter, the theatre constitutes a force that instils ‘sparks of light in the darkness of the people’s destitution’. This comparison between the theatre’s light and the darkness of the Yemenites’ daily lives recurs towards the end of the article: ‘The audience returned to its dim homes and carried in its heart a ray of light which would not hasten to go out’. The enthusiastic tone in which G. Z. writes about the play is deeply grounded in a paternalistic viewpoint in which Western theatre is a type of ‘white redeemer’ whose role is to shed light, if only momentarily, upon the darkness of the Yemenites’ lives.

Throughout his review, G. Z. couples his depiction of the Yemenites as immersed in darkness with the idea that they are also immersed in religious traditionality and are ignorant as to theatre etiquette. The article describes how in Yemenite synagogues, an argument developed regarding the enthusiasm surrounding the theatre and whether it was not a type of idol worship or at the very least, preventing people from studying the Torah. At the same time, when it was decided that going to the theatre was permitted, preparations for the event are described in ritualistic-religious terms: ‘That Tuesday, on which the group performed, was like Passover eve. From the early morning hours, fancy outfits were laid out, cleaned, and heavily perfumed’. From a Western-secular viewpoint, this positioning of the Yemenites within religious contexts contributed further to their ‘folklorization’ and their linkage to a religious-traditional ‘past’ vis-à-vis the modern Western theatre.[[37]](#endnote-37) On the other hand, the text portrays how, as they paraded toward Edison, the Yemenites snacked on sunflower seeds – littering the sidewalk with discarded shells. This popular pastime had for some time been viewed as an offense to proper social conduct, the uncultured, vulgar behaviour of ‘hooligans’. Indeed, G. Z. notes that upon arriving at the theatre, they were asked to refrain from eating the seeds, adding that ‘if someone failed to oblige, a spectator nearby would poke them in the neck or cheek until they stopped. And if this did not suffice, they were scolded: “Savage, stop!” – and that would be the end of the conversation’. In its role as the enlightening redeemer, the theatre constituted an acculturating and Westernizing institution.

G. Z.’s description is cognizant of the status hierarchy between Ashkenazi and Yemenite Jews in Eretz Israel. In an attempt to present the exception that proves the rule, he describes the ‘intellectuals of the ethnic group and their functionaries [...], including a number of accredited doctors and lawyers, respected by all’ who sat in the first rows of the theatre ‘in all their glory’. The rest of the Yemenites, in contrast, are depicted as poor and ignorant, servants to the upper echelons. Thus, for example, is G. Z.’s description of Yemenite women ‘who are accustomed, from childhood, to the taxing work of laundering, cleaning, and other forms of housework’ and who ‘were blinded by the luminous lights and astounded by the balconies and private boxes’. A similar portrayal concludes the article:

The extent to which the play is folky is evident in the fact that most of the housemaids in Jerusalem were late to work the next day, and when they were asked by their employers, ‘Victoria, Sultana, Violet, or Elizabeth, why are you late’? – they answered: *Love as Strong as Death.*

Presenting this scenario as factual (although G. Z. had no way of knowing it) verifies and sustains the power for dominance between the Ashkenazim and Yemenites in Jewish society in Eretz Israel. The theatre sheds some light on the Yemenites’ lives; however, they return to their ‘dark’ everyday lives. The play may momentarily destabilize their status as service providers (hence, the maids being late to work), but the social hierarchical order is quickly restored.

It is interesting to note that the article hardly describes the play itself. One scene is described as if incidentally, but only to facilitate a description of the audience’s response. G. Z.’s focus is on the audience: their preparation for the event, presence in the theatre, and the impact the play has on them. As part of the audience, the Yemenites may shift from being ‘folkloristic’ objects of the hegemonic gaze presented on stage to subjects who respond to what they are seeing, interpret it, and assume ownership over it (indeed, G. Z. writes: ‘each one of them felt as owning it and took responsibility for its success’). In this sense, it is possible that the Yemenites’ status as audience threatened the Ashkenazi hegemony even more than their status as actors. Accordingly, G. Z.’s text seeks to restore the hierarchal order, even while praising the play as instilling some light in the Yemenites’ lives. His detailed description also renders the Yemenite audience an object, the object upon which newspaper readers focus their gaze and which is part of an oriental exotic event.

This article outraged the Yemenite Association, and its leaders responded by sending a letter to *Hamashkif* newspaper underlining both the writer and the newspaper’s editors’ racist and patronizing attitude:

Although we are already aware that your newspaper does not print what we have to say (not because it is insignificant, but because its writers are of a different ‘race’), we will continue to implore you until תודגש הסאה.

[...]

Apparently, there are among the writers at *Haboker* those who imagine they ascend from the founders of theatre in the world and that a gentleman-like attitude and understanding in art is solely in their hands. If this is not the case, one wonders what is the origin of the arrogance with which they gaze askance at the Yemenites in Eretz Israel, a normal ethnic group, which, indeed, lacks the ‘Western culture’, but also lacks exoticism and ignorance.[[38]](#endnote-38)

This is a unique document in terms of its critical tone and the way in which it exposes in a clear and indisputable manner *Love as Strong as Death* (that is, both the play and its reception) as a theatrical event laden with conflicts and tensions. The text distinctively opposes the exoticization of the Yemenites – in this case, precisely those sitting in the audience. Particularly interesting is the writers’ argument that Ashkenazi Jews (or in this case, G. Z.) see themselves as people for whom art, theatre, and culture are naturally in their blood – as if they were born to a biological dynasty of ‘theatre founders’. In many ways, this claim is antithetical to the perception of the Yemenites as physically embodying the Bible. Similar to Halevy’s account, here, too, cultural knowledge – whether of the Bible, Western theatre, or Western culture in general – is presented not as abstract, theoretical, or intellectual knowledge, but rather as knowledge manifested in the body. However, as reflected in their letter, the members of the Yemenite Association are opposed precisely to the idea that any biological body has ownership over a body of knowledge or culture and art. Even if the writers acknowledge the existence of cultural difference (i.e., that Yemenite culture is not Western culture), they oppose rendering them essential-bodily differences which, accordingly, cannot be learned, transferred, or shared. The issue is, as implied in the letter, the Yemenites’ ability to take part in the art of theatre in Eretz Israel – as actors and spectators – in a manner that may destabilize the boundaries of the hegemonic definition of cultural belonging and ownership.

The letter ends with a critique of G. Z.’s depiction of the group’s distinguished members, the doctors and lawyers in the first-row seats: ‘Every baby knows that there are still no Yemenite doctors, and only one lawyer, and if this is the case, why this mockery and lie’. Thus, the writers not only undercut G. Z.’s credibility as a newspaper reporter, but also expose the way in which those ‘honourable’ Yemenites, who achieved ‘modern Western’ goals, serve in his text as a type of palm leaf designed to mock the Yemenite community at large. Instead, the letter reveals the inequality and gap, the fact that there are not yet any Yemenite doctors and hardly any lawyers. This candid scrutiny at these gaps, as opposed to an exoticizing point of view, exposes precisely what G. Z. attempts to obscure in their description: the letter does not deny the difficulties and injustices in the lives of Yemenites in Eretz Israel. On the contrary, it brings them to the fore in a way that arouses a demand for actual social-hierarchal change.

Despite the letter writers’ concerns, *Hamashkif* printed the letter under the title ‘Why Were Our Yemenite Brothers Insulted’? While the title carries a seemingly innocent undertone, its perception of the Yemenite Association’s response to G.Z.’s account as ‘insult’ frames the rest of the text as irrational, childish, and exaggerated. Indeed, in a note preceding the letter, *Hamashkif*’s editor in chief writes:

We are providing a platform for the Yemenite Association in Eretz Israel, and we do not maintain that the Hebrew press is not accessible to our Yemenite brothers. We were obliged to remove several lines from the letter, which were written in a particularly harsh tone, and we believe that our brothers’ sense of inferiority is unbased.

Despite the fact that the Hebrew press was not meant to be inaccessible to ‘our brothers’ the Yemenites, the newspaper did in fact censure parts of the letter they considered as exaggerated and biased content; notably these are still unavailable today. The editors thought it appropriate to determine which emotions are legitimate and which are not, what is an acceptable level of their intensity, and which are completely unfounded. It is worthwhile to notice that the letter itself does not reflect any ‘sense of inferiority’, as the newspaper claims, but protests against those who perceive Yemenites as inferior. The framing of the letter as an expression of a ‘sense of inferiority’ shifts the responsibility for these feelings back to the ‘insulted’ Yemenites rather than to those who view them as such. The title, editor’s note, and editing of the letter itself combine into a reframing of the protest from the vantage point of the Ashkenazi hegemony.

*Hamashkif*’s editorial handling of the Yemenite Association’s letter represents yet another manifestation of *Love as Strong as Death* as a theatrical event ingrained with ethnic conflict and tension in various fields: on stage, backstage, in the theatre, and in the press that reports and interprets the event. The intersection of these fields gives rise to the following questions: Who has ownership over the theatrical event and its interpretation? What types of knowledge are embodied in the performer’s body? What is the inconspicuous danger in even considering embodied knowledge – whether it be the actors’ bodies or the spectators’? How do struggles between East and West over cultural cooperation manifest in the theatrical event and in the ways in which it is documented and framed? Despite the Yemenite group’s short-lived career, all of these questions, which had just started to form around *Love as Strong as Death*, continued to accompany the Israeli theatre in its future development.

**Conclusion: *Love as Strong as Death* as Anticipating Issues in the Israeli Theatre**

The Yemenite stereotype and its attempted deconstruction as formulated in *Love as Strong as Death* continued to reverberate in the Israeli theatre. In 1949, Yemenite choreographer Sarah Levy-Tanai, founded the Inbal Ensemble as a theatre-dance group of Yemenite performers, and developed an artistic language based on Yemenite music and dance movements. Defying the perception of Yemenites as amateurs, the ensemble worked for four decades, was financed by the American-Israel Cultural Foundation, supervised by renowned dancers Jerome Robbins and Anna Sokolov, and even achieved international repute.

Unlike the dance field, the acceptance of Yemenite Jews to the theatre was slower. Saadiya Damari’s play *Hamivaser* (*The Herald*) (1957), which was performed by the Smadar group under the auspices of the Ohel theatre, told the story of the immigrants to Yavnieli[[39]](#endnote-39) in 1910 as a messianic aliya, and featured traditional Jewish Yemenite song and dance performed solely by Yemenites.[[40]](#endnote-40) Although sponsored by the Ohel theatre, the Smadar ensemble, like the Yemenite group of *Love as Strong as Death*, was not perceived as an integral part of the theatre, which still set clear boundaries between the professional (viewed as European) and popular (viewed a Eastern).

From the 1970s onwards, Yemenite theatre professionals’ criticism of this trend intensified and progressed from the margins to mainstream theatre. In 1977, Hatikva Neighbourhood Theatre Workshop, a community theatre led by Bezalel Aloni, produced a performance dealing with Yemenite Jews’ liturgical poems as a response to the total absence of Yemenite-Jewish culture in the education system. *Ahava Efsharit* (*Possible Love*) (1984) by Rafi Aharon was produced in the Orna Porat Children’s Theatre, the first repertoire theatre for young people in Israel. The play criticizes the Ashkenazi Jews’ disgraceful attitude toward the Yemenite immigrants in the early twentieth century.

Yet, despite these advances into mainstream theatre, in the 1990s, critics continued to perceive the Mizrachi audience through orientalist stereotypes evocative of G. Z.’s description of the audience attending *Love Stronger Than Death*. Shmuel Hasfari’s musical, *Hamelech* (*The King*) (1992), which was produced by the mainstream Beit Lessin theatre, tells the life story of Zohar Argov, a singer of Yemenite-Jewish origin, and features renditions of his hit songs. Argov is referred to as ‘The King’ of Mizrachi music given his mesmerizing effect on Mizrachi audiences, as opposed to the cultural tastemakers who viewed his repertoire as ‘inferior music’. Critic Shosh Weitz described the Mizrahi spectators as ‘speaking loudly and responding to the dialogue on stage and when they were asked to be quiet, they responded in tones and a manner associated with drivers at a stop light on a hot August day’. This is ‘a relatively young audience’, she adds, ‘that often interferes with what is happening on stage and comes to Beit Lessin only for Argov and the songs’.[[41]](#endnote-41) Similarly, critic Shosh Avigal describes how the Mizrahi spectators joined in the songs, held up lit lighters, and reacted to the dialogue on stage. Moreover, she notes that the audience clapped during scenes depicting Argov’s rise to fame as a way to identify with the character, and not necessarily to applaud the quality of the acting.[[42]](#endnote-42) Avigal sees the Mizrahi audience’s reaction as childish and primitive: ‘The play aims low to an audience that does not know and does not want to know how to distinguish between reality and fantasy. This is deficient theatrical education’. Even at the end of the twentieth century, the critics still perceived the Mizrahi as primitive, inferior, vulgar, rude, childish, and even as a savage who does not understand the fundamental basis of the theatrical medium.

It is only from 2000 onward that the Yemenite-Jewish narrative becomes increasingly present in the theatrical field. *Yesh Li Kinneret* (*I Have a Kinneret*) (2000) by Haim Idisis premiered on the mainstream stage at the Beer Sheva Municipal Theatre. The play criticizes the pioneers who drove out the Yemenites who lived and worked in Kinneret between 1912–29, and points as well to the erasure of this shameful event from the history of the pioneer’s offspring, the subject matter of Natan Alterman’s successful play *Kinneret, Kinneret* (1961). The Ashkenazi pioneers in 1920s Kinneret are presented in all their glory, as a nostalgic performance for heads of state, such as Golda Meir and David Ben- Gurion. In the play, the image of Adani the Yemenite is exceptional. He is not a farmer like the pioneers; rather he interprets dreams, sells talismans, is primitive, ridiculous, and grotesque. This, even though, in historical reality, the Yemenites of Kinneret worked the land, lost children to disease, and were ultimately expelled, two decades later by the pioneers.[[43]](#endnote-43) Thus, Zion, the protagonist in *Yesh Li Kinneret*, who was driven out of Kinneret, consciously protests against the Yemenite stereotype established in *Kinneret, Kinneret*, referring to it as a ‘delusional play full of falsehood and lies’.

The expulsion of the Kinneret Yemenites also comes up in *Tzeva Hamayim* (*The Color of Water*) (2019) by Gonen Agmon, at the centre of which is a love story between a Yemenite woman and Ashkenazi pioneer in Kinneret. The story ends with a double expulsion, of the Yemenites, and of the ostracized pioneer who joins them. *Yoldot* (*Parturient*s) (2017) by Hannah Vazana Greenwald deals with the affair of the missing children and babies, mostly Yemenite, during the large immigration of the 1950s – an affair which in recent years has flamed Israeli public discourse – and discloses the health system’s failures and the judicial whitewashing for years.[[44]](#endnote-44) Also in *Galaby* (2022) by Hagit Rachabi, Zohara Adani returns after thirty years to search for her twin sister who disappeared in the early 1950s.

Following the identity politics and multiculturalism that have recently become dominant in the public and theatrical discourse in Israel, Mizrachi artists are re-performing the Zionist history through the lens of institutional injustices. Only after more than sixty years is the demand of the Yemenite Association from 1942 accepted, to represent the Yemenite Jews onstage and in theatres not by way of stereotyping, but as a ‘normal ethnic group’. The narrative which was silenced is being heard only now, not as ‘insult’, but as protest.

**Endnotes**

1. Anita Shapira, ‘The Bible and Israeli Identity’, *AJS Review*,28, 1 (2004), pp. 11–42. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Freddie Rokem, ‘The Bible and the Avant-garde: The Search for a Classical Tradition in the Israeli Theatre’, *European Review*, 9, 3 (2001), **[you need to give the full range of the article before the specific page you’re quoting from. This goes for all entries]** p. 306; Glenda Abramson, ‘Israeli Drama and the Bible: Kings on the Stage’, *AJS Review,* 28, 1 (2004), p. 66. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ilana Pardes, *Agnon’s Moonstruck Lovers: The Song of Songs in Israeli Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), pp. 35–51. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Aharon Pollack (1862–1960) was born in the city of Berdichev (current Ukraine) and immigrated to Palestine in 1910. He was, amongst other things, an opera singer, founder of the Opera of Eretz Israel, and a Bible scholar. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For more on Song of Songs and drama and the pastoral legacy in the Hebrew theatre see: Yair Lifshitz, ‘“Ma Tehezu BeShulamit”: Theatre, Pastoral, and the Song of Songs in Zionist Culture’, *Teoria ve Bikoret*, 43 (2014), pp. 157–81 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See Chaim Shoham, ‘A Biblical Play – Helping to Create a New Hebrew Culture (a Chapter in

   the History of Hebrew Theatre)’, *JTD: Haifa University Studies in Jewish Theatre and*

   *Drama*, 1 (1995), pp. 61–83. For more general information on Ohel, see Dorit Yerushalmi, ‘Toward a Balanced History: Ohel, the “Workers Theatre of Eretz Yisrael” as a Cultural Alternative to Habima (1935–46)’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*,13, 3 (2014), pp. 340–59.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Quoted in Shoham, pp. 66–67. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. On *Jacob and Rachel* see, Shoham, **[page number/s]**; Ruthie Abeliovich, *Possessed Voices: Aural Remains from Modernist Hebrew Theatre* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), pp. 123–56. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Abeliovich, p. 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Moshe Halevy. *Darki Alai Bamot* (*My Path on Stages*) (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1955), p. 204 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Meir Amor, ‘Interests in the Palestine Concerning the “Yavnieli Aliyah”’, *Afikim* (August 1987), **[full range]**, pp. 18–19 [Hebrew]; Gal Levy, ‘Ethnicity and Education: Nation-Building, State-Formation, and the Construction of the Israeli Educational System’. PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2002, pp. 74–77. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 75–76. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Yael Guilat, ‘The Yemeni Ideal in Israeli Culture and Arts’, *Israel Studies*, 6, 3 (2001),

    pp. 26–53.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Dan Urian. *The Ethnic Problem in the Israeli Theatre* (Ra’anana: Open University Press, 2004), pp. 39–76 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Sammy Smooha, *Israel: Pluralism and Conflict* (London, Routledge, 1978), p. 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Sami Shalom Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel: Between Oppression and Liberation, Identification and Alternative 1948-2003* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), pp. 57–60 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Urian, pp. 56–57. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. *A Visitor from the Land of Israel in Yemen*. Israel Film Archive. <https://jfc.org.il/news_journal/27736-2/93509-2/>, accessed 3 May 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Leah Goldberg, ‘The Life of Yemen in the “Shulamit” Drama Studio’ (June 15 1938) in

    **[who is the author or editor?]** *Literary Journal. A Selection of Newspaper Articles*, Vol. 1 1941-1928 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad Sifriyat Hapoalim, 2016), pp. 245–46 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Sari Elron, *Rina Nikova and the Yemenite Group. Israeli Dance Between East and West*. PhD diss. Hebrew University, 2010, pp. 66 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. See also Pardes, 47–48. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Aharon Pollack, *Love as Strong as Death* (Tel Aviv: Ayin, 1949), p. 15 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Naphtaly Shem-Tov, ‘Black Skin, White Pioneer: Non-Traditional Casting in an Israeli School Pageant’, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*,18, 4 (2013), pp. 346–58, p. 349.‏ [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Genia Berger (1910-2000) was born in Kharkov (current Ukraine) and immigrated to Palestine in 1926. Berger was a painter and set and costume designer. She designed costumes and sets for many plays produced at the Ohel theatre. Sketches for the play are held at the Shaar-Zion Library, Beit Ariela in Tel Aviv. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Mark Lavry (1903–67) was born in Riga (currently Latvia) and immigrated to Palestine in 1935. He was a composer and conductor. He composed the first opera in Hebrew, Dan the Guard (1940). Lavry was Ohel theatre’s house composer. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Anonymous, ‘*Love as Strong as Death*: A Play Performed by the Yemenite Dramatic Ensemble’, *Haaretz*, 26 June 1940 [Hebrew]. **[the guidelines request page or section number for newspapers]** [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Yona Wahab, ‘*Love as Strong as Death*’, *Davar*, 19 July 1940 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Avner Bahat, ‘Yichiel Adaki – Cantor and Liturgical Poet’, *Tehuda*, 26 (2010), **[full page range]** p. 134 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. The premiere protocol is archived at the Lavon Institute for Labour Research, file IV-257A-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Wahab, **[add page or section number]** [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Leah Goldberg, ‘*Love as Strong as Death* in a Yemenite Drama Group’, *Davar*, 11 July 1940 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. M. Pb., ‘*Love as Strong as Death*’, *9 Baerev*, 4 August 1940 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Emil Feuerstein, ‘Stages: *Love as Strong as Death*’, *Haaretz*, 16 July 1940 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. M. Pb. **[provide page or section number]** [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Halevy, p. 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. G. Z., ‘Hamama and Yihieh Sharaby Go to Edison’, *Haboker*, 19 March 1942 [Hebrew]. G. Z. was probably Gabriel Tzifroni (1915-2011) who later became editor in chief of *Haboker* newspaper and director of Habima theatre. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. For more on the perception of religion as the modern Jewish theatre’s past see Yair Lipshitz

    Yair Lipshitz, *Theatre & Judaism* (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), pp. 8–32. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Yemenites Association Central Committee, ‘Why Were Our Yemenite Brothers Insulted’, *Hamashkif*, 1 April 1942 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Yavnieli was a secular Ashkenazi pioneer who travelled to Yemen in 1911 posing as a rabbi to encourage the immigration of Jews for the purpose of providing cheap labour to the settlements in Eretz Israel. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Naphtaly Shem-Tov, *Israeli Theatre: Mizrahi Jews and Self- Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 43–44. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Shosh Weitz, ‘Following Life, *Yediot Akhronot*, 21 August 1992 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Shosh Avigal, ‘A Séance, not a Show’, *Hadashot,* 12 June 1992 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Yehuda Nini, *Were You There or Was It a Dream: Kinneret Yemenites – Their Settlement and Expulsion 1912–1930* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996) [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Naphtaly Shem-Tov, ‘“In Sorrow Thou Shalt Bring Forth Children”: Docu-Poetic Theatre in Israel’, *TDR/The Drama Review*, 63, 3 (2019), pp. 20–35. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)