The lure and threat of cultural hybridity

OLGA GERSHENSON

In the last decade 'hybridity' has become a floating signifier. Its usage spilled from the pages of academic journals and monographs into the popular media (Kraidy 2002). In any discussion of cultural politics, 'hybridity' is recited along with other catchy refrains such as 'multiculturalism', 'diversity' and 'globalisation'.

Such floating and uncritical use became possible partly because the academics themselves cannot figure out what 'hybridity' means. The point of contention most relevant to the discussion of cultural politics is whether the term refers to a progressive or conservative phenomenon. The proponents of hybridity view it as progressive, endowed with the potential to resist hegemonic ideology (Bhabha 1990, 1994, 1996; Joseph & Fink 1999). The opponents view it as conservative. They claim that rather than subverting the dominant ideology, hybridity placates the differences between the dominant and the marginalised voices, and serves as a vehicle for the neocolonial power of global capitalism (Van der Veer 1997; Ahmad 1995; Chow 1993).

So, is hybridity a progressive or a conservative phenomenon? My view is that this question cannot be answered in the abstract. Hybridity and its political alignment can be theorised only as grounded in the localised discourses that embody it. Kraidy calls cultural theorists to understand hybridity as a communicative practice and to consider it 'as a space where intercultural and international communication practices are continuously negotiated in interactions of differential power' (2002, p.317). This article answers his call.

Here, hybridity is theorised as a phenomenon of cultural exchange. The question of understanding hybridity is rephrased as: How is hybridity realised in a discursive practice? In order to address this theoretical issue, I analyse the media representation of the hybrid voice of Soviet immigrants in Israel. The analysis focuses on the media representation of Yevgeny Arye, a renowned theatre director who is a Soviet immigrant.

This article is organised into five sections: in the first section, I discuss the theoretical origins and meanings of the concept of hybridity. In the second section, I explain my approach to discourse, particularly in the context of relations between Russian and Israeli culture. In the third section, I sketch the cultural and political scene in Israel, which is the site for my analysis. In the fourth, main, section I analyse the discourse of the media coverage of Yevgeny Arye. In the final section, I draw conclu-

sions about the relationship between hybridised and hegemonic discourses: in Arye's discourse, hybridity arises as a progressive phenomenon, yet the conservative media discourse ignores this hybridity or assesses it negatively. This article is a part of a larger project studying the history and media reception of Gesher theatre in Israel (Gershenson 2003).

HYBRIDITY IN CULTURAL THEORY

The current debate about the political meanings of hybridity is nothing new. Ever since its original use (in a biological context) the term has had ambivalent meanings (Young 1995). The use of hybridity as a form of cultural exchange sprang from the linguistic model introduced in the 1930s by Mikhail Bakhtin. In this precursory model hybridisation is presented as double natured: organic and intentional. Whereas organic hybridisation is defined as a natural ability to fuse languages and idioms shared by all linguistic expressions, intentional hybridisation is not so much a place of fusion, but an arena of contestation — 'collision between different points of view on the world' (Bakhtin 1981, p.360). Thus, Bakhtin suggests a model of linguistic and cultural interaction, in which organic incarnation of hybridity (which stands for fusion and amalgamation of cultures) is juxtaposed with the intentional hybridity (which brings forward contestation and collision). Applying this theory to colonial discourse analysis, Bhabha develops these two different aspects of hybridity.

Organic hybridisation receives further development in Bhabha's empowering notion of 'third space', reaffirming a positive meaning of cultural exchange. Bhabha argues that the constant stream of cultural production results in new hybrid identities that are 'neither the one thing nor the other' (Bhabha 1994, p.33). These hybrid constructions, according to Bhabha, contain multiple voices, practices and feelings that inform them. Therefore neither of the hybrid constituents has a 'pure' origin.

Such multi-vocal hybrid constructions existing in 'third space' have a transformative power due to their undefinability. They open up 'the *negotiation* of contradictory and antagonistic instances' (Bhabha 1994, p.25), displace 'the histories that constitute it', and set up 'new structures of authority, new political initiatives' (Bhabha 1990, p.211). Third space becomes an arena for complex negotiations, where polarities are blurred and different discourses are woven together. Hybrid agencies 'deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole' (Bhabha 1996, p.58). Bhabha expresses the hope that the emergence and development of hybrid agencies 'doesn't simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a community which is creating, guaranteeing, encouraging spaces within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace' (Bhabha & Parekh 1989, p.27). This vision of hybridity as a vehicle of empowerment is complemented by the concept of ambivalence that transpires in the process of cultural exchange.

Developing the concept of intentional hybridisation, Bhabha uses the motif of dialogised contestation of two idioms and combines it with the psychoanalytic concept of ambivalence. Within colonial discourse simultaneous attraction and repulsion result in the ambivalent mechanism of mimicry and menace. Bhabha argues that mimicry, a process forced on a colonial subject, 'is the desire for a reformed recognisable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (1994, p.86). However, mimicry is charged with the danger of menace: 'Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both normalised "knowledges" and disciplinary powers' (1994, p.86). Therefore, 'the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing' (Bhabha 1994, p.86). Colonising master discourse is incessantly involved into a *fort/da* game: a colonial subject is required to become 'like' a coloniser and to correspond to the coloniser's norms and models. However, when the subject mimics the coloniser, the threat of mockery is so great, that desire for the 'same Other' is withdrawn, causing remorse and anxiety. Bhabha captures this process: 'The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* — difference that is almost nothing but not quite — to *menace* — a difference that is almost total but not quite' (1994, p.91).

Is hybridity the syncretic 'third space', or the ambivalent mechanism of mimicry and menace? Young (1995) argues that hybridity belongs to the new generation of theoretical concepts that, by following the Derridian logic of breaking and joining at the same time, defies the fixed character of the habitual theoretical categories. This ambivalence inherent in the concept of hybridity complicates its realisation in discursive practice.

DISCOURSE AND POWER

My focus here is discourse. Following Foucault, I understand discourse as a capillary form of power — a way of constituting knowledge, social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations. In this sense, culture, national identity and ideology are all forms of discourse. These forms of discourse operate through such channels as law, education and mass media. But, in any form, discourse is not homogeneous; it is woven of different voices that both constitute and challenge it. Even the dominant discourse contains within it multiple voices, some of them affirming and some resisting each other. These voices do not exist in the simple opposition of empowered versus powerless discourse, but rather are 'blocks operating in the field of force relations' (Foucault 1981, p.101).

Contemporary Israeli discourse is no exception: in addition to the dominant Zionist discourse, other voices, such as those of traditional Jews, Mizrahi (Arab) Jews, and post-Zionist scholars are woven into it.[1] New Soviet immigrants have added one more voice to this polyphony, a voice that both resists and affirms the dominant Zionist discourse.

My project is to understand the complex relationships between the Soviet immi-
grant and Zionist discourses. To this end, it will prove useful to borrow from the
theoretical toolbox of postcolonial discourse analysis. Following Ella Shohat and Robert
Stam, I use 'colonisation' as 'the infantilizing trope, which projects colonized people as
embodying an earlier stage of individual human or broad cultural development, a
trope which posits the cultural immaturity of colonized ... peoples' (1998, p.28). Relying
on this definition, I understand colonial discourse in a broad sense, as a discourse
under the conditions of inequity of power, such as the dominance of hegemonic
ideology.

Despite the differences in historical and cultural contexts, the discursive practices
of immigration are similar to that of colonisation. In both cases, there is a binary
relation between coloniser and colonised, between the dominant and subordinate
voices, and, in general, between hegemonic and marginalised discourses. In both
cases, paraphrasing Fanon (1952), the relationship vacillates between narcissism and
inferiority.

In Israel, the dominant Zionist discourse plays a colonising role in respect to the
subordinate discourses of the cultural Others, including Palestinians, Mizrahi (Arab)
Jews, and, recently, immigrants from Ethiopia and Russia. This argument is based on
Ella Shohat's claim that a Jewish nationalism — Zionism —

> assumed that the 'national' is produced by eliminating the foreign, the contaminated, the
> impure, so that the nation can emerge in all its native glory. In the name of national unity,
> contradictions having to do with class, gender, ethnicity, race, region, sexuality, lan-
> guage and so forth tend to be erased or glossed over. (1999, p.11)

However, in the case of the relationship between the veteran Israelis and the
Soviet immigrants, both sides exhibit colonial attitudes, so that it is not clear who is the
coloniser and who is colonised. The cultural attitudes of veteran Israelis and the
Soviet immigrants reflect the colonial histories of Israel and Russia.

Russia emerged as a major coloniser during the 19th century. The Russian empire
held sway over Central Asia, Siberia, the Caucasus and the Far East. In the Soviet era,
colonialism spread to other parts of Eastern Europe, and to countries as far away as
Afghanistan and Cuba (Thompson 2000). All these territories were politically, eco-
nomically and, most importantly, culturally colonised.

In its turn, Russian culture was colonised by western European culture. This colo-
nisation found expression in the Europeanisation of the Russian elites, which 'laid the
groundwork for the great Russian literary, musical and artistic achievements of the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it also produced a strong case of culture shock
and a nagging sense of inferiority' (Wachtel 1999, p.50).

The situation was even more complex for Russian Jews. They fully shared the
Russian cultural attitudes explained above. But also they were subject to humiliating
anti-Semitism, which they internalised to some extent. The resulting self-hatred made
the Russian Jews feel inferior vis-à-vis the Russian cultural majority. On the other

hand, they developed a defensive reaction to anti-Semitism and took great pride in their ethnic heritage and traditional Jewish values of family and education. This defensive response allowed Russian Jews to feel superior to ethnic Russians. These conflicting attitudes set up the Soviet immigrants to experience the ambivalent feelings of cultural inferiority and superiority in Israel.

Israeli cultural attitudes are ambivalent as well. Israeli history is rooted in Russian and Eastern European culture. The idea of a Jewish nation-state came as a response to the position of cultural inferiority to which Jews were confined in Eastern Europe in the 19th century. However, in the struggle for the establishment of their state, the Jewish settlers (future Israelis) took a colonising position towards the native Palestinian population. This position was reinforced during the years of statehood, including not only the politics of expansion and conquest of the Palestinian territories, but also discrimination against the Arab Israelis. The colonising position was extrapolated to include all the Others, including fellow Jews: the Mizrahi immigrants in the 50s, then Ethiopian and Soviet immigrants in the 80s and 90s.[2]

Yet, simultaneously with the position of the coloniser, Israelis assume the position of colonised. For instance, within the cultural hierarchy of Israeli society, the Ashkenazi (European Jews) minority is placed above the Mizrahi majority, which is forced to occupy an inferior position (Kimmerling 2001). But even those Israelis who are on top of the social pyramid express feelings of inferiority with respect to European, including Russian, cultures. Such an attitude towards Russian culture is predicated on a number of historical connections. The ideology of Zionism has roots in Russia. The forefathers of Zionism, whose shadows still hover over the Israeli social landscape, came from Russia or Eastern Europe. The authority of great Russian literature, music and theatre still remain beyond reproach.

As a result of these ambivalent cultural attitudes, the vectors of colonisation in the relationship between veteran Israelis and Soviet immigrants are not clear. In the process, which I call mutual colonisation, both take positions of coloniser and colonised.

THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SCENE IN ISRAEL

Immigration (in Hebrew *aliyah*) is the backbone of ideology and politics in Israel. The *raison d'être* of the state of Israel is the 'Law of Return' that confers Israeli citizenship on any diaspora Jew. The ideology of Zionism is imbricated with immigration policy: Zionism justifies immigration, whereas immigration reinforces the Zionist idea.

In the 90s, Israel encountered a wave of immigration that did not fit the Zionist idea neatly. The new Soviet immigrants did not answer to the Zionist expectations, according to which they should be earnestly learning Hebrew while working in the kibbutz field. Fed up with ideology in their Soviet past, and coming from successful professional backgrounds, these immigrants were not in a rush to leave behind their diasporic past and plunge into a new cultural reality. This new wave of immigration,

neither quite Israeli nor quite Soviet, neither quite complicit nor quite resistant, inhabited the borderlands of the Israeli cultural landscape.

This mass migration (900,000 people — about 15% of the Israeli population) led to vast changes in Israeli society, culture and politics, adding a new ethnic minority with a distinct cultural voice. By the time of the 1996 elections the Soviet immigrant community had already received political representation. Yet, throughout the 90s, the community remained unrecognised in Israeli culture.[3]

The voices of immigrants, with their accents and foreign intonation, were never heard on Israeli radio; the characters of immigrants almost never appeared on TV or in film. There were no recent Soviet immigrants among Israeli public cultural producers. Media coverage of immigration was always from the veteran Israeli vantage point. A thriving industry of Russian-language media and culture existed separately from the mainstream Hebrew media, and thus was rendered invisible for Israeli audiences. Later, this situation gradually changed: in 1998, Russian subtitles were introduced on some cable channels; in 2001, Russian subtitles were introduced in movie theatres; in 2002, a Russian-language cable TV channel was launched. These steps towards recognition of the Russian-speaking audience in Israel, however, have not resolved the problem of under-representation of immigrants in the mainstream cultural production in Israel. Journalists and actors with Russian accents still make only cameo appearances in Hebrew-language media.

Throughout the 90s, one of the few places in the Israeli cultural scene where the Soviet immigrants were seen and heard was Gesher theatre. The Russian accent, usually relegated to the cultural margins, sounded there in the context of a major artistic production.

Gesher's history stands in contrast to the history of Habima, the first national theatre in pre-Israel Palestine. Habima, originally created in Moscow as the Hebrew-speaking theatre, was driven by the idea of Hebrew language revival (Levy 1979). In contrast to this Zionist mission, Gesher has a cultural vocation. In 1990, it was founded to be a bridge between the Russian culture of the actors and the Israeli culture of audiences (*gesher* in Hebrew means 'bridge').

However, already by 1992 Gesher was forced to switch from Russian to Hebrew because Israeli audiences were not interested in shows with simultaneous translation. The actors, who were new immigrants, did not know Hebrew and had to learn their parts phonetically. In spite of these challenges, the company proved to be both a box office and critical success, and received recognition from the international theatre community. In the late 90s, the Gesher troupe, comprised of Soviet immigrants and veteran Israelis, performed mostly in Hebrew and only occasionally in Russian. However, in the Israeli public sphere Gesher was still perceived as 'a Russian theatre' or 'a theatre of immigrants'.

Critical acclaim, popular success and official recognition on the one hand, and a condescending view of the theatre as an 'ethnic' or 'immigrant' venue on the other, lead to Gesher's ambivalent position in Israeli culture and politics. The theatre's me-

dia reception reflects this ambivalence. For these reasons, Gesher theatre is an inter-esting site for this research, which poses questions of hybridity realisation in discur-sive practice.

The primary data for this research project consists of profiles and interviews with Yevgeny Arye, the founder and director of Gesher theatre. These media materials were published in the national daily newspapers (*Ha-aretz* and *Maariv*), in the Tel Aviv weekly (*Ha-Ir*), and in the magazine *Anashim* in the years 1994-1999. *Ha-aretz*, one of the oldest and most prestigious newspapers in Israel, is an elite publication with high journalistic standards (similar to *The New York Times*). *Maariv* is one of the most widely read papers in Israel. It is a popular publication with lower journalistic standards (similar to *USA Today*). *Ha-Ir* is a popular local newspaper (similar to *The Village Voice*). *Anashim* is dedicated to gossip and scoops on celebrities (like *People* magazine).

Israeli newspaper writing, including theatre criticism, has its origins in 'party jour-nalism' when media were mobilised to serve the needs of society, specifically, to disseminate Hebrew language and Zionist ideology. The traces of this discourse are still pronounced in privately owned Israeli media today. Some authors observe that theatre criticism underwent a transformation in the post-state era and became more specialised and professional (Levy 1988; Weitz 1996). But I argue that the pervasive view of theatre as a national institution and the role of critics as ideological gatekeep-ers are still deeply embedded in Israeli popular culture.

My analysis pays close attention to the ideological Zionist terms in media dis-course. Translating Hebrew texts for the purpose of this essay, I use some Zionist terms in transliteration instead of translation and provide commentary on their ideo-logical meaning.

YEVGENY ARYE VS CRITICS

In Israel, the representation of immigration is situated within a hegemonic Zionist discourse. As a part of this discourse, the Hebrew word 'immigrant' (*ole*, plural *olim*) has distinct cultural and ideological meaning. *Ole* means literally 'ascendant'. *Olim* are repressed diasporic Jews who 'ascend' to the Land of Israel in order to build their national home. In the process of *klita* (literally 'absorption'), *olim* blend into the melting pot of a new society. They undergo the transformation from passive Jews to active Hebrews. This transformation includes the fulfilment of the Zionist commandments of an attachment to *Eretz Israel* (Land of Israel), a commitment to learning Hebrew and absorption into a new Israeli culture, i.e. complete cultural assimilation.

These commandments are predicated on the Zionist definition of immigration as 'homecoming'. New immigrants in Israel are not considered 'foreigners', but rather 'family relatives' who return to their natural home. Israeli sociologists argue that 'the homecomers' position eases entry into the new society' (Lomsky-Feder & Rapoport 2001, p.2). However, it is important to recognise that this positioning also puts immi-grants under tremendous ideological pressure. Zionist ideology interprets Jewish

immigration to Israel as relinquishing exile. Therefore, the discursive practice of Zionism obliges immigrants to feel 'at home' and forbids them to express nostalgia for their lost homeland and culture, or even speak their language.

In the following analysis I show how the ideological meanings of immigration in a hegemonic Zionist narrative inform Yevgeny Arye's media representation. Arye, who has degrees in psychology and directing, was a disciple of the great Russian director Georgy Tovstonogov. By 1989 Arye had directed at such leading venues as the Malyi and Bolshoi Drama theatres in Leningrad, and the Mayakovsky, Drama and Ermolova theatres in Moscow. He worked as a film director and as a theatre professor at the prestigious GITIS (State Academy of Theatre Arts). His theatre productions won several major directing awards in the Soviet Union and abroad. In 1990 he migrated to Israel and founded Gesher theatre (together with Slava Maltzev). Under Arye's leadership, Gesher productions have been awarded prizes at the national and international levels, toured extensively in Europe and the US, and received considerable media coverage in Israel and abroad. Arye's status as a public figure was confirmed when Yitzhak Rabin, then Prime Minister, invited Arye to accompany him to Oslo for the reception of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1994.

In Israel, Arye's media representation centred completely on the politics of identity, and particularly on his status as a new immigrant. He was expected to fit the ideological commandments of Zionism. But Arye both reaffirms and challenges these norms. Some characteristics of his public persona are consistent with Zionist ideology. He is a director of a Hebrew-language theatre which facilitates successful absorption of the immigrant actors. Effectively, he takes part in the production of Israeli culture: his shows are popular with Israeli audiences and are reviewed by the major media. Moreover, he is highly regarded by the Israeli establishment.

Yet other characteristics of Arye's public persona challenge the Zionist norms. Arye migrated to Israel for personal and professional reasons, rather than Zionist ideals. He does not know Hebrew and relies on Russian and English in his daily life. Moreover, he takes a great pride in his cultural heritage and gives no sign of moving towards complete cultural assimilation. As a result, Arye occupies an ambivalent position in Israeli culture: he is simultaneously an insider and an outsider, a marginal and a central figure.

Yet, Arye's media representation pushes him to one of the two extremes: he is presented as either complicit with or resistant to the Zionist norms. In earlier profiles and interviews, Arye is framed as a timid greenhorn on his way to becoming an assertive Israeli:

> Gesher today is an Israeli theatre in the full meaning of the word, and so is its director. When I met him at one of the first shows of Gesher, he was embarrassed and withdrawn. Today he is not hesitant to give his opinion, to point to the weaknesses of Israeli theatre, to suggest and to criticise. (Shohat 1994)

The critic presents Arye as a 'good' immigrant, whose behaviour is consistent with an Israeli ethos. She applies an ideological yardstick to Arye, imposing on him a system of Zionist values.

As the time went by, the critics grew impatient with Arye. In 1997, Shohat described him as an 'alien' who 'still does not speak Hebrew' (1997). According to the critic's logic, in his first years in Israel Arye's lack of Hebrew was forgivable, but after seven years this cultural dissent is unacceptable. Arye violates the Zionist norms of commitment to learning Hebrew and assimilation to Israeli culture, and the critic ought to call him into compliance.

A similar attitude is expressed in another interview, when the journalist asks Arye: 'Everyone knows the issue of your Hebrew, that you didn't have time to learn it. And despite that, do you feel attached to the life in Israel or do you live in a bubble?' (Shapiro 1997). The phrasing of the question poses attachment to Israel in opposition to complete separation from it, ruling out other possibilities.

Only one writer, Ariana Melamed, represents Arye's linguistic situation as a personal and professional drama, devoid of ideological meanings:

> English with journalists, Russian with actors, [Hebrew] with the help of crutches of translation ... It looks like part of Arye's extra adrenaline has its source in his constant fear that his comments will not pass exactly; that the nuanced language of such a verbal person as he, will not cross the double barrier of Hebrew and local culture. 'And it will be like that for the rest of their lives', he says sadly about his Russian actors who do heroic work and manage not to sound like a parody of the early Habima. About the rest of his life, and his own linguistic limbo he does not talk (1997).

But even Melamed's sensitivity comes to an end as soon as she starts discussing the relationships between Russian and Israeli cultures. She claims that the Russian pedigree of Israeli culture created space for a troupe like Gesher:

> In any other place in the world a phenomenon like Gesher wouldn't have survived ... Would it seem possible to imagine native New Yorkers storming the doors of a theatre which performs either in a very foreign language, or in heavy accents of new immigrants? Only in Israel, a place that is still attached by its umbilical cord to Russian culture, or at least to a certain image of the Russian culture, [is it possible].

According to Melamed, Gesher succeeded in Israel due to its Russian roots. As a matter of fact, Gesher succeeded in Israel despite (and not due to) its cultural origin. Since its first days, the Israeli audiences were reluctant to accept Gesher actors' accents. The Israeli critics exoticised Gesher as 'ethnic' or 'immigrant' theatre and judged its productions by how well the theatre-makers met ideological expectations.

Melamed also gives credit for Gesher's success to the open-minded Israeli public. She cannot imagine a similar reception elsewhere in the world. Melamed probably would have been surprised to learn, for instance, about the critical and popular success of Washington-based Stanislavsky Theatre Studio (STS), an American ensemble founded by immigrants from the former Soviet Union.[4]

The cultural positioning of Gesher is a stumbling point of almost every article about Arye. Melamed's attitude is stated already in the title of the article: '[Arye] will show you what is *kultura*'. For this threat she chooses the Russian word *kultura* (culture) over the Hebrew *tarbut* for its European 'cultured' sound. Having claimed her attitude, she criticises the ethnocentrism of the Soviet immigrants:

> When the leaders of immigrant intelligentsia point out to the Israelis that they [Israelis] are only descendents of the [Russian] culture, whereas they [Russian immigrants] are bearers of the thousands years of *kultura* [culture], too many Israelis tend to nod in agreement.

Melamed charges the Russian intellectuals with colonising Israeli culture and sneers at Israelis who willingly take the colonised position. She asks Arye, 'Maybe. Chekhov is a part of your colonisation program? An attempt to show how to do Russian culture correctly?' In response, Arye appeals to the presumed universality of art: 'There is no program', he admits, 'Chekhov is not Russian, just as Shakespeare is not English' (Melamed 1997). Refuting his 'colonisation program', Arye relies on the universal value of western art that transcends the boundaries of national cultures. It escapes both the journalist and Arye that his examples, Chekhov and Shakespeare, represent the western cultural tradition, rather than crossover cultural universals.

Critics often present Arye in the most stereotypical terms. Some representations clearly reflect ethnic stereotypes. For example, Sarit Fuks (1995) wrote about Arye:

> It's difficult not to describe Arye as a passionate Slavic man, a description that probably will annoy him. He is disgusted by an ethnic perspective on Gesher. He wants to be defined only by his art. Arye is an alien, almost an exile, in a non-idealistic and non-systematic theatre world in Israel and in the West.

Fuks was right — Arye, indeed, got annoyed with her 'ethnic perspective'. He rejected this representation and emphasised the universal value of his art. Ironically, in doing so he revealed his own ethnocentrism:

> I don't like when they say about us: those are immigrants. Our being *olim* does not define our work. We are not an ethnic dance group of Eskimos, when everything that is interesting about it is the fact that the dance is Eskimo. This is a very humiliating point of view. From the first day of founding Gesher we are trying to fight against it. (Fuks 1995)

In Arye's argument, the Eskimo dance is at the bottom of cultural hierarchy. As such, it has an anthropological rather than an artistic value. In contrast, Gesher productions are at the top; they exemplify universal (read European) art, and therefore Gesher's ethnic identity is not relevant to its artistic production. The journalists approached Gesher with yardsticks of Zionist ideology and ethnic stereotypes. In turn, Arye reciprocated with equal ethnocentricity.

Here, and in other interviews, Arye presents himself as an expert from a cultural centre. It is from this position that Arye expresses his concern over the provinciality of Israeli art, about incompetent theatre training, and ineffectual criticism (see, for

instance, Shohat 1997). Unfortunately, there is a remarkable symmetry in Arye's and his critics' reciprocal condescension.

In 1999, Gesher staged an Israeli political satire, *Eating*, which underwent a complete critical demolition. In a media interview Arye stated that the critics received *Eating* negatively because they assumed a position of ideological gatekeepers:

> In the play by Yakov Shabtai [*Eating*] I did what was not acceptable to critics. I took a short play that in my opinion is Israeli in its scope of universal problems. It is interesting to me to look for serious problems common for all of us in a political anecdote. But critics see the things in different terms than I. For them, this is politics, which is why [in their minds] I broke all the laws that I was supposed to follow. (Katz 1999)

By staging a satire of Israeli society, Arye broke the unspoken rules forbidding immigrants to voice political critique. As a consequence of this heresy, Arye took the punishment.

In another interview in *Maariv*, Arye also commented on the emerging negative media reception of Gesher: 'Because we are foreign, there was a wave of adulation towards us, and now there is another wave — a lack of appreciation. [Israelis] ask, ... Why? Don't we have our own theatre?' (Avidar 1999). Essentially, Arye describes the effects of mutual colonisation. Gesher's popularity and high status became threatening, as critics read cultural superiority into it. The threat triggered a defensive reaction. As a result, the critics attempted to reaffirm their cultural superiority ('Why? Don't we have our own theatre?'). This shift of positions results in a critical demolition of Gesher.

Other topics that loomed large in these interviews were Arye's cultural identity and the relationship between Russian and Israeli cultures. The first interview quoted above (Katz 1999) focuses entirely on the politics of identity. The journalist's questions emphasise Arye's non-Israeli cultural identity: 'Do you have a dialogue with Israeli theatre?' 'What do you like in Israeli art?' 'How is your theatre attached to Israel?' 'Do you miss Russia?' But Arye downplays the identity issue. He laughs it off ('I have a wonderful Hebrew, and it helps'), or just brushes it away, focusing on the 'universal' aspects of his work, which, according to him, transcend cultural boundaries. In another interview, Arye's responses painted a more complex picture:

> I understand how right I was to leave everything behind and to immigrate to Israel. Not because of Gesher's success, but because everything that is happening there [in Russia] does not belong to me any more. While visiting Russia I missed it here, despite the fact that my literature and theatre are still not here, but there, in Russia. (Avidar 1999)

Arye's self-representation is ambivalent. His approval of his immigration to Israel is complicit with the Zionist ideology. However, his allegiance to Russian culture contests the Zionist norms. Thus, Arye's hybrid identity both reaffirms the authority of the hegemonic ideology and disrupts it.

Arye's outlook on the relationship between Russian and Israeli cultures is ambivalent as well. On the one hand, he renounces cultural hierarchies and stereotypes:

Yevgeny Arye does not like generalisations like 'Russians' or 'Russian theatre', he is also against the generalisation of 'Israelis'. He protests when I ask him whether he is partial to the complaints of Russian immigrants that native Israelis are less cultured than Russians: 'I hate such thinking, but it touches upon a painful subject ... If Russians think they are so cultured, I'd like to challenge them. Maybe they say it as a defensive response, because their process of absorption was so difficult and painful. (Avidar 1999)

On the other hand, Arye's statements perpetuate colonial hierarchies of cultures. His criticism of Israeli society indicates his colonising position. When Avidar asks what bothers him in Israel, Arye responds: 'Junk that people leave behind, little towns that are covered with garbage, dogs whose owners don't clean after them. El Al [the Israeli national airline] airplanes that look like dumpsters after the flight' (1999). This may sound like an environmental concern; however, in Israel such rhetoric is usually aimed at housing developments populated by Mizrahi Jews. In Arye's complaint, 'garbage' stands for the lack of civilisation of the people who produce it, their low stage of cultural development. Arye's words echo colonial rhetoric.

The most outrageous exchange between Arye and a journalist took place on the pages of *Anashim*. If journalists from more respectable publications are constrained by 'the good taste' that their bourgeois audiences expect, nothing holds back Yoel Pinto from *Anashim*. He asks Arye: 'When you read negative reviews, do you think sometimes that if you were not Russian, they would not have written such review?' Arye's answer makes clear that he understands the pressure of the cultural dynamics: 'I am not talking about the fact that I am Russian, but that I am an immigrant — an other. I don't think that they [critics] are consciously writing [negative reviews] because I am a foreigner, but it definitely influences them' (1999).

As the interview proceeds, Arye starts confronting Pinto. Arye takes an ambivalent position: he criticises the media that perpetuate the cultural hierarchy, yet he joins in himself. He asks Pinto: '[Why] does the fact that we receive great press all over the world mean nothing for Israeli critics?' For Arye, 'all over the world' stands for the international cultural centres of London, New York, Paris and Berlin. Using references to the international critics' authority, Arye takes a superior position, and puts Israeli critics into a position of subjugation.

When Pinto asks Arye about his take on sour relationships between Russian immigrants and veteran Israelis, Arye's position is also ambivalent. On the one hand, he tries to put things into perspective:

Both sides [Russian immigrants and native Israelis] have problems. When the Russians say that there is no culture in Israel, they essentially are saying that the Israelis themselves are not cultured. I never thought so. Israelis have the same problem, when Israelis think that all the Russian women are prostitutes ... (Pinto 1999)

Arye recognises the mutual character of stereotyping between the two sides. But after scolding the Russian immigrants who say 'there is no culture in Israel', he easily restates it himself in his explanation of Gesher's credo:

> I still believe that we are fighting [a battle] over at least a little bit of culture in this country, which ... is not in a good condition in that respect. We are trying to struggle with TV and movies, we are trying to be unique, and we need help in order to achieve it. (Pinto 1999)

Arye takes upon himself the role of a missionary, the role enabling him to alleviate the assumed deficiencies of the 'natives', who without him would lose even the meagre 'little bit of culture' he is struggling to maintain. After statements like this, it is no surprise that some critics and audiences find Arye's tone condescending.

But the most heated exchange results from a discussion of music in *Eating*. The journalist tries to force clear cultural categories onto Arye, who time and again resists these attempts:

> [Pinto asks:] 'When a Russian director, in a Russian theatre, adds Mizrahi music to a play, does it have a special meaning?' [Arye replies:] 'I never think in terms of Russian director and Russian theatre. The problem is that after we have been performing in Israel for eight years, you are still asking me such questions. For you, we are still not among the rest of the theatres, and not because of our art, but because of our [cultural] background. For you, we are still foreigners here.' [Pinto asks] 'And you feel Israeli?' [Arye replies] 'I am already not Russian, but not yet Israeli. I am Israeli because I live and work here, but I am different, because I have not been born here. My childhood and my [world of] associations are different. I will be different until the end of my life, but there is a big difference between the way I see myself and the way others see me.'

Arye wants to be accepted the way he is, neither quite Israeli nor quite Russian. As he asserts his hybridity, he protests against Israeli critics who constantly drag him to either one cultural identity or the other.

However, this manifesto of hybridity only further infuriates the journalist. Pinto goes into a direct attack on Arye: 'Why are you staying here? I am sure that if you go to France, everyone there will fall to your feet.' Arye's answer testifies to his great desire to be accepted in Israel: 'I've worked in France ... The problem is that in France I will always be foreign [alien], but if here I will also remain foreign forever, that will be truly bad.'

Pinto is unrelenting: 'But you are foreign! You haven't even learned Hebrew.' Arye flies into a rage: 'This is not the critics' business whether I am conducting rehearsals in Russian or in Hebrew. If they want to criticise me for that, then they might as well criticise me for the fact that I am fat, or that I have a big beard ... When you ask me why I don't know Hebrew, I ask myself, why does it bother you?' They've reached an impasse.

In conclusion, vacillating between Russian-intellectual and Zionist discourses, Arye is put into a duplicitous cultural position. His dismissal of Israeli culture stems from his Russian high-cultured standards influenced in their turn by the inherent Russian inferiority in respect to Europe. Yet, he himself is dismissed by Israeli critics and audiences as an 'ethnic phenomenon', a marginal cultural oddity, who is not Israeli enough to be considered seriously. Thus Arye is simultaneously in an inferior and superior position to Israeli culture. The Israeli position as presented by journalists is a mirror

image of this duplicity. Proud of their emergent national culture, they force a new-comer to comply with it; yet intimidated by the prototypical cultural model, Russian art, they allow his positioning as a cultural expert.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows how the mainstream media discourse represents Arye, who stands for a new model of immigrant. Arye's hybrid representation emerges on the borderline of two discourses: first, Soviet-immigrant discourse which is informed by Russian culture and Jewish identity, and second, the Zionist master-narrative, which is also grounded in Russian culture. In addition, both of these discourses are subject to the colonising influence of European 'high-culture' values. The multi-vocal narra-tive of Arye's representation becomes an arena of cultural production of a new hybrid identity that is 'neither the one thing nor the other' (Bhabha 1994, p.33). This hybrid identity is both complicit and resistant: he is a new immigrant and an Israeli citizen; simultaneously, he is a Russian-Soviet intellectual and cultural producer. Neverthe-less, he is neither quite Israeli, nor quite Russian. His hybrid identity exists, in Bhabha's words, on the borderline of cultures, in the 'third space', which acquires transformative power due to its indefinability. It is in the third space that the voice of an immigrant minority has a chance to be heard rather than silenced.

It is tempting to adopt this inspiring vision of hybridity and hope that it will lead to 'a community which is creating, guaranteeing, encouraging spaces within which dif-ferent communities are able to grow at their own pace' (Bhabha & Parekh 1989, p.27). However, this approach to hybridity as an empowering third place gives only a limited understanding of complex transcultural processes.

The concept of ambivalence in colonial discourse developed by Bhabha is neces-sary for understanding the controversial representation of Arye in the media. In the ideological master-discourse its innovative hybrid nature gets ignored or assessed negatively. In dealing with Arye, media agents come to a rhetorical impasse, finding themselves lacking the vocabulary to relate to the emergent phenomenon without crutches of ideological stereotypes. Faced with an attempt by a subject (Arye in this case) to articulate the third space, the master-narrative is at a loss, unable to move towards resolution. Due to the mechanisms of mimicry and menace, Arye is in a lose-lose situation. On the one hand, the master-narrative speaking in the voice of the media requires him to be a compliant colonial subject and to perform an act of mim-icry, to be 'almost the same but not quite'. However, as he does it (i.e. stages Israeli plays, tries to be concerned with Israeli issues), his mimicry becomes too menacing, at which point the media attack him by emphasising his foreignness, and substantiat-ing the difference 'that is almost total but not quite'. On the other hand, if Arye gives up mimicry and positions himself as a complete alien he is also attacked since his refusal to be a colonial subject is threatening. As a result, the vituperative Zionist master-narrative is in a deadlock with respect to Gesher.

Even though hybridity works on both levels of syncretic cultural production and ambivalence of mimicry and menace, its double nature is manifested in different cultural contexts to different extents, depending on the existing power relations. The hybridity as a third space is more salient in the polyphonic situation where there is an equal (or almost equal) power balance which allows multiple cultural voices to be heard simultaneously, or one after another. However, ambivalent hybridisation prevails in the situation of a vast power imbalance, i.e. in the situation of cultural minority/majority or coloniser/colonised. With a Zionist ideology in a hegemonic position the only possibility for the Other is marginalisation. In this system an alternative (immigrant) voice is either silenced or is bound to mimic.

It is time for Israeli media to move beyond the rigid norms of Zionist ideology and embrace other ideological and cultural perspectives, among them those of post-Zionist thinkers, Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews, orthodox Jews and Soviet immigrants. None of these perspectives should have hegemonic power; no uniform voice should define the one and only system of values and unitary set of criteria of judgment. Such polycentric discourse will create opportunities for negotiations leading to the resolution of the current ethnic and political crises in Israel.

Olga Gershenson, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Theatre at Bridgewater State College. Her doctoral dissertation addressed cultural policy for Israel. Her other works deal with critical ethnography and intercultural conflict management. She is a member of the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR-USA) and a former emissary of the Jewish Agency of the Former Soviet Union.

NOTES

1. For further discussion of traditional Jewish discourse in the context of Zionism see Katriel (1997). For further discussion of Mizrahi Jewish discourse in the context of Zionism see Shohat (1999). For further discussion of post-Zionism (critical approach to Israeli history and ideology) see Hadar (1999) and Pappe (2000).

2. An important distinction should be made between the discriminations against different cultural Others. The discrimination against Soviet immigrants lies mainly within the cultural domain. For instance, Soviet immigrants were reprimanded for speaking Russian by strangers, who were reinforcing the Zionist imperative of 'only Hebrew'. The fair skin and blonde hair of many Soviet immigrants were read as a sign of gentile origin. In Israel, such immigrants were often faced with questions about their Judaism, or attitudes resulting from assumption of their ethnic impurity.

3. In my claim that Soviet immigrants were unrecognised, I rely on Nancy Fraser's (1998) definition of 'politics of recognition' as social practices of representation, interpretation and communication.

4. For further information, see the STS website www.sts-online.org.

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