

ABSTRACT

WHAT TYPE OF ARAB-JEWISH NARRATIVE  
IS THE ISRAELI CONSENSUS WILLING TO ACCEPT?  
THE CASE OF AMNON SHAMOSH

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This paper uses the Foucauldian notion of 'Name of the Author' to examine the ways in which Amnon Shamosh, whose work has generally been neglected in scholarship, functioned in the literary and cultural discourse of Israel in the 1970s and early 1980s, focusing on his famous 1978 novel – adapted for television in 1982 – *Michel Ezra Safra and Sons*. This popular novel, initially rejected by all major publishing houses in Israel, tells the tale of Aleppo's wealthy Safra family throughout the twentieth century, as historical circumstances gradually force it to leave its beloved city, sending one part of the family to Israel and the other to South America. Shamosh claimed that the novel redeemed the image of the Israeli Mizrahi family and its members, portraying educated and proud Mizrahi subjects. Yet, a close reading reveals that the novel actually demonstrates the ways in which the Mizrahi subject is forced to shed his/her Arabic traits inasmuch as he/she approaches the Israeli mainstream and consensus – much as, it seems, Shamosh himself had to do. Using three geographic spheres – that of exile, of the Israeli urban space, and of the kibbutz – the novel depicts three possible ethnic modes of existence of Israeli Mizrahi, who is forced to surrender layers of Arab heritage as he/she approaches the Holy Mecca of Israeliness, the kibbutz.

The investigation of Shamosh's biography, his literary techniques, his narrative, and the acceptance of his writings, leads to some intriguing conclusions regarding past and current possibilities of Mizrahi authorship in Israel; including Shamosh's own. What type of Arab-Jewish narrative is the Israeli consensus willing to accept, and why?