



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Chalom and 'Abdu Get Married: Jewishness and Egyptianness  
in the Films of Togo Mizrahi

Deborah A. Starr

Jewish Quarterly Review, Volume 107, Number 2, Spring 2017, pp.  
209-230 (Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jqr.2017.0007>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/659869>

## Chalom and ‘Abdu Get Married: Jewishness and Egyptianness in the Films of Togo Mizrahi

DEBORAH A. STARR

IN 1932, A JEWISH COMIC ACTOR known as Chalom made his first film appearance as an Arabic-speaking, bumbling, lower-class Alexandrian character also named Chalom. Two years later, in the film *The Two Delegates* (*Al-manduban* [1934]) Chalom strode out of a café, arm-in-arm with his Muslim sidekick ‘Abdu, marching headlong into their first of two comic adventures (fig. 1). These films, *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* (*Al-‘izz babdala* [1937]), explore class and cultural markers of identity in early twentieth-century Alexandria through the adventures (and misadventures) of the friends Chalom and ‘Abdu.

In these comic narratives of chance and mistaken identity, the fates of the two friends—Jew and Muslim—are closely intertwined. The films’ humor derives from Chalom and ‘Abdu’s clumsy efforts to function in unfamiliar environments. Both films resist exploiting stereotypes for their comic potential.<sup>1</sup> The characterization of Jews and Muslims in *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* foregrounds similarities rather than

---

I would like to thank Ziad Fahmy, Elliot Shapiro, and Sami Zubaida for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. I am also grateful to Jacques Mizart, Nicole Angel McManamny, and Maureen McManamny for sharing family history, clippings, and photographs. This project was partially supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

1. This form of “ethnic comedy” is evident in such films as Hilmi Rafla, *Fatima wa-Marika wa-Rashil* (1949); Fu’ad al-Jizayirli, *Hasan wa-Murqus wa-Kubayn* (1954); Hasan al-Sayfi, *Hasan wa-Marika* (1959). “Levantine cinema” of the 1930s reflects the diversity of the Egyptian urban population, but comic scenarios are constructed around narratives of masquerade and mistaken identity rather than ethnic stereotypes. For more on this distinction, see Deborah A. Starr, “Masquerade and the Performance of National Imaginaries: Levantine Ethics, Aesthetics, and Identities in Egyptian Cinema,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 1.2 (2011).

*The Jewish Quarterly Review* (Spring 2017)

Copyright © 2017 Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies.

All rights reserved.



Figure 1. 'Abdu and Chalom leave a café arm-in-arm. Screenshot, *The Two Delegates* (1934).

differences. The films portray a locally situated, Alexandrian culture of coexistence.

In this essay I argue that these comedic films attempt to shape the popular imaginary of what it means to be Egyptian through their representations of a diverse urban landscape. Further, I contend that these films seek to articulate the place of Jews in the Egyptian polity through characterization of salt-of-the-earth, Arabic-speaking Egyptian Jews.

*The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* were written, produced, and directed by Togo Mizrahi (1901–86), a Jew of Italian descent who was a popular and prolific filmmaker in Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I begin by exploring Togo Mizrahi's career and examining the common threads of pluralism and lower-class concerns that characterize films produced in his Alexandria studio between 1930 and 1939.<sup>3</sup>

2. The title credits in both films appear in both Arabic and French, while the films' dialogue, as discussed in what follows, is almost exclusively in Arabic. The Arabic and French titles of the 1934 film—*Al-manduban* and *Les deux délégués*—can both be translated into English as *The Two Delegates*. However, there is a notable discrepancy between the titles of the 1937 film. The French title, *Les deux banquiers*, reads as *The Two Bankers*. The Arabic title, *Al-'izz babdala*, is not easily rendered into English; for the sake of consistency, I have adopted the translation proposed by Viola Shafik, *Mistreated by Affluence*. Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo, 2007), 29–30. Although the French titles draw attention to the parallels between this pair of films, I refer to the latter film by its Arabic title as translated into English.

3. For a broad overview of Jewish involvement in the Egyptian cinema industry, see Eyal Sagui-Bizawe, "Ha-te'atron voha-kolno'a," in *Mitsrayim*, ed. N. Ilan

I argue that Chalom and 'Abdu are depicted as *awlād al-balaḍ*, a populist identification of salt-of-the-earth nativeness that is usually applied only to Muslims. I then unpack how this identity is constructed in the films *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence*. First, I explore how the representations of Chalom and 'Abdu's weddings highlight shared cultural practices and downplay differences of religious rite. Over the course of the two films, Chalom and 'Abdu have the good fortune of celebrating their marriages twice. The happy couples—Chalom and Esther, 'Abdu and Amina—doubled their joy by celebrating their wedding days together, further intertwining the representation of their experiences. Following discussion of the ethics of coexistence represented by the dual weddings, I then analyze how language use (and misuse) serves as a means to set Arabophone Jews apart from the Francophone cosmopolitanism of foreign-minority elites and sharply distinguish them from the incomprehensible gibberish attributed to foreigners. The films' construction of Jewishness sits at odds with the Western-oriented aspirations of the Jewish bourgeoisie and the traditional values and religious practice ascribed to Egypt's Arabic-speaking Jews. In the final analysis, despite their effort to portray a culture of coexistence among equals, the films contain within themselves the discourse of otherness that was ultimately employed to drive a wedge between Egyptianness and Jewishness.

#### TOGO MIZRAHI'S CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF COEXISTENCE

Togo Mizrahi was born and raised in Alexandria to an Italian Jewish family that had made its fortune in the cotton and textile trade. Mizrahi was among the founders of the Egyptian film industry in the 1930s. He established a studio, Studio Togo Mizrahi, and a production company, Shirkat al-Aflam al-Misriyya (Egyptian Films Company). Mizrahi exerted extensive creative control over his films—writing, directing, and producing most of the films with which he was associated. Studio Togo Mizrahi was the most productive studio in Egypt in the 1930s, turning out many popular and successful films.<sup>4</sup> Mizrahi's films reflect—and help shape—a collective and distinctly local sensibility.

---

(Jerusalem, 2008); Robins Walker, "Cinema, Arabic, Jews in," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. N. A. Stillman and P. I. Ackerman-Lieberman (Leiden, 2010), [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/cinema-arabic-jews-in-SIM\\_000349](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/cinema-arabic-jews-in-SIM_000349).

4. Magdy Mounir el-Shammaa, "Shadows of Contemporary Lives: Modernity, Culture, and National Identity in Egyptian Filmmaking" (Los Angeles, 2007), 46–47. For a complete listing of Egyptian films released in the 1930s, see Ahmad al-Hadari, *Tarikh al-sinema fi Misr: Min bid'ayat 1931 ila akhbir 1940*, vol. 2

Mizrahi produced films in his Alexandria studio from 1930 to 1939, after which he relocated most of his operations to Cairo. Mizrahi's representation of Alexandria in his 1930s films reflects the city's diversity. In contradistinction to the foreign elitism characteristic of the Francophone bourgeoisie, in Mizrahi's films, characters from variety of religions and nationalities are depicted as part of the fabric of Egyptian society. In addition to Chalom's Jewish character, Mizrahi's films from this period also regularly feature Nubian, *shami* (Levantine Arab), and Greek characters. While Francophone characters make cameo appearances in some films, multiculturalism, syncretism, and cultural exchange manifests primarily among residents of lower-class neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his wealth, all the films Mizrahi made in his Alexandria studio from 1930 to 1939 sympathetically represent Egypt's lower classes. In explaining the popularity of "'lower class' personae" like Chalom and 'Abdu, the critic Viola Shafik has noted that such characters "were most probably designed for, or at least took into account, the tastes of visitors of local third-class movie theaters."<sup>6</sup> Mizrahi's farces, which played in second- and third-tier cinemas, feature physical comedy and lowbrow humor. His early melodramas also address struggles facing the lower classes. Togo Mizrahi's first feature film, *The Abyss* or *Cocaine* (*Al-hawaya* or *Al-kukayin* [silent, 1930]), offers a bleak representation of the effects of drugs on Egyptian laborers. *Children of Egypt* (*Awlad Miṣr* [1933]) is a love story between a poor college student and the sister of one of his wealthy classmates. In *The Sailor* (*Al-babbar* [1935]) the impoverished wife of a boat captain seeks solace, and financial security, in the arms of an aristocrat when her husband is at sea.

The native, lower-class urban-dwellers featured in Mizrahi's films can be characterized by the Egyptian colloquial expressions *awlad al-balaḍ*, *ibn al-balaḍ* (m, sing.), and *bint al-balaḍ* (f. sing.). In its popular usage, the term *ibn* or *bint al-balaḍ* also signifies simplicity, goodness, and purity of heart. *Awlad al-balaḍ* speak the urban Egyptian dialect and prize themselves on their sense of humor.

According to Sawsan al-Messiri, the term emerged in the eighteenth

---

(Cairo, 2007), and Munir Muhammad Ibrahim, *Al-sinima al-Miṣriyya fi al-tḥalath-iniyat (1930–1939)* (Cairo, 2002).

5. For critical discussions of the application of the term "cosmopolitan" to Egypt, see Will Hanley, "Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies," *History Compass* 6.5 (2008); Deborah A. Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt: Literature, Culture, and Empire* (London, 2009), 1–28; Sami Zubaida, *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East* (London, 2011), 131–55.

6. Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 31.

century to describe native craftspeople, distinguishing them from Turko-Circassian elites, Arabic-speaking immigrants from outside of Egypt, and foreigners. Although, according to el-Messiri, the definition of the term and the valences attached to it shifted—in the early twentieth century, and again following the 1952 revolution—it consistently functions as a marker of indigeneity and class status. While el-Messiri's study of the term's historical meanings passes quickly over the period during which Mizrahi's films are produced, one of her informants, a craftsman self-identified as an *ibn al-balaḍ*, offers some insight into the term's associations at that time. From his vantage point in the late 1960s or 1970s when el-Messiri conducted her fieldwork, he notes that *awlaḍ al-balaḍ* of an earlier generation "used to attend the theater, especially the plays of Nagib al-Rihani and ['Ali] al-Kassar."<sup>7</sup> In other words, according to this informant, in the early twentieth century, *awlaḍ al-balaḍ* were, in part, defined by their attendance at theatrical performances that reflected their self-identification back at them.

Al-Rihani's and al-Kassar's comic sketches reflect dislocations experienced by rural migrants to the city. Naguib al-Rihani's most famous character, Kish Kish Bey, is the mayor of a fictional village "Kafr al-Balas." 'Ali al-Kassar was known for his character 'Usman 'Abd al-Basit, a down-on-his-luck Nubian.<sup>8</sup> Their comic personae play on the tensions between urban modernization and traditional practices in the countryside.

Naguib al-Rihani had a long stage career leading a popular theater troupe, as well as a successful star turn on the silver screen from 1937 until his death in 1949. Both his onstage Franco-Arab review and the film projects with which he was associated represent Egyptian diversity across classes.<sup>9</sup> Although Mizrahi and al-Rihani never made a film together, al-Rihani's longtime writing partner, Badi' Khairi, collaborated with Mizrahi on several films in the 1940s.

The other quintessential *ibn al-balaḍ* of the stage, 'Ali al-Kassar, worked extensively with Togo Mizrahi. Mizrahi was instrumental in helping al-Kassar bring his popular stage persona to the screen. Al-Kassar starred

7. Sawsan Messiri, *Ibn Al-Balaḍ: A Concept of Egyptian Identity* (Leiden, 1978), 74.

8. For more on the involvement of al-Rihani and his troupe in shaping national discourses during the 1919 revolution, see Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford, Calif., 2011), 134–66.

9. For a discussion of Egyptian diversity in the film *Salama Is Fine* (*Salama fi khayr* [1937]) featuring Naguib al-Rihani, see Starr, "Masquerade and the Performance of National Imaginaries."

in nine films directed by Mizrahi. The first five, produced in Alexandria, are farces set in the present. Their collaborations produced in Cairo in the 1940s took a turn toward fantasy, based loosely on the *1001 Nights*. These bigger-budget films featured extravagant sets and costumes into which al-Kassar's simple, well-meaning character was unwittingly dropped for comic effect.

In addition to his prolific output with al-Kassar, Mizrahi's films produced in the 1930s in his Alexandria studio featured two other comic stars who also consistently play lower-class characters: Fawzi al-Jazayirli and Chalom. Fawzi al-Jazayirli frequently played the shop owner "Bahbah" and other simple characters of limited means. In addition to his supporting role as Amina's father in *The Two Delegates*, al-Jazayirli appeared in *The Sailor* and starred in *Doctor Farabat* (*Al-Duktur Farbat* [1935]).

Chalom was the screen name and onscreen persona of Leon Angel, an Alexandrian Jew of Greek nationality. Angel hailed from the same lower-class quarters his character inhabits on screen. According to colorful family lore, Leon's father smuggled hashish on the Nile. Although his contributions are not credited, Angel reportedly drew on his family experience to help develop the scenario for Togo Mizrahi's first film, *The Abyss*, or *Cocaine*.<sup>10</sup> Angel went on to star in three films directed by Togo Mizrahi, including *5001* (silent, 1931), a sports comedy; *The Two Delegates*; and *Mistreated by Affluence*.<sup>11</sup>

What sets Togo Mizrahi's collaborations with Chalom apart from other contemporaneous representations of *awlad al-balad* is their inclusion of Jews within this populist category. This bold assertion challenges commonly held assumptions about nativeness and Jewishness in 1930s Egypt. On the one hand, as el-Messiri notes, the term *ibn al-balad* is generally applied exclusively to members of the Muslim majority—a restriction Chalom's character contests. On the other hand, the films' characterization of Chalom reflects neither the perceptions of Arabophone lower-class Jews nor the aspirations of the Jewish bourgeoisie and elites.

In dress and speech Chalom shares traits common among the Jews from the popular districts in Cairo and Alexandria. But, according to

10. Correspondence with Nicole Angel McManamny and Maureen McManamny, December 11–12, 2016.

11. Angel is credited as assistant director of *The Two Delegates*. He went on to direct two additional films in which he also starred: *Chalom the Dragoman* (*Chalom al-turgaman* [1935]); and *The Athlete* (*Al-riyadi* [1937]).

Jacques Hassoun, Jews from the urban lower classes were generally “strongly committed to their religion.”<sup>12</sup> In Mizrahi’s films, Chalom is portrayed without reference to religious practice. The lower-class character Chalom performs a secularity generally associated with the bourgeoisie.

The Egyptian Jewish bourgeoisie looked down on the poverty and traditional religious values characteristic of the residents of Cairo’s medieval Jewish quarter, *barat al-yahud*, and spurned the use of Arabic.<sup>13</sup> Reuven Snir goes so far as to claim that “a Jew as a ‘carbon copy of *ibn al-balaḍ*’ was never a desired option for Egyptian Jews.”<sup>14</sup> Members of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and those with upwardly mobile bourgeois aspirations, spoke French, modeled their comportment on Western fashion, and, indeed, never saw themselves as embracing the option Chalom represents.<sup>15</sup>

However, Chalom’s character, contrary to Snir’s claim, reflects a desire to express an Arabophone Egyptian Jewish nativeness. Chalom is a representation of a Jewish *ibn al-balaḍ*—not a “carbon copy,” a dismissive term that denies authenticity to lower-class Arabic-speaking Jews. Chalom, the *ibn al-balaḍ*, reflects Togo Mizrahi’s and Leon Angel’s desire to assert Jewish nativeness and belonging within the Egyptian polity in an era when notions of Egyptianness and national identity were in flux.<sup>16</sup> In what follows, I explore the expressions of Chalom’s nativeness and unpack the valences of the representation of this Jewish *ibn al-balaḍ*, beginning with the representation of the weddings of Chalom and Esther, ‘Abdu and Amina.

#### TWO DELEGATES, TWO BANKERS, AND FOUR WEDDINGS

*The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* can be read as an asynchronous pair. The narratives revolve around the same eight major characters: Chalom, Esther, Esther’s parents, ‘Abdu, Amina, and Amina’s parents. Although the actors are not all the same in the two films, the defining

12. Jacques Hassoun, “The Traditional Jewry of the Hara,” in *The Jews of Egypt: A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*, ed. S. Shamir (Boulder, Colo., 1987), 170.

13. Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914–1952* (Seattle, Wash., 1989), 28.

14. Reuven Snir, “‘A Carbon Copy of *Ibn Al-Balaḍ*’? The Participation of Egyptian Jews in Modern Arab Culture,” *Archiv Orientalní* 74.1 (2006).

15. Dario Miccoli, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt: An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s–1950s* (London, 2015).

16. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, 1995).

personality traits of each of these characters remain consistent. The primary discontinuity between the films is the timing and circumstances leading up to the marriages of Chalom and Esther, 'Abdu and Amina. Although narratives of remarriage were popular in Hollywood films of this era, the films in question do not conform to the conventions of what Stanley Cavell calls "the remarriage plot."<sup>17</sup> Thus, one is prompted to closely examine the repeated scene and consider why Mizrahi chose to portray the dual weddings in both films.

At the start of *The Two Delegates*, both men extend proposals of marriage and are rejected by the brides' families on grounds of class. Independently, both mothers identify the suitor's native garb—the *gallabiya*—as a sign of poverty and backwardness. The two dejected friends, determined to improve their appearance, purchase suits and slip into a barbershop for a shave (fig. 2). When they leave the barbershop, they mistakenly put on the wrong suit jackets, bearing lapel pins that identify them as members of an international organized crime outfit. A local band of thieves is anticipating the arrival of two delegates from abroad to review their accounting books (!) and oversee a covert operation. Chalom and 'Abdu are mistaken for the international delegates and escorted to the thieves' den. After comic antics of miscommunication, they manage to escape from the secret lair. Later in the film they succeed in foiling the thieves' plans. The authorities give Chalom and 'Abdu a cash reward for helping them to apprehend the thieves. The sum enables them both to marry at the end of the film.

While *The Two Delegates* treats the interconfessional friendship matter-of-factly, *Mistreated by Affluence* immediately calls the viewer's attention to its ethics of coexistence. The opening scene of *Mistreated by Affluence* shows Chalom and 'Abdu asleep side by side on a mattress in their shared

---

17. Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981). Cavell focuses on this plot device as it appears in Hollywood romantic comedies of the 1930s and 1940s. Mizrahi employs this convention a few years later in his musical melodramas *On a Rainy Night* (*Fi layla mumtara* [1939]) and *Layla, the Village Girl* (*Layla bint al-rif* [1941]). As the title suggests, Mizrahi's *On a Rainy Night* owes a great deal to *It Happened One Night* (1934, Frank Capra, dir.), one of the films Cavell analyzes in defining the classification. More recent scholarship has identified even earlier antecedents to the "remarriage plot" in Hollywood films of the 1910s and 1920s with which Mizrahi may also have been familiar: Charles Musser, "Divorce, DeMille and the Comedy of Remarriage," in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. K. B. Karnick and H. Jenkins (New York, 1995); Billy Budd Vermillion, "The Remarriage Plot in the 1910s," *Film History* 13.4 (2001).



Figure 2. Chalom and 'Abdu purchase suits, screenshot, *The Two Delegates* (1934).

room on the roof.<sup>18</sup> When the butcher dies and leaves the shop to 'Abdu, he shares the windfall with Chalom, helping him to open a store next to his own. The money also makes it possible for them both to wed. The day after the wedding, Chalom purchases scrap paper for 'Abdu to wrap meat and discovers that the papers are valuable stock certificates. With this second, even larger sum they buy a bank. The temptations of the good life create a rift between the two protagonists that is only repaired when the bank fails, they lose their investment, and return, happily, to life in the old, popular quarter.

In *The Two Delegates* the protagonists' adventures are motivated by their desire to wed. Even through its episodic digressions, the plot builds toward the dramatic conclusion of the dual weddings. By contrast, the weddings play a much less significant function in the plot of *Mistreated by Affluence*. The wedding scene takes place about fifteen minutes into the film, and the significant plot elements unfold after the couples are wed: it is not until after the wedding that Chalom finds the stock certificates. While the *fact* that Chalom and 'Abdu are married has some bearing on the course of the film's plot—two female performers flirt with them in an attempted extortion scheme—the inclusion of the weddings is not essential to the plot.

18. For a discussion of same-sex bed sharing in Mizrahi's films, see Deborah A. Starr, "In Bed Together: Coexistence in Togo Mizrahi's Alexandria Films," in *Post-Ottoman Co-Existence: Sharing Space in the Shadow of Conflict*, ed. R. Bryant (Oxford, 2016).

As the analyses to follow demonstrate, Mizrahi chooses to depict only the shared idioms of celebration rather than religious rites distinct to each community. These shared elements of celebration are somewhat varied—including both traditional Egyptian modes of celebration and, in the case of attire, Western fashion.<sup>19</sup> Representing the celebrations in this way serves to underscore the films' ethics of coexistence.

In *The Two Delegates*, although the weddings represent the dramatic conclusion of the film, the nuptials only occupy one minute of screen time and are presented entirely without dialogue. The wedding scene begins with the sound of ululation that signals the families' acceptance of the marriage proposals and carries over to a shot of festive decorations outside the house. The scene then cuts to Amina in her wedding gown as we begin to hear the sound of the *zaffa*, the wedding procession accompanied by a traditional band. The music plays in a continuous, unbroken stream over a montage of wedding images featuring both couples.

The representation of the dual wedding in *Mistreated by Affluence* is more extensive, encompassing celebrations preceding the nuptials as well as wedding preparation. Several elements common to Egyptian weddings are depicted in this scene: a celebration welcoming the delivery of furniture to the future home of the bride and groom; a henna ceremony; communal preparation of food for the wedding feast; seating of the bride and groom facing the guests at the wedding party; and a processional led by musicians and a dancer escorting the newlyweds out of the party toward their new home.<sup>20</sup> In the film, over the course of five and a half minutes, the scene cuts between preparations and celebrations, comic interludes, and celebratory tableaux accompanied by music. The rapid intercutting

---

19. The weddings in *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* reflect the traditional wedding celebrations as practiced in Egypt's cities, even as the attire reflects Western influence and class aspiration. As a point of comparison, see Mizrahi's portrayal of a Nubian wedding in *Seven O'Clock* (*Al-sa'a 7* [1937]). For a discussion of marriage as a reflection of the modern and bourgeois aspirations of Egyptian Jewry at this time, see Dario Miccoli, *The Jews of Modern Egypt: Schools, Family, and the Making of an Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s–1950s* (PhD. diss.; European University Institute, 2012), 119–78. Other historians and anthropologists have also looked at transformations of marriage practices and wedding ceremonies as articulations of modernity or reflections on social changes affected by modernization. See, for example, Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London, 1989), 116–17; Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, for Worse: The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt* (Stanford, Calif., 2010).

20. For a more complete discussion of the marriage practices of Muslims and Jews, see Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, 108–16.



Figure 3. Esther and Chalom celebrate their wedding. Screenshot, *Mistreated by Affluence* (1937).

between the two celebrations in honor of Chalom and Esther, 'Abdu and Amina, serves to blur distinctions between them.<sup>21</sup>

The similarities are further underscored at the pinnacle of the wedding festivities in *Mistreated by Affluence* with the repetition of the image of bride and groom side-by-side rising from a seated to a standing position (figs. 3 and 4). In both shots, the groom stands on the right, arm in arm with his bride on the left. Both grooms wear evening clothes and a tarbush, while both brides wear a wedding gown and a white lace cap to which is attached a bridal veil. The visible features of the two wedding gowns—the draping fabric at the neckline and over the bodice, the shape of the sleeves—suggest that they were cut from the same pattern (and may even be the same dress). Mizrahi's use of a wipe to shift from one celebration to another means that for a brief moment, the two tableaux share the screen.

It is perhaps not surprising that Mizrahi chooses weddings to represent shared cultural practices. In a study on Middle Eastern popular culture, Sami Zubaida offers wedding ceremonies as an example of the confluence of popular religious practice that cuts across confessional groups.<sup>22</sup> In the

21. As anecdotal evidence of the confusion sown by the intercutting, note the user-generated title to excerpts from the dual Muslim and Jewish wedding sequence from *Mistreated by Affluence* posted to YouTube by a user identified as zein37 from Egypt: "Afrah al-yahud al-misriyyin" (Weddings of Egyptian Jews) (October 30, 2010), video clip, accessed June 19, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W7Tm3qJNsw>.

22. Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, 106–16.



Figure 4. Amina and ‘Abdu celebrate their wedding. Screenshot, *Mistreated by Affluence* (1937).

context of shared popular culture, the wedding montage in *Mistreated by Affluence*—with its intercutting of documentary footage shot in the streets of Alexandria and staged vignettes and tableaux shot in the studio—echoes a lively montage of Egyptians celebrating the spring festival of Shamm al-Nasim that appears near the beginning of the film. Shamm al-Nasim is a spring folk festival with roots in ancient Egyptian practices. Although observed on the day following Coptic Easter, it is considered a nondenominational festival traditionally celebrated with picnics and other outdoor activities.<sup>23</sup> This festival holds great appeal for Mizrahi—featuring prominently in *Mistreated by Affluence*, as well as his films *On a Rainy Night* (1939) and in *Layla in the Dark* (1944).<sup>24</sup> In *Mistreated by Affluence* the preparations for and celebration of Shamm al-Nasim follow immediately on the opening scene in Chalom and ‘Abdu’s apartment. This

23. Jacques Hassoun attests to Jewish participation in Shamm al-Nasim festivities: Jacques Hassoun, “Chroniques de la vie quotidienne,” in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, ed. J. Hassoun (Paris, 1990), 177–78.

24. Both films feature Layla Murad, an Egyptian Jewish musical film star whose popularity and onscreen persona emerged during her collaboration with Mizrahi on five films between 1939 and 1944. Unlike Chalom, the characters Murad played were presumably or explicitly Muslim. However, as Walter Armbrust notes, Egyptian viewers would have likely known of Murad’s Jewish background. Walter Armbrust, “The Golden Age before the Golden Age: Commercial Egyptian Cinema before the 1960s,” in *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. W. Armbrust (Berkeley, Calif., 2000), 299.

sequence of scenes, like the wedding, firmly establishes the film's ethics of coexistence.<sup>25</sup> The visual connection between the festive montage of the holiday and that of the dual wedding serve to further underscore the shared cultural practices of Egypt's Jewish and Muslim (and, implicitly in the case of Shamm al-Nasim, Christian) populations.<sup>26</sup>

Mizrahi highlights shared cultural practices to the exclusion of distinct religious rites. Notably absent from both representations of the dual weddings—one abbreviated, the other quite detailed—are the wedding ceremonies themselves. There is no handshake accompanied by the recitation of the *fatiba*, nor is there a *hupah* and breaking of a glass.<sup>27</sup> No clergy presides over either of the weddings. Mizrahi studiously evacuates the weddings of religious content.<sup>28</sup>

#### LINGUISTIC MARKERS OF COMMUNAL IDENTITY

Communal affiliation in these films is marked instead by naming and speech. Names can signal a character's ethnonational or religious identification. Muslim characters, like Amina, consistently bear Arabic names. Esther and Solomon (Esther's father) with their biblical names are identifiably Jewish. Other Jews are identified by names from European lan-

25. Viola Shafik observes that "their first common meal . . . conveys an expressive image of coexistence." Shafik, however, mistakenly notes the presence of a Christian family in this scene. Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 29–31.

26. The only Christians evident in Mizrahi's films are Greeks, whose characterization is discussed below. As Viola Shafik has noted, Copts are seldom depicted in film, particularly prior to 2005. Although the plot of Muhammad Bayumi, *Ma'allim Barsum yabhabh 'an wazifa* (1932), involves a Coptic-Muslim friendship, this particular expression of coexistence does not reappear on screen until 1954 in *Hasan wa-Murqus wa-Kubayn*. Shafik notes the brief appearance of a Coptic character in Niyazi Mustafa, *Salama fi kbayr* (1937). She offers a possible explanation for this omission: discourses of national unity, embraced by Copts and Muslims alike, have tended to view the Copts as "one element in a coherent national block rather than a minority." She also outlines the Coptic Church's objections in more recent years to filmic portrayals of the community it deems misleading. Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 41–64. See also Mahmud Qasim, *Surat al-adyan fi al-sinima al-Misriyya* (Giza, 1997), 209–34.

27. In the Islamic tradition the ceremony of *katib al-kitab* at which the *fatiba* is recited may precede the communal wedding celebrations by days or weeks. Nevertheless, Mizrahi clearly elects not to represent this religious ceremony in the wedding montages.

28. Anthropologists and historians have also looked at transformations of marriage practices and wedding ceremonies as articulations of modernity or reflections on social changes affected by modernization. Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, 116–17; Kholoussy, *For Better, for Worse*; Miccoli, "The Jews of Modern Egypt."

guages, like Vittoria (Esther's mother), but these names are more ambiguous, as they were common among both foreigners and Western-oriented minorities in this era. In *Mistreated by Affluence* the communal affiliations of two other characters are similarly identified by name. Two "doctors"—actually nurses pretending to be doctors—are called to care for Chalom's and 'Abdu's injuries following a scuffle: "Dr." Wali attends to 'Abdu, and "Dr." Maurice attends to Chalom. In case the communal identity shared by doctor and patient was not sufficiently clear by their names alone, when the "doctors" find themselves in a position to swindle the families by continuing to offer phony medical care, Maurice whispers to Wali, "You take care of yours, and I'll take care of mine."

The names of the protagonists, Chalom and 'Abdu, are the same as the (stage) names of the actors playing the roles in *The Two Delegates*. It was quite common in Mizrahi's films—although by no means universal—for actors to play characters with the same first name as their own.<sup>29</sup> Leon Angel's choice of screen name reflects his commitment to peaceful coexistence but also foregrounds his identity as a Jew.<sup>30</sup> Little is known about 'Abdu Muharram, the actor who plays 'Abdu in *The Two Delegates*.<sup>31</sup> 'Abdu is the short form of a name constructed of two words: 'Abd, meaning "believer," followed by a name of the deity—a name that can (but does not always) identify the religion of its bearer. The nickname 'Abdu erases the name's religious content, and along with it, traces of religious difference. Consistent with the secularized representation of the weddings, 'Abdu's name is evacuated of its connection to religious practice and belief. Consider the implications instead had the protagonists been named Musa (or Moïse) and Muhammad instead of Chalom and 'Abdu. Names in the films downplay confessional difference by their indeterminacy or by marking a character's identification with a collective that is more ethnic than religious.

In *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence*, language and idiom also signal communal identification. In *The Two Delegates*, when Chalom first enters the apartment of Esther's parents, he greets them with the Hebrew phrase *Shalom 'alekhem*—also a play on his name. While some of Mizrahi's Jewish characters speak the same urban Egyptian Arabic dialect of their

---

29. The character Vittoria is played by the actress Vittoria Farhi. Esther is played by an actress credited as 'Adalat, whose real name was Esther Cohen Angel, the wife of Leon Angel. Correspondence with Nicole Angel McManamny and Maureen McManamny, December 11–12, 2016.

30. Correspondence with Nicole Angel McManamny and Maureen McManamny, December 11–12, 2016.

31. Ahmad Haddad plays the character in *Mistreated by Affluence*.

Muslim counterparts, others speak what Gabriel Rosenbaum has identified as a modern Jewish dialect of urban Egyptian Arabic (EJA).<sup>32</sup> According to Rosenbaum, the character Vittoria, in particular, employs a number of expressions distinct to Egyptian Jews.

Not all contemporaneous Jewish viewers were amused by Vittoria's caricature of Egyptian Jews. Following the release of *Mistreated by Affluence*, a reader by the name of Raphael Mosseri wrote a letter to the Arabic-language Egyptian Jewish newspaper *Al-shams* complaining that the film debases Jews. Mosseri considers Vittoria's speech to be an exaggerated affectation.<sup>33</sup> In his complaint about dialect, Mosseri demands not authenticity but accuracy. The Chalom-'Abdu films are comedies, not social realism, not naturalism. Charlie Chaplin's tramp accessed something authentic about poverty even as his character was exaggerated and the plots attenuated. The Chalom-'Abdu films, likewise, seek to represent an authentic (if not accurate or realistic) articulation of Jewish native-ness—including Vittoria's (possibly exaggerated) Jewish dialect—and an authentic site of coexistence.

To place the representation of Jewishness into relief, consider the portrayal of Greeks who occupy a somewhat different semiotic space in Mizrahi's lexicon of Egyptian coexistence.<sup>34</sup> In what becomes established as a trope in Egyptian cinema, Greeks, unlike Arabized Jews, speak Greek among themselves and heavily accented Arabic with other interlocutors. In *The Two Delegates*, the waiters in a restaurant from which Chalom steals food all speak Greek. Chalom is able to replicate the foreign sounds convincingly enough to trick the kitchen staff into putting up an order.

The use of language as a marker of identity is employed in the inverse as well. Mizrahi also explores failures of communication—the alienation

---

32. Gabriel Rosenbaum, "Elements and Evidence of Spoken Judeo-Egyptian Arabic in Old Egyptian Movies" (paper presented at "Jewish Languages—Languages in Contact," Jerusalem, June 23, 2016); "The Arabic Dialect of Jews in Modern Egypt," *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo*, no. 25 (2002).

33. Raphael Bakhur Mosseri, "Tuju Mizrahi yashuh sam'atna fi sharit 'Al-'izz babdala," *Al-shams*, March 4, 1937. It should be noted that Mosseri also criticizes Chalom's ethical lapses (stealing meat from the butcher, for example). His complaint about the representation of Chalom's character reflects a confusion of genre: rather than lowbrow comedy of the poor, he wishes for an epic drama of the rich (he offers the 1934 Hollywood film *The House of Rothschild* as a point of contrast).

34. Mizrahi's connection to the Egyptian Greek minority is not incidental. In addition to his Arabic filmography, Mizrahi also directed and produced four films in Greek. "Greek-Speaking Films," Bibliotheca Alexandrina, <http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/films/Greek.html>.

of confronting foreign languages. These miscommunications serve to underscore the identity of the protagonists as plain-speaking, lower-middle-class residents of popular quarters—*awlād al-balaḍ*—who, in the popular imagination, represent authentic Egyptianness. Miscommunications in *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* take two forms: an address spoken in a foreign language not understood by the listener, and an address intended to confound the listener. These two forms of disrupted communication similarly set up comic misunderstandings that also serve to highlight particular characteristics of the films' construction of native Egyptianness.

Chalom and 'Abdu repeatedly demonstrate in these films that they don't speak or understand European languages commonly heard on the streets of Alexandria. French, in particular, both is spoken by characters in the films and appears nondiegetically alongside Arabic in the credits and title cards. A lengthy scene in the *The Two Delegates* illustrates miscommunication between speakers of French and the protagonists. Chalom and 'Abdu, catching sight of one of the thugs, seek cover in a posh massage parlor. The receptionists, director, and clientele all speak French, while the massage therapists are a linguistically mixed lot. Misunderstandings abound. 'Abdu is taken for a job applicant. Chalom is presumed to be a client. When the director ushers 'Abdu into a treatment room, he provides instruction in French then rhetorically asks, "Compris?" (understood?). He leaves without a response. 'Abdu shrugs and mutters to himself in Arabic, "Ana ma fahimti sh wa-la haga" (I didn't understand a thing), a sentiment he repeats several times throughout the scene. Both characters encounter scantily clad Francophone women in the treatment rooms, and both eventually manage to overcome linguistic barriers and the mixed, unfamiliar social codes of physical contact between sexes. The scene ends when the director, in a trilingual tirade ("à la porte" [to the door]; "fayn al-flus?" [where's the money?]; "door"), throws Chalom out when he can't pay for his massage.

At first glance, it would be easy to dismiss this comic interlude as sensationalism, an excuse to show some skin. Nearly twelve minutes long, this scene features no less than three women in various states of undress. Further, this lengthy digression has little direct bearing on either the romantic plot or the gangster narrative.

However, I would like to suggest that this scene serves to establish the nexus between language and class, illustrating the valences attached to French (and Arabic) in these films. The series of miscommunications in this scene between the protagonists' Arabic and their interlocutors' French serves to draw attention to particular characteristics that define

their nativeness. French is a language associated with the bourgeoisie. Poor and uneducated, but bearing the street smarts, charm, and good humor of *awlad al-balad*, Chalom and 'Abdu speak exclusively Egyptian colloquial Arabic. In other words, within the broader context of constructing a (pluralist) nativism, in this scene Mizrahi sets his uneducated protagonists from humble origins against local residents who belong to, aspire to, or provide services for the Francophone bourgeoisie, to whom the massage parlor caters.

The second form of miscommunication—an utterance intended to confuse or deceive—is, by contrast, intentionally insurmountable. In both films a character masquerading as someone he is not launches into a monologue of nonsense sounds. In *The Two Delegates* this incomprehensible address takes place during the first encounter between the protagonists and the band of thieves. Seated at the head of a conference table, surrounded by his underlings and across from the visiting delegates, the local crime boss—in a nod to Hollywood gangster films—reports (in Arabic) on recent activities, summarizes the annual take, and pays tribute to their members who were killed. During the course of this meeting he invites 'Abdu to address the local membership in his own language, “Globes-talk.” 'Abdu obliges by animatedly launching into a gibberish monologue.

A similar bit appears in *Mistreated by Affluence*. Following the initial success of Bank Chalom, a competing bank sends a spy to discover their business secrets. The spy is introduced as *al-Ganab* (the Honorable) Dr. Farti, director of Banque Europa. Alone in the office with Chalom, he speaks a nonsense language to distract Chalom. Dr. Farti affects a nervous tic, a jerky head movement—an example of physical comedy in the absence of verbal communication—that enables him to get a look around.

By reviewing these scenes of comic miscommunication, I want to draw attention to the distinction between speakers of foreign languages and (presumed) foreigners. The speakers of French in the films—like the characters in the massage parlor—are understood to be local residents. The accents of one of the clients and the massage therapist, Marie, suggest that they are Alexandrian Greeks. By contrast, in both scenes involving nonsense language, the visiting “dignitaries” are identified as foreigners—explicitly European in the case of the bank director, and implicitly so in the case of the delegates. The films thus establish two discourses of otherness. The first, defined by class and language difference, is locally situated, familiar, and culturally comprehensible. The characters who speak French expect their address to be received and understood. The second form of otherness is enacted by gibberish-



Figure 5. Chalom visits Solomon and Vittoria's apartment to ask for Esther's hand in marriage. Screenshot, *The Two Delegates* (1934).

speaking locals pretending to be foreigners. The imaginary "foreigner" they represent is one of radical otherness.

The eight principal characters in the two films are clearly identified as local subjects who share language and cultural practices. Even class differences between these characters—although a source of friction between Chalom and 'Abdu and the families of their love interests—are revealed to be mere appearances. Although the décor of the in-laws' apartments attests to their identification as members of the middle class, they nevertheless reside in the same building and in the same popular district as Chalom and 'Abdu. (fig. 5) The aspirational component of the class discourse is revealed when, in *The Two Delegates*, the two families agree to accept the proposals of marriage when the suitors proffer the requested bride price. Although by wearing a Western suit and tarbush they are dressed like the rising *effendiyya*, Chalom and 'Abdu have not secured civil service jobs that would ensure their place among the rising middle class.<sup>35</sup> By the end of *Mistreated by Affluence*, the families, disillusioned by their lives as members of the economic elite, abandon their class

35. In an affectation of the *effendiyya*, Chalom and 'Abdu wear Western suits along with a tarbush. For more on the emergence of the *effendiyya* in this period, see Lucie Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New *Effendiya*': Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919–1952*, ed. A. Goldschmidt, A. J. Johnson, and B. A. Salmoni (Cairo, 2005); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, N.C., 2011).

aspirations and celebrate their return to the simplicity and familiarity of their former lives.

Throughout the films, the experiences of Egyptian Muslims and Jews are one and the same. The situatedness of these characters is further cemented by the presence of the two forms of otherness I have identified. In these two films, Jews, like their Muslim counterparts, are Egyptian Arabic-speaking local subjects. Chalom and 'Abdu, in particular, share many of the qualities associated with *awlād al-balad*, an expression of authentic nativeness familiar to contemporaneous Egyptian viewers of Mizrahi's films. The Francophone cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, while lacking the native authenticity of the Arabophone Muslims and Jews, nevertheless constitute part of the local landscape. Foreigners, as imagined by the locals, are portrayed as uncomprehending and incomprehensible intruders into the local social fabric. In Mizrahi's films, Jews are not portrayed as part of either of these categories.

*The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* vaunt a native authenticity derived from a relationship to language (Arabic) and place (Alexandria). The films' articulation of a locally situated pluralism can be read as a response to rising national consciousness, particularly the rise of exclusionary ethnonationalisms. In what could be understood as a reaction against ethnoreligious nationalism, markers of religious difference in these films are reduced to ethnic names and evacuated of any religious content.

#### CODA: KHAWAGA VERSUS IBN AL-BALAD

Despite the popularity of Togo Mizrahi's films and their afterlife on television and satellite broadcasts, home video, and the Internet, Egyptian film critics have tended to dismiss the light, popular fare from this era as wholly derivative of Hollywood.<sup>36</sup> The mainstream critical view holds that silent cinema in Egypt was dominated by the Orientalist aesthetic of foreign directors and technicians involved in the establishment of the film

36. Andrew Flibbert, "State and Cinema in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt, 1927–1952," in *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919–1952*, 449, 61, n. 3. Flibbert lists several notable examples of this commonly accepted claim. Others, including Flibbert, have drawn attention to the value for film critics and historians of films in these understudied periods, and of critically underappreciated popular genres such as musicals and comedies. My study emerges out of engagement with this body of scholarship. Ahmad Yusuf, for example, debunks assumptions about "the cinema of war profiteers" of the 1940s: Ahmad Yusuf, "Safahat min tarikh al-sinema al-Misriyya," in *Miṣr: Mi'at sana sinima*, ed. A. R. Bahjat (Cairo, 1996). See also Armbrust, "The Golden Age before the Golden Age."

industry. Such critics also denigrate the decadent, bourgeois Hollywood-inflected idiom of early Egyptian sound films and disparage the influence of war profiteers in financing cinema in the years following World War II.<sup>37</sup> Proponents of this view rather consider melodrama the genre best suited to narrating the national liberation struggle and the articulation of a populist national imaginary. The 1939 film *The Will* (*Al-'azima*, Kamal Salim, dir.) is often cited as the first articulation of the idiom of socially conscious melodrama that rose to prominence in the 1950s.<sup>38</sup>

Dismissal of Mizrahi's films, along with other "Levantine films" of the interwar period, reflects the critics' postrevolutionary (1952) conceptualization of the nation.<sup>39</sup> While their critique of films from this era is couched in terms of genre, class, and foreign influence, the agenda of such critiques is unabashedly nationalist. The pluralist, Levantine conceptualization of Egypt that Mizrahi's films represent is out of sync with the emerging national imaginary—a conceptualization of the nation that consolidates in post-World War II Egypt and reaches its full articulation following the 1952 Free Officers Revolt. The last film Togo Mizrahi directed, the musical *Salama*, starring Umm Kulthum, was released in 1945.<sup>40</sup> He continued to produce films in 1946 and then withdrew from the cinema industry. In 1948, in response to the diminishing status of Jews in Egypt, Togo Mizrahi left for Rome.<sup>41</sup>

Following Togo's departure from Egypt, his youngest brother, Alfred, nineteen years his junior, took over the operations of the studio. Togo Mizrahi's Egyptian Films Company was one of the nearly one thousand private business establishments—and among the thousands of private properties—that were sequestered by the Egyptian government between

---

37. Walter Armbrust summarizes this argument: "The Golden Age before the Golden Age," 301–2.

38. Joel Gordon, who is not a proponent of the nationalist thesis outlined above, offers a detailed discussion of the politics and aesthetics of 1950s and 1960s Egyptian melodrama: Joel Gordon, *Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt* (Chicago, 2002).

39. The term "Levantine cinema" is further explored and historically situated in Starr, "Masquerade and the Performance of National Imaginaries."

40. Mizrahi was also involved in directing *The Beauty Queen* (*Malikat al-gamal* [1946]). Mizrahi is credited with producing the film, which was initially directed by Niyazi Mustafa. Following a dispute, the director quit, Mizrahi finished the job, and the film was released without directorial credit. Mahmud 'Ali Fahmi, "Sinima Tuju Mizrahi (1930–1946): dirasa naqdiyya," in *Al-sinima al-Miwiyya: Al-nash'a wa-l-takwin*, ed. H. al-Nahas (Cairo, 2008), 206.

41. Correspondence with Jacques Mizart, nephew of Togo Mizrahi, September 24, 2013.

1961 and 1966.<sup>42</sup> Sequestration and nationalization policies were broadly implemented but disproportionately affected resident foreign minorities and Egyptian Jews. In July 1965 the Egyptian government sold off the film holdings of the Egyptian Films Company along with the rights to all thirty-four films Togo Mizrahi had produced.<sup>43</sup>

Even though Togo Mizrahi's Chalom-'Abdu films advocate for coexistence, one can find evidence of the pressures faced by the Egyptian Jewish community in the 1930s and 1940s. I have argued that the films *The Two Delegates* and *Mistreated by Affluence* portray Chalom as a Jewish *ibn al-balaḍ*, distinguishing him from the Francophone cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. Egyptian Arabic speakers use the word *khawaga* as a term of address or salutation for resident foreign minorities, as well as foreigners. The term is used respectfully in Mizrahi's films to connote the outsider—minority or foreign—status of the addressee. For example, just before Chalom is thrown out of the massage parlor scene in *The Two Delegates*, he implores the director for mercy by addressing him *ya khawaga*. In this scene, by employing the term in addressing the Francophone director of the spa, Chalom asserts his nativeness in contradistinction to the other's foreignness.

However, as a member of the Jewish minority, Chalom might equally be addressed as *khawaga*. Indeed, in the same film Abu Amina addresses his good friend Solomon as *khawaga*. The term *khawaga* was regularly employed to describe, or used as an honorific when addressing, members of the Francophone Egyptian Jewish bourgeoisie.<sup>44</sup> When Abu Amina addresses his friend as "*Khawaga* Solomon" he honors their mutual bourgeois aspiration. But, within the context of a single film, can *khawaga* signify outsider status in the interaction between Chalom and the director of the massage parlor, but not when Abu Amina addresses Solomon? Although both utterances reflect naturalistic language use, the use of the terms in these two different ways in the same film draws attention to the precariousness of Jews in Egypt, even Arabic-speaking Jews like the

42. According to John Waterbury, "Over the period 1961–66 some 4000 families were affected by sequestration measures. Total assets seized during those years may have been worth EGP 100 million and included 122,000 feddans, 7,000 urban properties, about 1,000 business 'establishments.' And over EGP 30 million in stocks and bonds." John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), 339.

43. A letter issued by the sequestration official is reproduced in Muhammad Awad and Sahar Hamouda, eds., *The Birth of the Seventh Art in Alexandria: Catalogue* (Alexandria, 2007), 42.

44. Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 28.

characters Chalom and Solomon. Despite the cultural integration of the long-standing Arabic-speaking Jewish community in Egypt, the popular use of the term *kbawaga* in *The Two Delegates* points to an always-already existing marker of difference from the majority culture.<sup>45</sup> Although, as I have argued, Mizrahi aims in the Chalom-'Abdu films to depict seamless Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Egypt, the two usages of the term *kbawaga*, when read against one another, uncover anxiety about the very claims to the nativeness of Egyptian Jews the films are trying to assert.

---

45. My discussion here is based on the popular usage of the term *kbawaga* in Cairo and Alexandria. In Sa'id, upper Egypt, the term *kbawaga* is also applied to Copts and to Egyptian visitors from the north. I thank Ziad Fahmy for his insights on this matter. See also Nicholas S. Hopkins and Reem Saad, *Upper Egypt: Identity and Change* (Cairo, 2004).