

Shushu, *Zumzum*, and *Sumsum*
Dana International and the Politics of the “Other”

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An exotic, gorgeous girl is coming on stage. Tight pants on well shaped legs, high leather boots and a gleaming blouse, and then she starts to sing. The audience is hysterical.¹

She is not a gay man, and she is not a lesbian. It's not right to say that she has given anything to our community.²

[She] is a very pleasant girl, who looks like every girl her age. Besides that, she is a wonderful hostess... a great interview subject. Open, and she says whatever she wants without giving a damn.³

This choice does not reflect the will of the nation. It's a choice of an anomaly, something unnatural. I don't even know if [she] is a man or a woman.⁴

...there is something pathetic, grotesque, ridiculous. Could the whole point here be, pardon me, bad taste for its own sake.⁵

She embodies the relationships of east-west, fringe-center, man-woman, modern, advanced music that is also folksy. You can't put her in a box.⁶

The above quotes all refer to one individual, Dana International. Born into a working class Yemeni family in Tel Aviv, Dana has become one of Israel's top performers in popular music. She has sparked controversy as well, but not so much for the lyrical content of her songs, or due to any performance antics. Instead, Dana has become the focal point of an ongoing struggle in Israel over issues of class, race, religion, and gender,⁷ due to her own transgendered identity. She began her life as a biological

¹ "Expose: Her Name is not Sa'ida: It's a not a Miss, it's a Mister!!!" Rosh 1, August 1993. This and all Israeli news articles were translated by Ziv Geri (unless otherwise noted), and obtained from http://d1o202.telia.com/~u222600821/Geir%20Site/Geir_Danna_1.html.

² "Where a Gay Man Gets a Bottle in His Head, a Transvestite Gets a Obscene Suggestion." The Pink Time, April 1996.

³ "I'm Dying to Fall in Love, But I Sleep Alone." La-isha, December 23, 1996.

⁴ ibid

⁵ "Dana, Queen of the Levant." translated by Ha'aretz staff. Ha'aretz, December 3, 1997.

⁶ ibid.

⁷ Dana is used as a symbol of both the right and left, secular and orthodox political factions. See "'Cultural War' in Israel may be based on politics, power" at <http://www.shamash.org/jb/bk980529/iwar.htm>. The difficulty in defining her is used by all sides, including Dana, to their advantage.

male, was performing as a drag queen when her career took off, and almost invisibly transformed herself into a pre-operative and then a post-operative transsexual.

These categories of gender identity reflect on a portion of Dana International's complex and contradictory embodiments of gender relations in modern Israel. Through interviews, public appearances, and most importantly through her music, Dana makes statements aimed at undermining the multitude of binaries that exist in Israel, and the power structure that proceeds from these relationships. Her very existence calls into question the categories that are used to define her, as she does not fit neatly into any of them.

What does it mean when so many differing points of view are put forth in an attempt to explain or define an individual? And what if that individual is able to move between and freely combine subject positions? Beyond any concrete explanation of Dana, what these viewpoints reveal is the troubling nature of her existence. In this paper I hope to map out the dominant discourses that have been put forth about Dana International, and to show how she has created spaces for herself in modern Israeli society. I will also concern myself with the extent of her subversion and reinscription of existing gender hegemony. On their most basic level the discourses that are created about her attempt to place her on a continuum of subversion-reinscription (although not all discourses subjectively define the poles the same way), and in the process make their own value judgments about this placement.

Judith Butler, in Bodies That Matter, introduces the idea that existing power relationships can be subverted by claiming and exaggerating hegemonic gender roles:

Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a

repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers.⁸

She is speaking specifically of how drag can subvert the binary gender system which marginalizes other forms of gender expression, but I think this idea can apply to anything defined as "Other" by the power elite, including race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender. This subversion is not necessarily a given, that is, what may seem to be parody may in fact serve to reinscribe the existing power relationship that initially produced the subject. Furthermore, subversion and reinscription may coexist in the same space, and proceed from the same act of parody. Making a determination as to what degree each is present requires careful and detailed analysis of the discourses put forth by the subject and, perhaps more importantly, those that emerge in reaction to that act of parody, or self-embodiment as the "Other."

Equally important is the audience that receives, absorbs, and reflects the gendered messages. The same act can spawn many diverse reactions, depending on the individual audience context. In the case of Dana International this becomes more relevant when the contemporary Israeli social order is understood, for while Israel may present itself to the world as a homogenous society⁹, its citizens are in fact highly diverse, comprising several ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. In many ways Dana International represents Israel's underclass, both to her supporters and her detractors.

⁸ Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1995, p122.

⁹ This perception is only increased by the assumptions made in the United States press about Israelis. Many editorial columns dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict create misleading binaries: Jewish/Arabic, Israeli/Middle Eastern, Israeli/Muslim, and even Israeli/Christian. The Israeli is then very narrowly defined as Jewish, white, and of European ancestry.

Historical Background

It would seem that Dana is a rarity, an anomaly in Middle Eastern culture. This couldn't be further from the truth. Dana can be seen as one in a long line of transgendered individuals in the Middle East, most of whom also challenged societal norms. The main difference between these earlier persons and Dana is that older Middle Eastern cultures to some degree tolerated or at least made room for different individuals, while modern society is in the process of closing and erasing these categories.

Beginning as far back as the 7th century AD, transgendered performers have been documented. . The most famous case is documented in Everett Rowson's article "The Effeminites of early Medina."¹⁰ Rowson cites numerous historical references to reconstruct this group of musicians, matchmakers, and confidants to women. The rulers of the time looked down upon these performers, going so far as to arrest and punish several of them. Their punishment was usually based on their status as musicians, or because they were seen as dangerous due to their intimate access to cloistered females, rather than specifically on their gender status. The documents on these entertainers also make reference to their existence long before the documents themselves. At one time the transgendered performers of Medina were revered and held an important place in their culture. They even coexisted with the prophet Muhammad, possibly before that time.

Other recent Middle Eastern cultures have also made room for the transgendered. One such place is Oman, where those born male can live their lives in a space between male and female (referred to as *xanith*).¹¹ They dress in garments that are a mix of male and female

¹⁰ Rowson, Everett K. "The effeminates of early Medina." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111/4 (1991), 671-93.

¹¹ Wikan, Unni. "Man becomes woman: Transsexualism in Oman as a key to gender roles." *Man* 12/1 (1977), 304-19.

clothing (long, colorful robes), oil their hair like women but part it like men, walk with an exaggerated swing of the hips, and douse themselves with perfume. They eat meals with the women and socialize with them in public, while men are not allowed to talk with or look at the naked face of a woman with whom they are not closely related.

The *xanith* make a living as household servants, wedding singers, and prostitutes. While Omani society condemns prostitution as evil, and it is understood that those who work in this profession are destined for hell, it is preferable for an unmarried man to visit a *xanith* rather than a female prostitute. A complex mix of discourses create this space for the *xanith*, including the need to protect the virtue and purity of women, the recognized natural desires of men, and the prohibition on purposely causing harm or making trouble for another person.

Male and female gender categories are very clearly defined in Omani society, not most importantly by genitalia, but by the role a person plays in sexual intercourse. If the "man" is the active partner, there is no problem or threat to his status as a "man." Once marriage occurs, however, men are not allowed to visit these transgenders any more, although it is reported that many still do. The *xanith* can also move between the gender categories of male and *xanith* by marrying and deflowering a virgin woman. Later in life they can return to living as a *xanith* if they are divorced or widowed and take the receptive role in intercourse.

Social Climate of Urban Israel

Contemporary Israeli society is built on competing discourses that arise from a simultaneous desire for unification and the distrust of ties to Middle Eastern neighbors. Self-defined as a Jewish state, Israel holds as its most important tenet the unity of its Jewish citizens.

For the nature of Judaism is such that, in all their wanderings, individual Jews were conscious that they were members of a single people, and that the fulfillment of their own individual destiny was inextricably bound up with the safety and restoration of their people.¹²

Massive immigration from around the world has occurred, and Israel's borders have remained open to any Jew who wishes to enter. This public face of unity is important in light of Israel's view of its role as an "oasis in the desert."

Existing concurrently with this discourse of unity is the distrust of Arabic and Islamic culture. Jews and Arabs, while not necessarily historical enemies, have almost stereotypically come to be viewed as polar opposites. This view is promoted both within and outside of Israel, with each "side" using the other as a threat, as a danger to the established way of life of their people.

This distrust of Arabs extends to any Arabic or Islamic associations that might exist in Israel. Nissim Rejwan writes that "the designation 'Arab' has become a term of abuse" in Israeli schools and playgrounds.¹³ This is particularly troublesome in light of the fact that more than half of Israel's Jewish citizens are of Middle Eastern or North African origin.¹⁴ This group, referred to as Mizrahim, have been systematically marginalized and excluded from Israeli politics by Jews of European origin, the Ashkenazim.¹⁵

One of the main doctrines that had guided the establishment since Israel was established was that the Orientals [Mizrahim] should under no circumstances be allowed to organize themselves in ethnic political groups and that whatever portion they were to get of the "national pie" should be doled out to them by existing parties.¹⁶

¹² Rejwan, Nissim. Israel's Place in the Middle East: A Pluralistic Perspective. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998, 119.

¹³ Ibid, 4.

¹⁴ Ibid, 137.

¹⁵ The Ashkenazim are those Jews of Eastern, Middle, and Western European backgrounds who speak Yiddish. They are differentiated from other types of Jews not only by language but also religious rituals.

¹⁶ Ibid, 137.

This doctrine has resulted in an underclass that outnumbers the ruling class, and that is now beginning to demand equal access to the government and institutions of power.

The Mizrahim are used by the Ashkenazim to maintain their position at the top of the power relationship in modern Israel. On the one hand, the government encourages Mizrahi politicians and community leaders, in an attempt to appear "progressive" and sensitive to minorities, and to court the large, and therefore important, Mizrahi vote. Simultaneously the Mizrahim serve as a foil for the Ashkenazim, they are the "dark" Jews, their faces are not the ones presented to the rest of the world as those of the normal Israeli. In order for any one group to maintain a hold on power, it must create an opposing group with which to contrast itself. If there is no other side, no polar opposite, then there is also no power relationship of which to be in control. We will see that Dana International exploits this position as Mizrahi, taking advantage of the great amount of latitude afforded to her as a representative of that group.

Israeli society is also torn between strict religious observation and an ever-increasing desire for personal freedom. Dana has become the symbol of a progressive, modern Israel for secular politicians from both the right and left. Her rise to fame has allowed these power brokers an opportunity to demonstrate their "tolerance," not only to their constituents at home, but more importantly to the European community. She has appeared at political functions, and before the Education and Culture Committee of the Israeli legislature.¹⁷ At the same time Dana is used by the Orthodox as a symbol of the failure of secular policy. Like the secular faction of the Israeli government, the Orthodox see Dana as representative of modern Israel, but unlike their opposition, Orthodox leaders

¹⁷ To appreciate the magnitude of these appearances, keep in mind that in our own country, where we pride ourselves on "freedom", it is almost unimaginable that a transsexual nightclub performer would be invited

are not proud of this representation. Dana confirms the stereotypes of homosexuals (they all want to be women) and secular thought (focused solely on sex) to the Orthodox.

The Creation of Dana International

Dana International is the stage name of Sharon Cohen, an Israeli Jew of Yemeni origin. Sharon was born Yaron Cohen in 1971 in the city of Tel Aviv. Early in her life, she recognized that she was “different” than other boys:

Dana - I was a very talented boy. I was always very special and outgoing. I liked to play girls' games with the other girls. I also liked to dance, paint and listen to music. I was a very good student, but if the teachers annoyed me, I beat them. School was a memorable experience for me. Everyone liked me although I was a little bit problematic, I mean different. But I was always proud of my difference.

Rosh1 - Can you explain ‘difference’?

Dana - The frame bored me. Routine is not interesting. I was very beautiful and feminine. All the girls adored me. My childhood dream was to become an actress.¹⁸

Dana’s family was not concerned with her early desires. Her mother taught her Yemeni folk songs, and she learned and observed traditional practices of Judaism. For Dana’s family, individual masculine or feminine behavior did not define gender roles. Rather, Yaron would prove his manhood through mandatory military service, and most importantly by getting married and beginning his own family.

Yaron did indeed report for military service at age 18, but he was dismissed from his duty for reasons that Dana reveals only as “[the uniform didn’t] match the color of my eyes...”¹⁹ At the time, Yaron had been frequenting gay nightclubs in Tel Aviv for about four years, and was gaining a reputation as a female impersonator. He began performing with Ofer Nisim’s drag

to appear before a Congressional committee, and that the appearance would be trumpeted in the national press as a triumph for American society.

¹⁸ “Expose: Her Name is Not Sa’ida, It’s not a Miss, It’s a Mister!!!” Rosh1, August 1993.

revue, doing parodies of popular Israeli and American pop songs. It was while singing a parody of Whitney Houston's "My Name is Not Susan" (renamed "My Name is Not Sa'ida") that Yaron gave birth to Dana International. During the vocal bridge of the song (which leads back into the chorus), Yaron began to sing the melody in Arabic and in the style of his favorite singer, Ofra Haza. This impromptu localization of American pop was an immediate hit. Dana's reputation grew in gay circles, and soon a recorded version of "My Name is Not Sa'ida", complete with Arabic verses, was being played on Israeli radio.²⁰ Dana was still unknown to most, but a string of popular songs, and the popular Israeli press, attempted - in their own ways - to create, introduce, and explain her.

Creating Dana in the Popular Press

The various incarnations of outsider that Dana International embodies are located in the discourses created by the Israeli popular press. Various and often conflicting ways of understanding Dana, including her own self-definitions, seem to revolve around an attempt to highlight her exclusion from normalized gender categories. These statements proceed from a local need, whether it is an attempt to marginalize and belittle Dana, or to free and empower her. Taken as a group, or a set of individual strands that create a larger discursive field, we can see the creation of an exotic, mysterious definition of Dana, and begin to understand the motivations behind this creation.

Early articles on Dana invariably foregrounded her gender identity in a way that is best described by the most common term of this group of articles, a "gimmick."

¹⁹ "Expose: Her Name is not Sa'ida: It's a not a Miss, it's a Mister!!!" Rosh L, August 1993.

²⁰ "Confessions of a Singer" Tel Aviv, August 14, 1992.

Examples of this approach are "It's not a Miss, it's a Mister,"²¹ "Yes, she is a pretty woman indeed, but she is not really a woman,"²² and "...he-she is still a gimmick here."²³ In this early stage she was described as a curiosity, something to be looked at, an object of interest. She was called "a local musical-sexual phenomenon,"²⁴ "more provocative than Madonna"²⁵ and "like a Fata Morgana (mirage)."²⁶

Along with this early fascination about her "true" gender, another discourse was forming that attempted to place Dana into a preset gender category, that of "woman." This way of writing about Dana emphasized her differences from the "normal" transsexual, or at least expectations as defined by the dominant, heterosexual discourse:

The first time I saw Dana was in the studio, when she recorded [The Crying Game]. In front of me I saw a very pretty and gentle girl, very interesting and intelligent. She has a powerful femininity, and she is not provoking like people may think about transvestites, [who are] identified with vociferousness, heavy makeup, and opposition. She is neither vicious nor aggressive. Everything with her is natural and feminine in the most pure way.²⁷

Here the words "natural," "pure," and "feminine" are used as a way of removing Dana from her gender identity. That is, while her gender status gives her freedom from known gender categories, describing her with understood feminine language works to rein her in again. It is understood that she remains separate from "real" women, but not so much so that she works outside of the category. No one can be allowed this kind of freedom and power, for if an object exists apart from the defined categories, those categories become insufficient to describe what is real.

²¹ *ibid*

²² "She is Like a Fata Morgana!!!" *Rosh 1*, August 1993.

²³ "Dancing With Dana." *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, December 15, 1993.

²⁴ "Expose: Her Name is Not Sa'ida, It's not a Miss, It's a Mister!!!" *Rosh1*, August 1993.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ "She is Like a Fata Morgana!!!" *Rosh 1*, August 1993.

²⁷ "Ehud Manor: 'She Has a Powerful Femininity'." *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, December 20, 1993.

Along with, and contained within, this discourse of seeming inclusion is another discourse of exclusion, of "otherness," that is being created by simply attempting to place Dana within categories. By asking such questions as "Do you think about **adopting** children?"²⁸ (emphasis mine), "Do you want to get married?,"²⁹ "Do you want to raise a family?,"³⁰ and the subtle "Tell me how you **became** a woman"³¹ (emphasis mine), the interviewers are in effect highlighting Dana's differences. She is not a "real" woman because she could never have children, she can't really be legally married (not in a traditional Jewish wedding), and her "femaleness" is constructed.³² Whether intentional or not, the effect of squeezing Dana into a category that is too limited to explain or define her serves the purpose of foregrounding her differences.

Dana's response: self-creation

Where was Dana's voice in all of this? What discourses was she putting forth through her own words? In interviews, she presented a number of conflicting and contradictory images. Depending on what articles the audience was exposed to, she alternately cast herself as "a good daughter, helpful, supporting, loving,"³³ someone who "get[s] bored with men very fast, [and] change[s] them very often,"³⁴ "a mistake of God, who added a male body to a female inside,"³⁵ or "only a variation of a gay man."³⁶

²⁸ "I Want Children." Ma'ariv La-no'ar, April 1994.

²⁹ "Dana's Crying Game." Rosh 1, January 1994.

³⁰ "Expose: Her Name is Not Sa'ida, It's not a Miss, It's a Mister!!!" Rosh1, August 1993.

³¹ "Dana's Crying Game." Rosh 1, January 1994.

³² Of course all "femaleness" is constructed through the naturalization of gender and sex, but in this discourse about Dana her gender is and must be defined as constructed, and placed in opposition to the "natural-born" woman.

³³ "What the Eyes are Seeing Now, It's Not Always the Truth." Yedi'ot Aharonot, December 13, 1993.

³⁴ "I Want Children." Ma'ariv La-no'ar, April 1994.

³⁵ "What the Eyes are Seeing Now, It's Not Always the Truth." Yedi'ot Aharonot, December 13, 1993.

Is there a method to this fractured and multiple sense of who Dana is? Taken as a whole these statements define Dana as undefinable. She has empowered herself by constantly changing her self-definition. No single category can hold or define her, she is at once "woman," "man," "straight," "gay," "pure," "impure," as well as none of these. This is explicitly stated in one interview in which she is asked about the text of her song "Fata Morgana":

From 'Fata Morgana': I'm Fata Morgana / A slutty nun / A stripper and a poet / Every day I'm completely different.

Dana: It's true. I'm really like that. And it's the way I enjoy being. The mystery, the unknown.³⁷

A single event transformed Dana from a relatively harmless curiosity - albeit one that needed to be objectified and controlled - into a potentially dangerous and powerful subject. That event was the choice of Dana to represent Israel at the 1998 Eurovision Song Contest.³⁸ No longer could she be swept aside as a diversion, or a light entertainer with no real power. She would now embody the State of Israel in a contest that carries

³⁶ "Where a Gay Man Gets a Bottle in the Head, a Transvestite Gets an Obscene Suggestion." The Pink Times, April 1996.

³⁷ "What the Eyes are Seeing Now, It's Not Always the Truth." Yedi'ot Aharonot, December 13, 1993.

³⁸ Dana's victory was further complicated by her loss the year before, a defeat that many thought was due solely to her transgendered status. This same argument, that her winning or losing was based not on musical merit but on her gender status (seen as a gimmick), would later be used against her, by both Orthodox Jewish leaders in Israel and "liberal" Europeans who objected to her presence in Eurovision as creating a "circus." Representative of this liberal viewpoint is the following message, which was posted in the newsgroup alt.showbiz.gossip: "I was sufficiently furious at what happened last year to e-mail the European Broadcasting Union (the Eurovision "umbrella" organization) to express my disgust and displeasure and to express my opinion that the Dana International win has set the Contest back and probably discouraged the more deserving and talented entrant whom the public does not consider a "joke" entry. I got back a very lovely email from EBU HQ--apparently I was not the only one to contact them regarding this issue...and I hope those of us that were motivated to do so will see the end of the "joke" entries in the national finals."

importance beyond the music. When she took the stage at Eurovision she was Israel to the world.

Why was this event so important? How did it achieve this transforming power? After her nomination and acceptance of this position, a segment of the Israeli government, one which had previously shunned and ignored Dana, began an aggressive and moralistic attempt to contain and redefine her as "deviant,"³⁹ "symboliz[ing] darkness,"⁴⁰ "an abomination,"⁴¹ a "crossbreed creature between a man and woman,"⁴² and "at the bottom of the moral ladder, just like murderers, thieves, and rapists."⁴³ The rhetoric was used to voice objection to Dana's role as the definer of Israel. She could not be in this position, she was not "one of us." In fact, more than ever, she was cast as a danger to society, a criminal who dared exist outside of known gender boundaries.

Professor Moshe Shoked, an anthropologist at Tel Aviv University, attempted to re-marginalize Dana as an "outsider" by defining drag as "Western" and Dana as a drag queen; thus Dana is a product of the West, not of Israel.⁴⁴ This type of reasoning is particularly alarming coming from the secular, intellectual sector of Israeli society, as it is their greatest desire to be seen as part of Europe, as Western. It is also fallacious to define drag or any gender traversal as foreign to the Middle East, as the performers of Medina and the Omani *xanith* show. In an unintentional way this statement also attempts to collapse the multi-layered category of transgendered into a single, farcical unity: the

³⁹ "Dana, Queen of the Levant." translated by Ha'aretz staff. Ha'aretz, December 3, 1997.

⁴⁰ "Dana to the Gentiles." Yedi'ot Aharonot, November 25, 1997.

⁴¹ "Opening the Week – Diva." Rosh 1, December 7, 1997.

⁴² "Dana to the Gentiles." Yedi'ot Aharonot, November 25, 1997.

⁴³ "Opening the Week – Diva." Rosh 1, December 7, 1997.

⁴⁴ "Dana, Queen of the Levant." translated by Ha'aretz staff. Ha'aretz, December 3, 1997.

drag queen. While Dana began her performing career as a drag queen, by this time in her life, she was probably closer to a pre-operative transsexual.⁴⁵

Reacting to this Dana inverted the power structure by defining those who stood against her as the outsiders, the deviants. In this instance she boldly claimed,

I make a clear separation between the Israelis and the orthodox. The orthodox are Jewish but not Israelis... from my point of view I was chosen to represent the citizens of Israel and not the Jewish country. I will go to the Eurovision as the representative of the Christians and the Muslims who live in Israel as well.⁴⁶

In this definition of Israel the Orthodox are not included - they are not "real Israelis."

Dana has not forsaken her image as an outsider, but instead is claiming that the country she represents includes all marginalized groups. Dana's statement proceeds from both the Orthodox partitioning of Israelis by religious observance (but turns it on its head), as well as the secular desire to appear tolerant and inclusive of all groups. The new dichotomy is modern versus old-fashioned, secular versus orthodox.⁴⁷

Dana's Musical Discourse

Discourses can be developed through non-verbal means as well, and it is through this means (her music) that Dana makes her most convincing and blatant statements about her status and the various elements that define her. It should be pointed out here

⁴⁵ This is not meant as a condemnation of drag queens, but it is important to make a distinction between those who perform or imitate "femaleness" for laughs (the drag queen), those who take on "female" traits or tropes for sexual gratification (the transvestite), and those who incorporate and mix "female," "male," and "other" (the transsexual). Even these three categories are crude and don't reflect the complexities of transgendered individuals.

⁴⁶ "I Was Chosen to Represent All the Citizens of Israel, Not Only the Orthodox." Ma'ariv, November 27, 1997.

⁴⁷ This positioning is also a challenge to the existing Ashkenazi/Mizrachi discourse, which defines the latter as old-fashioned, rural, conservative people, and the former as the enlightened, urban, educated group.

that when I speak of Dana International as a social force, or in relation to institutions such as the Orthodox or the ruling elite, I am speaking not only of the individual who holds that stage name. I am also including her music producer, song writers, lyricists, publicists, record company, and any other individuals who may contribute to the discourse that is recognized as emerging from Dana herself. This is important because a gendered reading of her music must include elements to which Dana herself did not contribute, although the audience perceives the entire musical package as "Dana."

I have focused on two songs, each of which uses a different musical strategy and makes a slightly different statement about Dana's gender. The first is from her early period ("Shushu Ya Shushu") and the second is from a few years later, when she was a more established entertainer ("Yesh Bo Esh"). These two songs illustrate the musical ways in which Dana casts herself as "Other," how she is able to smoothly slide between several subject positions, and the great amount of humor and satire that is presented in her work. Specific musical elements are read within the framework of their reception by a multicultural Israeli audience.

Musical Strategy #1 – Fragmentation

The song "Shushu Ya Shushu" ("Kiss Me Shushu"⁴⁸) is one of her earliest hits, and one which traveled beyond Israeli borders into neighboring Arabic countries. Several remixed versions of the song also exist, each with its own spin on the gender statements projected. The remix entitled "Airport Version" is the most interesting, in terms of how

Dana plays off these assumptions in not only this statement, but also in her musical opposition to an Ashkenazi in "Yesh Bo Esh."

⁴⁸ Although I have no evidence to make a connection with the Arabic, in Portuguese the word *shushu* is a slang expression used by women to describe a man they find attractive.

it creates and undermines expectations through the framing of the material (see form chart in Appendix B). The outermost frame seemingly subverts the subject (the original body of the song), but it in fact serves to underscore the precarious perch that Dana holds in the musical discourse. In other words, she subverts herself - she highlights her own construction.

In the context of a modern, urban Israeli audience, the song becomes a pointed stab at the powerful and at the notion of the "exotic." It is framed by a faux airport announcement (audio example 1) that right away identifies the origin of the singer as foreign (from Saudi Arabia):

This Is Saudi Arabian Airport May I Have Your Attention Please All Passengers On Flight Number Six 0 Sex To Monaco Please Approach To Gate Number 42 Shukran (Thank You)

Dana holds multiple positions in this song: that of the female subject (the singer) and also that of the "male" airport announcer. In this latter role she presents a mock version of a "male" voice. She lowers her own natural register⁴⁹, but not in an attempt to "pass" or become male. Rather this is both parody of what constitutes "maleness,"⁵⁰ and a jab at the pomposity of authority. In both instances Dana is threatening the naturalization of these categories. If they can be taken apart and shown to be constructed, if they can be skillfully mocked, they are not absolute and impenetrable.

⁴⁹ Dana's "natural" register would seem to be a contradiction, since it is probable she consciously changes either the register or timbre (or both) of her voice when performing as Dana International. On the other hand, within the context of this performance, she does establish a "natural" sound through the consistent use of one voice type. The parody of the opening announcement is further emphasized by Dana's use of a mocking and playful tone, one that has the effect of pointing out the farcical nature of her performance.

⁵⁰ At the time of the song's release Dana had not yet medically become female, and was living as a male. She self identified as a drag queen at this point. This further elaborates the gender play – this is a male creating a female persona and in that persona she is mimicking a male voice.

The music that enters after the announcement continues in this parodic vein. A synthesized string section plays a James Bond-esque progression (example 1) that is present in the original version, but here is foregrounded and orchestrated in such a fashion that the meaning is immediately recognizable as mysterious, alluring, dangerous, and at the same time campy (audio example 2).

Example 1 – James Bond Strings



Interwoven with the spy motive (possibly representing an idealized version of the West), are two distinctly Middle Eastern sounds – the firqah (audio example 3) and a goblet drum (audio example 4). The firqah, a large ensemble used to accompany singers, is evoked here by an “Oriental” gesture, a minor scale that swirls around a drone (example 2). Even more than the gesture itself, it is the timbre used here that brings the firqah to mind: a nasal, pointed sound with pitches that seem to slide one into another. The spy strings and the firqah present two versions of the same basic drone idea, with the Western spy strings giving a harmonic reading, and the Eastern firqah a melodic take (example 3).

Example 2 - Firqah Gesture

Example 2 - Firqah Gesture

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter rest, then a sixteenth-note triplet (B4, A4, G4) with a sharp sign on the G, and a dotted quarter note (F4). The bottom staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a quarter note (B3), followed by a quarter note (A3), then a sixteenth-note triplet (B3, A3, G3) with a sharp sign on the G, and a dotted quarter note (F3).

Example 3 - Firqah/James Bond Strings

Example 3 - Firqah/James Bond Strings

The image shows three systems of musical notation. The first system consists of two staves: the top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C), and the bottom staff is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The top staff has a whole rest, followed by a quarter rest, then a sixteenth-note triplet (B4, A4, G4) with a sharp sign on the G, and a dotted quarter note (F4). The bottom staff has a half note (B3), followed by a half note (A3), then a half note (G3), and a half note (F3). The second system consists of two staves: the top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C), and the bottom staff is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The top staff has a sixteenth-note triplet (B4, A4, G4) with a sharp sign on the G, followed by a dotted quarter note (F4). The bottom staff has a half note (B3), followed by a half note (A3), then a half note (G3), and a half note (F3). The third system consists of two staves: the top staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C), and the bottom staff is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The top staff has a quarter note (B3), followed by a quarter note (A3), then a quarter note (G3), and a quarter note (F3). The bottom staff has a half note (B3), followed by a half note (A3), then a half note (G3), and a half note (F3).

After two phrases of this spy/firqah motive a goblet drum (probably synthesized as well) enters, playing a rhythmic pattern that approximates a pattern common among nightclub entertainers in the Arabic world. This drumming pattern in an Israeli context can have multiple meanings. For the Ashkenazi youth that make up a large portion of her audience, this sound is at once familiar and exotic. I would compare this reaction to the appeal of Rap music for a suburban white youth in the United States. The music of the

Mizrahi is immensely popular in Israel, not only among Mizrahi themselves, but also with the Ashkenazi youth. Unlike their own somber and political songs, Mizrahi songs engage the body, they are light and fun. The drum itself represents the sound of the forbidden, which is not presented in a position of power within the song, as it appears in only one channel of stereo throughout most of the song.

After two more phrases of the spy motive a chorus of men enter (audio example 5), chanting the nonsensical lines "Wha Abiba Ea, Wha Abiba Ba" (example 4), whispering them as if they were a glorious secret. Before the female subject of the song enters we are presented with two male authoritative voices (the airport announcer and the male chorus). Both of these are telling the listener that this is a not a local journey, this is not the familiar, rather this will be the words of and images of the "Other."

Example 4 - Men's Chorus

The musical notation consists of four staves of bass clef music in common time (C). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first two staves each have two measures. The third staff has three measures. The fourth staff has three measures.

Wa - bi - ba - ay Wa - bi - ba - ah - ah

Wa - bi - ba - ay Wa - bi - ba - ah - ah

Wa - bi - ba - ay Wa - bi - ba - ah Wa - bem - bay - bom - ba - bom - ba - ba Wa -

bi - ba - ay Wa - bi - ba - ah Wa - bem - bay - bom - ba - bom - ba - ba

The body of the song itself is similar between the album and airport versions and the singing track seems to be identical in each. What is changed here is the relative value

of each of the parts. Because this is a mix targeted and created for the local Israeli audience, the "traveling"⁵¹ music (audio example 6) that accompanies the lines "Shushu Ya Shushu" is heavily foregrounded, although this may only be properly understood by her Mizrahi audience (as the music originates from an Arabic children's program shown in Israel).

Dana exhibits a sense of playfulness, performing the song with a sly wink to the audience. Musically this is signaled by the high "yelping" sound that is first heard by itself before the initial airport announcement. This very short and seemingly throwaway gesture signals to the audience that everything to follow is a big joke, a parody.

Some critics have read this gesture as "orgasmic" and signifying the sexual. This is a very superficial explanation of how the gesture actually works in the context of the song itself. The sound does seem to suggest some kind of sexual meaning, but it also incorporates a camp element as well. This is in fact an orgasmic laugh, a joyful, playful, inviting sound that draws attention to and deflates the masculine frame that follows. It is the first sound we hear, and it subtly inverts the power relationship of the masculine containing the feminine. The masculine frame now serves the purpose of subversion - a "parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command."⁵² The male voice has no power in the context of this song other than to produce pointed laughter.

⁵¹ Ted Swedenburg ("Saida Sultan/Dana International: Transgender Pop and the Polysemiotics of Sex, Nation and Ethnicity on the Israeli-Egyptian Border" *The Musical Quarterly*, 81(1), 1997: 81-108) has identified this music as originating from a popular Israeli children's program (*Sammi and Susu*) from the early 1960's that was produced in Arabic. This is the same music that would be played when the main characters of that program traveled in their magic airplane from place to place.

⁵² Butler, 122.

The song also works as a reflection of Dana's fractured gender identity, her mixing of several categories, a mixing that ultimately allows her to exist outside of any one category. As I've already shown, the song uses several distinct elements (see form chart Appendix B). To the Israeli audience, each of these may represent a larger social or cultural site. The James Bond strings could bring to mind the overblown excess of the West, the firqah either popular concert music of the Middle East, or an Orientalist representation of the Middle East as seen from the West. The goblet drum holds the power of the forbidden and sensual, it could represent the Mizrahi themselves. The male chorus is those in power, uttering nonsense. The "travelling music" may be read as a secret joke for Arabic speaking Israelis, a very local and personal reference.

Underlying the entire mix is the sounds of the disco, the house percussion and bass, suggesting Dana's ties to the gay community. These sounds provide connection, unity between the different and distinct parts; they allow the other elements to slide in and out effortlessly. At the time this song was popular, Dana herself was moving in and out of various identities, and was doing it all with a sense of fun and playfulness.⁵³

The text itself is also of importance here, both in its overall meaning and through specific instances of wordplay (see Appendix A for full texts of both songs analyzed). The narrative describes the life of a well-kept woman, who traverses the globe, buying expensive and luxurious items, accompanied by her wealthy sugardaddy. This is meant as

⁵³ Another inside joke that only a portion of Dana's audience would understand exists in the brass chords that follow each of the solo firqah gestures. I have labeled the brass gesture as "Wonder Woman Brass" (audio example 7) because the rhythm, melodic contour, and function of the brass gesture is nearly identical to the opening brass heard in the theme to the 1970's American television show, "Wonder Woman" (audio example 8). Much of 70's American pop culture is known around the world for its camp value, and it is not too much of a stretch to imagine a singer who started her career performing parodies of American pop divas as being familiar with this television show and its famous theme song. Furthermore it fits perfectly into the overall effect of the song, adding another level of kitsch to an already overloaded, multilayered jumble of references.

parody, poking fun at the idea of the glamorous starlet. This tongue-in-cheek presentation is achieved in a manner similar to a drag queen performance: the material is taken to its most extreme, to the most ridiculous level.

Another, more subtle, meaning of the narrative has been circulated first through those in the know, her queer audience, and then by Dana herself through press interviews. This second, deeper meaning retains the element of camp, but shifts the focus from an unattainable elite to the undesirable lower class. The subject of the song is actually a poor woman who is fantasizing about being taken care of by a rich patron. From this vantage point the song then becomes not about the superficiality of the wealthy, but about the class system in Israel itself, and about someone who creates an illusion. The subject of the song is a world traveler only in her own mind; in the eyes of those in power she is not part of the club, she doesn't belong.

"Otherness" is also demonstrated on a more specific scale within the text. The identity of the subject is first thought to be the wealthy female jet setter (or the fantasy of a poor woman), but this position is shifted to that of a high price call girl with the lines, "I'm giving pussy/Come on and busi (kiss me)."

In the next verse this position is again changed by the somewhat ambiguous lines "fi andi zumzum/Come see my sumsum." These lines are best translated as "You think I have a zumzum /Come see my sumsum." The words zumzum and sumsum are not translated in any source available, however according to the Israeli publication *Rosh I* their implied meaning is female and male genitalia, respectively⁵⁴. This refers to the

⁵⁴ The passage from the Rosh 1 article reads as follows: "Half an hour earlier, a dark and thin guy came out from the dressing room, Yaron Cohen was his name. He looked at all the teenagers with a satisfied smile, and went home. If the connection between Dana and Yaron is still not clear, maybe a line from the song 'Dana International' will clarify everything. In an almost full translation it goes like this: "Do you think I

singer herself, for at the time of this song she was pre-operative. It also maintains the "Otherness" of the subject, and moves this position outside of existing gender categories.

At this point in the song Dana inverts the meaning of the original orgasmic laugh. She is not poking fun at the subject of the song so much as she is teasing the audience. The unexpected change of subject identity serves to emphasize the fragile boundaries of Dana's identity. She seems to be telling the audience that if she is to be defined than it is she who will choose to do so, and she will revel in her multitude of positions. In this respect she is performing a parody of the misfit, of the freak, exaggerating the characteristics that are expected of one who inhabits this space. Like the elusive and dangerous Carmen, she is able to slide between points of "Otherness" and at times appear both desirable and repulsive.

The use of Arabic, Hebrew, French, and English in the text mirrors the use of the various musical styles and cultural connections in the song. Dana freely mixes the languages, sometimes switching from one word to the next (see Appendix D). Her use of the languages is often grammatically incorrect, she pronounces words wrong, and some lines of text are difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of. An example in English is the line "I have a golden hair," which Ted Swedenburg has posited refers to the blonde starlet of Hollywood films, purposely using the singular form to poke fun at the character in the song who thinks she is sophisticated, but is ignorant of her mistakes.⁵⁵ The context of the line is no help either. It follows the Hebrew line "You are the millionaire," and precedes the equally confusing lines "I'm giving pussy/Come on and *bussi*."

have a Zoom-Zoom, come see my Soom-Soom". The words Soom-Soom and Zoom-Zoom were not translated. For those of you who still do not understand, here is the explanation. Dana is actually Yaron Cohen, in other words: Yaron Cohen is actually Dana" *Expose: Her Name is Not Sa'ida, It's not a Miss, it's a Mister!!* Rosh1, 1993.

The linguistic knowledge of the listener is very important in determining how the text is received. In Israel it is common for a person to understand Hebrew, English, some Arabic, and the few words of French. But because Dana mixes the languages so freely, even a full translation will not reveal all of the intricacies of her use of language. Both Hebrew and Arabic employ similar gendered pronouns and word endings (masculine, feminine). In this song, Dana sometimes uses the feminine pronoun with a masculine form of a noun, and vice versa. She also switches between referring to herself in the feminine and masculine.⁵⁶ Since the song was also popular in Arabic-speaking countries, where audience knowledge of Hebrew and English was limited, several readings of the song have appeared, based on misunderstandings of which language Dana was using.

Near the end of the song, a final “airplane” announcement is heard, performed again in the faux masculine voice.

Ladies and Gentlemen, attention please
Five minutes before landing in Ben-Gurion airport
No kiss kiss, no miz-miz
And no business allowed
Shukran

This announcement informs the passengers (the listening audience) that the trip is over, and we are not in an exotic location as originally promised, but in Ben-Gurion airport in Israel. When we land there is to be no sexuality, nor sexual behavior (no kiss-kiss); no ethnicity, specifically Mizrahim (no miz-miz); and no economic opportunity (no business allowed). While this is on the surface another jab at authority, it also describes the

⁵⁵ Swedenburg, 90.

⁵⁶ I am indebted to Geir Skoseth for his insights and understanding of Hebrew and Arabic. He provided me with the information used in my discussion of gender and language. He also maintains a website with extensive resources on Dana. The site can be found at http://d1o202.telia.com/~u222600821/Geir%20Site/Geir_Danna_1.html.

personal situation of Dana at the time, as a marginalized ethnic and sexual minority with little career opportunity outside of entertainment.

Musical Strategy #2 – The Trojan Horse

This performance of multiple and fragmented roles came early in Dana's career, when she was still considered a "gimmick" and erased by the power elite, who refused to acknowledge her existence. As she gained popularity (and subsequently power) in Israel, her strategy of highlighting the difficult nature of her identity shifted from a straight-on parody to a more subtle and powerful one. In 1996 Dana released her third recording, Maganuna, which contained the song "Yesh Bo Esh (He Has Fire)." This song in particular reflects Dana's contention that she may be "Other" in the context of Israeli politics, but that she is embraced and representative of the larger society, which is pluralistic.

Unlike "Shushu Ya Shushu", this song is presented as a battle between two opposing views, the traditional (which could be read as the orthodox, or at least conservative and exclusionary), and the contemporary, secular, and sexual/sensual. Dana represents the latter, while her rival is the singer Igi Wachsman. Again, Dana is exploiting the accepted Ashkenazi/Mizrahi divide. Each of the singers represents a particular ethnicity by virtue of actually having that background. Their enunciation of Hebrew also indicates which social class they come from – Igi Wachsman speaks in a more refined and smooth manner, almost exaggerating the speech patterns of the elite, while Dana's speech is rougher and more akin to that of a lower-class person.

The two women also have distinctive singing styles and vocal timbres, each of which fits the particular role that they are playing in this song. Dana's voice is aggressive and consistently voiced, which contrasts with the more passive, almost unvoiced (breathy) quality of her rival. Dana's trademark yelps are also present in this song, and in this context retain their sexual overtones, but also add a feeling of strength, as if she is firm and confident of her position, and is using her space to launch an offensive.

The conservative position is undermined by the music itself, which supports Dana's aggressive tone. The entire song consists of synthesized sounds, none of which attempts to mimic a "real" instrument (other than a string-ish timbre). The introduction presents harsh, square wave timbres in a sensual rhythm that is supported by a heavy drum pattern. Added to this modern sound are gestures, which can best be described as evoking the image of a dominatrix. Sharp and whip-like, these gestures appear over a stripped down and subservient drum-and-bass pattern. Overall the sensual, aggressive, and forbidden are evoked by the music and by Dana's vocal timbre and singing style.

The narrative of the text is somewhat ambiguous. It concerns a battle between the two women for the love of a man, who is either already dating both of them, or has another lover altogether. Each woman presents her case as to why she is the best choice through the words she sings and how she sings them. The first section of text in the song is sung in an alternating fashion, with each side taking a few lines of text apiece. The conservative point of view stresses adherence to traditional forms of femininity such as loyalty and service to a mate, but at the same time decries the man's lack of passion and

emotional detachment. Dana's point of view highlights her sensuality and sexual prowess.

She is the "whore" normally set up as the foil for the "good girl":

Dana: He has innocence, he has fire He is feverish and fascinating

Igi: He is frightening and glowing Why isn't he passionate

Dana: For her, for her, only for her sake All the time only hers

Igi: For her, for her, only for her sake All the time only hers

Dana: He is careful, he is on fire He understands and shines

Igi: He comes and goes Why isn't he excited?
If I get my hands on him You will see what a man he is.

Dana: If I get my hands on him There will never be anyone else but me

Igi: If I get my hands on him It will go like in the old tales

Dana: If he comes to me If only he, then you'll see that only he

Both: He is a giant, he is huge As well as strong and sensitive
He is stunning and electric. Why doesn't he see?
He is perfect and grand He is capable of anything
He is charming and old-fashioned Why is he loyal like her?

On its surface the text describes what the women see in this man, what qualities they admire and are frustrated by. However, I believe that the song is not about a "man" at all: in fact, the text actually reveals what qualities each woman thinks are important for herself. When Dana sings words like "fire," "feverish," and "fascinating" she casts herself in the role of the sexualized female. Igi reveals her character as passive and subservient with the lines "He is frightening," "He comes and goes," and "It will go like in the old tales."

This textual analysis is strengthened by the roles projected in each woman's singing style, but an alternate reading of the song can also be made based on the text alone. The danger associated with Dana International as a performer is parodied here by presenting two options for femininity - passive or aggressive, old-fashioned or modern, sexually mute or a sexual predator.

On one level Dana subverts the notion that these are actually opposites and the only choices for a woman by presenting a combination of the two in the final section of the song. Instead of having to choose between two poles that are each defined in relation to a male figure, she and her singing partner create a hybrid persona that combines elements of both types, one that is newly defined by women.

Another reading of the song that deals with Dana and danger is a narrative one. As the song progresses Dana's sexualized persona seems to be emerging victorious in her quest for the man. Igi is receding into the background and losing her initial voice in favor of one that is more like Dana's. But in the end the man is nowhere to be found; he is no longer in the picture at all. Instead the ultimate danger is presented, a scenario in which Dana is able to seduce the man, but instead discards him in favor of the seduction of the woman.

The battle between conservative, old-fashioned discourses and modern, sensual ones is played out explicitly in the singing styles of the two performers. A section of nonsense syllables sung in unison by both performers is heard three times in the course of the song (see Appendix C for form chart). The relationship between the voices changes each time, and is indicative of the power struggle between the conservative and modern discourses. The first time these are heard the style is uniformly closer to the conservative, with no yelps and a toned down and more passive timbre in both singers. Dana is passing here as a "normal" woman, illustrating her ability to code-switch, and to appear like and embody the conservative image. This may also be her way of thumbing her nose at those who paint her as monstrous - she is in a way warning them that initial, superficial appearance can be misleading.

When the same section reappears in the middle of the song the voices are now pitted directly against each other. Dana has switched to her aggressive, sensual mode, while her conservative rival has remained the same. In this section Dana greatly overpowers the conservative voice, casting her as the "Other," while she is claiming the position of authority.

The final statement of the nonsense syllable section is at the conclusion of the song, the last section to be heard. Here the transformation is complete as the modern voice has seduced the conservative, and now both women sing in unison once again, albeit this time in a more seductive tone. This final section is not a clear change from unvoiced to voiced, however. Rather, the two poles have come together to create a new timbre, one that is simultaneously breathy and aggressive, demure and sexual - the new woman who combines elements of competing constructs.

Conclusion

In her words and her music, Dana International presents herself as the "Other." She is an ethnic, sexual, and gender minority in her culture. As such she may be expected to fulfill the niche of the sexualized, dangerous seductress. The power elite need her to do so, in order to use her position as a foil for their own conception of morality. However Dana's performance of gender and sexuality in her public persona do not serve this need so much as they subvert it. She is able to slip out of any one categorization as "Other" by becoming all of them, through exaggeration of the category itself.

Appendix B

Shushu Ya Shushu **Form Chart**

Appendix D “Shushu Ya Shushu” Language Distribution

English	Arabic	Hebrew	Mock Arabic	French	Italian
<p>This is Saudi Arabian airport May I have your attention please All passengers on flight number “six o sex” to Monaco Please approach to gate number 2 [Thank You]</p> <p>[Take me to Monaco] [Take me to Mexico] [Take me in a taxi] I’m feeling sexy Dana International</p> <p>[Take me to Paris] Kiss me [I have sesame] Come see my Dana International</p>	<p>Sukran</p> <p>hudni lil-monako hudni lil-meksiko zub li bil-taksi</p> <p>hudni lil-bari</p> <p>fi andi sumsum sumsum</p>				
			<p>Wa abiba eh wa abiba ba Was buba bomba bomba ba</p>	<p>mon cheri</p>	
<p>[You are the] milionaire And I have a golden hair (sic) I’m giving pussy Com on and [kiss me] Dana International</p> <p>[I bought it] duty free [Givenchy Shampoo] And expensive [pants] Compact disc and [telephone]</p>	<p>ina il [milyuner]</p> <p>bussi</p> <p>stretu bil [dyuti fri] sampu mal Givenchy</p>				<p>pantaloni telefoni (sic)</p>

English

Dana International

[Shushu, oh Shushu]

[Get hot, Shushu]

[My heart, Shushu]

Kiss me

[Come on, Shushu]

Touch me

[Oh, come on!]

[Take me, Shushu]

Arabic

shushu ya Shushu

hammi ya Shushu

albi ya Shushu

ya Shushu

yalla ya Shushu

ya Shushu

a yalla!

hudni ya Shushu

HebrewShushu⁵⁷Miz-Miz⁵⁸**Mock Arabic****French****Italian**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Five minutes before landing in Ben-Gurion

airport

No kiss-kiss, No [necking]

And no business allowed

[Thank You]

miz-miz

sukran

⁵⁷ According to information found on the Geir Sokgarth website about Dana International, “Shushu” is also Hebrew slang for a closeted gay man.

⁵⁸ Miz-miz is also a shortened version of Mizrahi, and is usually used in a derogatory manner.

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