

## In Bed Together

*Coexistence in Togo Mizrahi's Alexandria Films*

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The camera pans across the rooftops in a popular district of Alexandria. The image cuts to chickens feeding on one of the rooftops, then fades to the interior of the adjacent one-room apartment. An alarm clock rings, waking Chalom, a Jewish seller of lottery tickets. He quiets the alarm, leans over, and wakens his bedmate, °Abdu, a Muslim butcher's assistant (figure 1). Thus opens *al-Izz Bahdala* [*Mistreated By Affluence* (1937)], a film written, directed, and produced by Togo Mizrahi (1901–1986), an Alexandrian Jew with Italian nationality.<sup>1</sup>

This image of a Jew and a Muslim in bed together functions as a point of departure for this essay's analysis of the construction of coexistence in Togo Mizrahi's films produced in his studio in Alexandria. I approach the phrase "in bed together" as not just a metaphor of coexistence, but as a key to unlocking Mizrahi's projection of sameness and difference, self and Other, in 1930s Alexandria.

From the outset I should note that the sight of these two impoverished characters sharing a bed need not—and indeed should not—be understood as signaling sexual desire or a romantic affiliation between them. They share a bed because they are poor, not because they are gay. However, in this essay I argue that Togo Mizrahi's Alexandria comedies queer gender identity in a variety of ways, and that we cannot dismiss out of hand the gender and sexuality implications of this opening scene.<sup>2</sup> In this essay I tease out the interrelationship in Togo Mizrahi's films between an ethics of coexistence, "Chalom and °Abdu," and the queering of gender identity, "in bed together," as they play out against the backdrop of the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria. I argue that Mizrahi's films, through their narratives of mistaken identity, queer both ethno-religious identities and gender.



**Figure 5.1.** Chalom and ‘Abdu wake up together in bed. Screenshot, *Mistreated by Affluence* (1937).

I begin my analysis by situating Mizrahi’s Alexandria films within the development and critical reception of Egyptian cinema. Mizrahi’s comedies—and 1930s and 1940s Egyptian films in general—while popular at the time of release, have been disparaged by latter-day nationalist film critics and historians. In the first section below, I argue that the coexistence narrative in Mizrahi’s Alexandria films—as articulated through what I have termed a “Levantine cinematic idiom”—does not fit into the parochial nationalist paradigm of the critics, and goes at least part of the way toward explaining their discomfort with his films. In the second section I unpack the twin critical frameworks through which I analyze Mizrahi’s films: queerness and the Levantine. In the final sections I flesh out this argument with readings of two of Mizrahi’s Alexandria comedies: *al-Duktur Farhat* [*Doctor Farahat* (1935)] and *Mistreated by Affluence*.<sup>3</sup>

### Levantine Farce Versus National Melodrama

Togo Mizrahi was one of the pioneers of the Egyptian film industry. Through the 1920s until the mid-1930s, filmmaking was driven by the creative efforts (and financial investments) of individuals—there was no

Egyptian equivalent to the Hollywood studio system. In 1929 Mizrahi established his own film studio in Alexandria and his own production company *Shirkat al-aflam al-misriyya* (Egyptian Films Company). Studio Mizrahi produced more films in the 1930s than any other studio in Egypt (El-Shammaa 2007). Mizrahi directed and produced his films, developed the scenarios, and for the most part, throughout his career wrote (or co-wrote) his scripts. The first three films that Togo Mizrahi made in his Alexandria studio addressed social issues: *al-Hawiya / al-Kukayin* [*The Abyss* or *Cocaine* (silent, 1930)];<sup>4</sup> *5001* (silent, 1932); and *Awlad Misr* [*Children of Egypt* (sound, 1933)].<sup>5</sup> Between 1934 and 1938 Mizrahi made nine Arabic comedies filmed in Alexandria and its environs and in his Alexandria studio.<sup>6</sup>

In 1939 Mizrahi began filming in Cairo, first shooting on the sound stage at Studio Wahbi, and then opening a second location for his own studio.<sup>7</sup> His decision to begin filming in Cairo was likely due to the centralization of talent and resources in the capital at that time. In 1934, Egyptian nationalist financier Muhammad Tal'at Harb had founded Studio Misr, with the goal of establishing a robust national film industry. Harb also supported the development of local talent, investing in sending Egyptians for technical training in Europe (al-Hadari 2007; Hasan 1986). Studio Misr's first film, *Widad*, a musical starring the already well-known singer, Umm Kulthum, was released in 1936.<sup>8</sup>

The comedies Mizrahi directed between 1934 and 1938 in Alexandria share a number of features that distinguish them from his films made after his 1939 move to Cairo. The Alexandria comedies are all set in Egypt of the 1930s and involve a plot of mistaken identity. These films also all feature the same three comic stars who play consistent characters or types across the films: Chalom; 'Ali al-Kassar; and Fawzi al-Jazayirli. Leon Angel, the actor credited as Chalom, regularly appears as a character named "Chalom."<sup>9</sup> Critics have noted that "Chalom," a poor seller of lottery tickets in a popular district of Alexandria, is modeled on Charlie Chaplin's tramp (Farid 1996).<sup>10</sup> During the period under discussion Chalom appeared in two films directed by Mizrahi. 'Ali al-Kassar regularly appeared on stage and screen as a character called 'Usman 'Abd al-Basit, a down-on-his-luck Nubian.<sup>11</sup> Fawzi al-Jazayirli frequently played the shop owner "Bahbah," as well as a variety of other simple characters of limited means.<sup>12</sup> In Mizrahi's films, al-Jazayirli's characters get themselves into complicated situations beyond their comprehension.

These films also all play out in the streets, cafes, shops, homes, clinics, and, of course, beaches of Alexandria. Alexandria has a long-standing reputation as a cosmopolis. Mizrahi's representation of the city in these films reflects Alexandria's diversity. Mizrahi's films from this era repre-

sent a culture of coexistence that cuts across class.<sup>13</sup> Mizrahi's choice of stars—Chalom plays a Jewish character; °Ali al-Kassar portrays a Nubian—reflects an inclusive vision of local subjectivity. Mizrahi's films from this period regularly feature Greek and *shami* [Levantine Arab] characters as well as members of the Francophone Alexandrian elite.

While there is no abrupt rupture between Mizrahi's films before and after the relocation of his studio in 1939, some differences are notable. After 1939 Mizrahi continued to write and direct comedies of mistaken identity; however, he also began to explore other genres. The first film he made in Cairo, *Fi Layla Mumtira* [*On a Rainy Night* (1939)], is a musical melodrama.<sup>14</sup> In the 1940s Mizrahi began to branch out into what could be called costume comedies, like the films starring °Ali al-Kassar based loosely on narratives from the Thousand and One Nights: *Alf Layla wa-Layla* [*1001 Nights* (1940)]; and *°Ali Baba wa-l-Arba'in Harami* [*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1942)]. Also, in Mizrahi's films after 1939 the self-conscious engagement with an ethics of inclusion becomes somewhat more muted, whether by virtue of generic conventions in the case of musicals, or the removal of comedies—which had already maintained a strained relationship to reality—from the Egypt of the time and into fictional settings.

Contemporaneous Egyptian critics lauded Mizrahi's efforts to bring locally produced entertainment to Egyptian viewers. One critic, Ra'uf Muhammad al-Shaf'î (1935), deemed *Doctor Farahat* "a brilliant success ... in step with the Egyptian spirit." During these early years, critics also lavished praise on the performance of Mizrahi's stars. Muhammad Yunis al-Qadi (1935), a playwright who had written for Fawzi al-Jazayirli, expressed his appreciation for Mizrahi's adaptation of the actor's physical comedy for the screen. Another critic (Kutah 1935) lauded the screen presence of Tahiya Muhammad, later known by the screen name Tahiya Carioca, in her film debut under Mizrahi's direction in *Doctor Farahat*.<sup>15</sup>

Later Egyptian critics do not generally share this enthusiasm about Mizrahi's films. In an essay published in 1996, °Ali Abu Shadi (1996: 91–92), for example, concedes that, "Mizrahi's films were very popular and successful at the box office, and they made their stars famous." However, he goes on to dismiss these films for their "contrived and exaggerated" plot lines and their low-brow humor. Abu Shadi (1996: 91–92) levied the following critique of Mizrahi's comic fare: "These films are light comedies, there is no character development, no motivation for action, and no subtlety to the words. They seek only to amuse and entertain, and some are farces using mistaken identity and misunderstanding as their primary means of arousing laughs."

Abu Shadi is correct that farces were indeed Mizrahi's stock in trade in the 1930s. *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theater* defines farce as a "form of popular comedy in which laughter is raised by horseplay and bodily assault in contrived and highly improbable situations ... It deals with the inherent stupidity of man at odds with his environment" (Hartnoll and Found 1996). In its modern usage, according to the entry, "the word farce is applied to a full-length play dealing with some absurd situation, generally based on extra-marital adventures—hence "bedroom farce" (Hartnoll and Found 1996). However, the entry draws a clear distinction between farce with "its hold on humanity" and burlesque "depicting the grosser faults of mankind" (Hartnoll and Found 1996). Abu Shadi and other Egyptian critics are not alone in disparaging the contrivances of farce.<sup>16</sup> Eric Bentley (1964: 219–56), in his analysis of the genre, cites a host of oppositions to the underpinning violence of farce, and its subversion of the tenets of religion, marriage, and moral social codes.

Mizrahi's farcical plots of mistaken identity are indeed "contrived" and "highly improbable." In this article I aim to make a case for the value of revisiting these farces (which I, apparently unlike Abu Shadi, find quite entertaining). What interests me is the nature of the contrivances of Mizrahi's farcical plots. Specifically, I wish to unpack the particular acts of "mistaken identity and misunderstanding" that Abu Shadi dismisses.

Abu Shadi's assessment also reflects a predominant trend in Egyptian film criticism. Critics sympathetic to Nasserist ideology take a dim view of interwar and postwar genre films, dismissing them as decadent and derivative of (dangerous) foreign influences (Flibbert 2005: 461n3).<sup>17</sup> Nationalist critics of Egyptian film have tended to view melodrama as the vehicle best suited to cinema of substance. Melodrama has the capacity to reveal social ills. It was also the genre of choice for depicting the anti-colonial struggle.<sup>18</sup>

To summarize this position, nationalist critics have posited a relationship between the genre of melodrama and the nation (with emphasis here on the post-Nasser Arabo-centric nation). In this chapter, I similarly posit a relationship between the genre of farce and the Levantine. The Levantine idiom in Togo Mizrahi's 1930s farcical films, I am arguing, queers identity.<sup>19</sup> It is this dynamic, more than the mere inclusion on screen of non-Arab minorities that challenges the hegemonic national narrative of Egyptian film criticism. As articulations of a queer, Levantine urban localism, Mizrahi's farces offer an alternative to the parochial, homosocial, and heteronormative national imaginary produced by and reproduced in melodrama.<sup>20</sup>

## Queerness and the Levantine

My construction of the performativity of identities—Levantine, on the one hand, and gender and sexuality on the other—is indebted to Judith Butler’s influential work, *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990). Since her debunking of the myth of compulsory heterosexuality and stable categories of gender, the epistemological questions about identity that Butler raises burst open interrogation of other forms of identity formation. Richard Thompson Ford (2011: 123), for example, models his own critique of racial identity politics on Butler’s critique of gender: “Queer theory’s anti-identitarianism is the key to its portability ... The queer critique of (nominally) gay identity politics would seem to apply to identity politics in general.” In labeling Mizrahi’s Levantine film idiom “queer” I am referring to both the particularities of the performativity of gender and sexuality, as well as its broader destabilizing potential, as explored by Ford, for “identity politics in general.”<sup>21</sup>

In the introduction to *Out Takes*, a volume of essays on queer theory and film, Ellis Hanson takes a similarly broad view of the term’s significance. Hanson (1999: 4) defines “queer” as:

a rejection of the compulsory heterosexual code of masculine men desiring feminine women, and it declares that the vast range of stigmatized sexualities and gender identifications, far from being marginal, are central to the construction of modern subjectivity; but it is also, as Michael Warner has pointed out, a resistance to normalization as conceived more generally as a sort of divide-and-conquer mentality by which cultural difference—racial, ethnic, sexual, socioeconomic—is pathologized and atomized as disparate forms of deviance.

Hanson acknowledges the broad significance of the term queer, in destabilizing received categories including but not limited to gender and sexuality. In the second half of the quote, he asserts the power of queer theory to expose the dynamics of other forms of social marginalization.

I argue that Mizrahi’s Alexandrian bedroom farces destabilize prevailing gender categories in 1930s Egypt. The films, by extension, poke fun at emerging middle class assumptions about modernity and the nation. Historian Wilson Jacob (2011) has mapped what he terms “effendi masculinity”—a subject position reflecting middle class aspirations toward and performance of modernity that began emerging in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This “effendi masculinity” was commonly recognizable by the 1930s. Jacob reads as performance these new forms of gendered, national subjectivity that emerge in British colonial Egypt.

Mizrahi's 1930s comedies feature lower class characters ill at ease with middle class expectations. The bumbling characters portrayed by Chalom, <sup>c</sup>Ali al-Kassar, and Fawzi al-Jazayirli simultaneously confront modernity and emerging gender norms to which they do not conform. Class mobility is linked in these films with the performance of normativized gender expectations that look a lot like the "effendi masculinity" Jacob identifies. The lens provided by Jacob permits us to see the ways, by extension, Mizrahi's films reflect upon and subtly critique (in a non-ideological way) emerging normativizing discourse and Egyptian articulations of modernity.<sup>22</sup>

According to Gershoni and Jankowski (1995), the new *effendiyya* were also the driving force behind a shift in the conception of the nation Egypt underwent in the 1930s that ran counter to Mizrahi's Levantine construction of identity, and threatened the coexistence of Jews and Muslims portrayed in his films. The territorial nationalism identified with the 1919 revolution, with its pluralist bent, had derived from Western thought and political philosophy. By the 1930s the economic and political environment had shifted, and disillusionment with the failures of the 1919 agenda fed the ascendance of what Gershoni and Jankowski (1995) call supra-Egyptian nationalism. Although these strains of nationalism shared an anti-colonial agenda, the supra-nationalists drew inspiration from Arab-Islamic sources and articulated their political agenda in terms shared by other Arabs and Muslims in contrast to the Western orientation of territorial nationalism. In practice, the ascendant nationalist strains increasingly excluded resident non-Muslim minorities like Mizrahi. The 1929 Nationality Law, according to Shimon Shamir (1987: 48), "gave dominance to *jus sanguina*" in defining those eligible for Egyptian nationality, and "accorded special position to Arab and/or Muslim affiliation." In the interwar period exclusionary nationalist discourses such as Greek irredentism, Italian fascism, and Zionism also circulated among some members of Egypt's resident foreign minority communities, dividing them from one another and from the majority culture.

Mizrahi's films resist this deterministic trend by embracing what I call a Levantine cinematic idiom. I have chosen the term "Levantine" because it reflects the 1930s Alexandrian society that Mizrahi portrays on screen, and in which he produced his films. The term "Levantine" also highlights ambiguity and performativity of identity alongside the presumption of diversity. I identify three characteristics of Mizrahi's Levantine idiom. First, Levantine films depict an urban localism characterized by diversity, and feature, to echo Rebecca Bryant's definition of "coexistence" in the introduction to this volume, "the horizontal relations among persons belonging to different ethnic or confessional groups."<sup>23</sup>

These films engage with, although do not necessarily promote, a Levantine ethics of coexistence. Second, these films also employ a visual language of inclusion, a Levantine aesthetic. Third, in these films the performance of identity is fluid and mutable, embracing the vagueness and porousness of the boundaries of identity. This idiom, which grows out of Egyptian comic theater, is evident in films by other filmmakers in Egypt in the 1930s as well.<sup>24</sup>

In what follows, I analyze two Togo Mizrahi films produced and set in Alexandria in the 1930s that engage the nexus between queerness and the Levantine: *Doctor Farahat* and *Mistreated by Affluence*. *Doctor Farahat* overtly troubles assumptions about gender and sexuality. *Mistreated by Affluence*, as I have already described above, foregrounds coexistence. By reading these films together, I aim to demonstrate how these two articulations of the performativity of identity in Mizrahi's work inform one another.

### Suitors in Swimsuits – *Doctor Farahat* (1935)

Like Mizrahi's other films from this era, *Doctor Farahat* is fundamentally a comedy of assumed identity. Hilmy, a successful surgeon who has been living in England for fifteen years, returns to his native Alexandria to get married. In addition to his wealth, he is considered a minor celebrity for his medical discoveries. A match has been arranged to Nona, a woman he has not yet met. Concerned that she is a gold-digger, he seeks an opportunity to court her, without her knowing his identity. So, he arranges to meet her twice, once in disguise as the stuffy, bearded, and bespectacled Dr. Hilmy (figure 2), and once looking and acting naturally, but under the assumed identity of Mustafa, a clerk (figure 3).

To add to the confusion, upon Hilmy's arrival, he dodges reporters by asking an employee of the hotel, Farahat (Fawzi al-Jazayirli), to assume his identity. The backward, impoverished, and uneducated Farahat has been employed as a translator by the hotel under false (and humorous) pretenses. Nevertheless, the ruse succeeds; the reporters snap Farahat's picture, convinced they have taken the photo of Dr. Hilmy, setting in motion this additional plot line of mistaken identity.

Nona's family, eager to meet the young suitor, send for Hilmy, and instead get his geriatric pretender, Farahat. As the title suggests, it is Farahat's humorous misadventures in the guise of the esteemed Dr. Hilmy that dominate the plot. Farahat and his sidekick 'Ali, in the role of the doctor's secretary, pay a visit to Nona's house.<sup>25</sup> Nona and her friend Tahiya privately mock the suitor, and set out to humiliate him in the hopes of calling off the engagement.





**Figure 5.2.** Hilmy disguised as Dr. Hilmy. Screenshot, *Doctor Farahat* (1935).



**Figure 5.3.** Hilmy disguised as Mustafa, with Nona. Screenshot, *Doctor Farahat* (1935).

It is within this multilayered charade of mistaken identity that one encounters gender play. In what follows, I unpack two articulations of the queering of gender identity in *Doctor Farahat*. First, I examine instances when same sex pairs share the same bed. Then, I discuss moments in the film that individually and collectively can be read as highlighting a performative construction of gender identity.

Much of the plot of *Doctor Farahat* revolves around Nona's efforts to exhaust Farahat and to drive him away. The women first keep the men walking along the Corniche until midnight, then Nona calls at five o'clock the following morning to invite them for a swim. Nona also arranged for notable doctors to attend a lecture later the same morning to be given by "Dr. Hilmy" (Farahat), and in the afternoon she entices the men to join her for a party on a boat that lasts until late in the evening.

On four occasions, during the brief intervals between these engagements, Farahat and °Ali flop into the plush double bed in their shared hotel room. These comic scenes are rife with sight gags and tame verbal innuendo. On the first occasion, °Ali removes his jacket on Farahat's side of the bed and starts to climb over Farahat. Farahat exclaims, "Hey brother, why not enter from the door of your house?" °Ali responds, "But it's a long way from here. Let me pass through your roof." The root of the verb *kharama*, here used in its form that signifies "pass through" or "take a shortcut," can also signify "pierce"—adding to the suggestive double entendre to the exchange. Later in the scene, when the phone rings, °Ali, in his role as the esteemed doctor's secretary, again climbs over Farahat to answer the call (figure 4).

Although the men remain fully clothed, physical contact between them in bed—like the sight of °Ali climbing over Farahat—elicits laughs.<sup>26</sup> By contrast with this scene, while the opening sequence of *Mistreated by Affluence* leaves no question that we are viewing a comedy, the *fact* that the two men share a bed is not played for laughs. Farahat and °Ali would, like their counterparts Chalom and °Abdu, think nothing of sharing a bed with a male friend in their own cramped domestic quarters. The luxurious bed in the hotel is large and inviting, and despite the presence of a couch in the suite, neither character seems to question that they would share the bed. Farahat objects to the way °Ali enters the bed, but not to his presence.

The scenes with Farahat and °Ali confirm heteronormative sexuality within homosocial Egyptian norms. Any ambiguity of these bedroom scenes is resolved in the final iteration of this repeating pattern (figure 5). Throughout the film, Umm Ahmad, Farahat's wife, chases after him. After failing to follow him to the party on the boat, she lies in wait. After the party, Farahat falls drunk into bed and starts to brag about kissing Nona. Umm Ahmad indignantly reveals herself and demands an expla-



**Figure 5.4.** ʿAli climbs over Farahat to answer the telephone. Screenshot, *Doctor Farahat*, (1935).



**Figure 5.5.** Farahat and Umm Ahmad in bed. Screenshot, *Doctor Farahat* (1935).

nation. We are restored to the standard heteronormative extramarital love triangle of the bedroom farce.

Just prior to the first scene of Farahat and ʿAli in bed together, Nona and Tahiya are also shown sharing a bed. After the long walk on the Corniche, Nona sits on the bed in a negligee, stretches, proclaims that she is tired and then lies down under the covers. Tahiya, sitting on the edge of the bed undressing, concurs, adding “If you think you’re tired, what about them?” This scene reads as a (male) voyeuristic view into the women’s boudoir.

Later, at the conclusion of the party scene, Nona and Mustafa embrace in the moonlight. The scene cuts abruptly to Nona’s bedroom, the second scene showing the women in bed together. In this miniature scene, lasting nineteen seconds, Nona lies awake, and repeats Mustafa’s proclamation of love to her, while Tahiya drifts off to sleep beside her (figure 6). The film then cuts to Umm Ahmad hiding under the covers awaiting Farahat’s return from the party. As with the scene between Farahat and Umm Ahmad that follows, Nona’s wakeful reflection appears to restore heteronormative desire. But, Nona muses on Mustafa’s words—“I love you, Nona”—rather than giving voice to her own emotions (even in the privacy of her own bedroom). Unlike the conclusion of the scene between Farahat and Umm Ahmad, the self-reflexivity of Nona’s utterance



Figure 5.6. Nona and Tahiya in bed. Screenshot, *Doctor Farahat* (1935).

simultaneously troubles the predominant narrative axis of heterosexual desire that it appears to assert. The ambivalence of Nona's assertion also fails to completely displace the titillating queerness of the visual projection of two scantily clad women in bed together.

As my reading of these bedroom scenes implies, Nona's role as an object of desire and as a desiring subject bears closer examination. Nona believes she has three male suitors in the film: Farahat, in the guise of Doctor Hilmy; Hilmy, in disguise as the stuffy doctor; and Hilmy as Mustafa. Male desire is focalized through the main character, Farahat. Viewers recognize that Farahat is a buffoon. His age and his coarse, uneducated, and lower-class manner make him appear an inappropriate suitor for the wealthy, modern, westernized Nona. We also know that Farahat is already married.<sup>27</sup> While he inadvertently falls into the role of suitor, he persists in the charade for the promise of access to Nona's body. Each time Farahat considers walking away, Nona draws him back in by feigning affection and then, after the appearance of Mustafa, by fomenting jealousy.

Nona embraces her performance of femininity to deceive Farahat. Take, for example, the early morning swim. In the cabana with <sup>c</sup>Ali, Farahat decides that it is too cold to swim. He steps outside to inform Nona. Borrowing a visual idiom already established by Hollywood cinema, the camera reproduces Farahat's desirous gaze by panning Nona's body from toe to head. The sight of Nona in her bathing costume changes Farahat's mind.

But, the bathing scene that follows troubles these very same gendered assumptions about agency and desire. As she is changing into her bathing suit, an exasperated Nona proclaims that perhaps the women should "drown [the men] and be done with them." Tahiya, it appears, takes Nona's suggestion seriously. A lengthy silent montage (accompanied by upbeat music) intercuts Tahiya wrestling with <sup>c</sup>Ali and Nona attempting to coax Farahat into the water. As the scene progresses, Tahiya's malicious intent becomes more apparent with each subsequent dunking. What is striking about this scene is its violence—violence perpetrated by the female characters.<sup>28</sup> Tahiya's physical contact with <sup>c</sup>Ali in the water is simultaneously ludic and menacing, playful dunking that verges on attempted drowning. In the final image of the scene, Nona is shown dragging Farahat screaming into the cold water. This is torture, not play. Thanatos, not eros.

In the swimming scene the male characters are emasculated by an aggressive, predatory, violent femininity. And, over the course of the film, Nona's cruel tricks become increasingly more emasculating. The final indignity involves Nona piloting a small plane with Farahat as a passenger. Nona's aerial acrobatics frighten Farahat, causing him to wet his

pants, and then pass out. It is worth recalling that this violence and cruelty is in the service of repelling a prospective suitor, deferring marriage.

Tahiya encourages Nona in her sadistic yo-yo of attraction and repulsion toward Farahat. Her motives begin to emerge in the cabana as the two women change into their swim suits. As Nona begins to unbutton her shirt, Tahiya casts her own desirous gaze at her friend's body. Farahat, it seems, is not the only one to leer at Nona's body. Nona is not only the object of the male gaze within the film (and for that matter, the object of the masculine gaze of the audience), she is also the object of a desirous female gaze.<sup>29</sup> Tahiya's desire for Nona poses a complication (but not a replacement) of the heteronormative reading of the women's bedroom scenes.

Nona appears oblivious to Tahiya's affections. And, as the plots of mistaken identity unravel, we encounter a final (but not complete) restoration of heteronormativity. After Farahat passes out on the plane, the real Dr. Hilmy revives him. Hilmy and Farahat reveal their true identities. Hilmy requests Nona's hand in marriage from her puzzled parents. Nona's parents agree, although they admit they do not understand what has happened. When Tahiya bows out, she too, expresses her confusion. After dodging marriage for the whole film, Nona agrees to wed. Nona



**Figure 5.7.** Tahiya watches Nona undress. Screenshot, *Doctor Farahat* (1935).

and Hilmy embrace, as do the happily reunited Farahat and Umm Ahmad. Tahiya, however, is not paired off at the end of the film, despite the presence of a suitable male mate—Hilmy's friend. While her designs on Nona are thwarted, her same-sex desire is not normativized.

While I grant that this film narrates an especially convoluted plot, even for a farce, it is unusual for the characters in Mizrahi's films to remain confused once all has been revealed. The boundaries of identity—and gender—have been troubled. The characters' confusion at the end of the film reflects the residual of the disturbances wrought by masquerade. We may end up with two male-female pairs, but the film does not conclusively or universally restore heteronormativity.

Thus far, I have focused my attention on masquerade as an articulation of gender instability in *Doctor Farahat*. I would also like to point to the way this film also marks fluidity of identity as Levantine. Hilmy first appears on screen in a disguise, insisting on embracing the fluid possibilities afforded by Levantine subjectivity. He counts on names as a signifier of an ethno-religious affiliation just as he relies upon the physical (and linguistic) indifferenciability of Levantines.

Dr. Hilmy makes his first appearance as he enters the hotel. In the first words he utters, Hilmy confirms with his secretary, °Ali, that a room has been booked. He continues: "Under what name?"

"Doctor Hilmy," replies °Ali.

"You idiot," exclaims Hilmy, "Didn't we agree that you shouldn't register under the name 'Doctor Hilmy?'"

"What should I have written?" retorts °Ali.

"Write any name you want. Write 'Boutros.' Write 'Mikha'il.'"

In this originary moment, the masquerade that sets into motion the multiple layers of role play in the film, lies the (nominally) Muslim character's desire to hide behind a Christian name.

There is yet another layer to passing as a Levantine. The credits identify the actor playing Hilmy as °Abd al-Aziz al-Mashriqi. This is a pseudonym. The actor playing Hilmy is none other than Togo Mizrahi.<sup>30</sup> Mashriqi is the Arabic translation of the Hebrew Mizrahi (meaning "eastern," or, not to put too fine a point on it "oriental"). In other words, a Jewish actor (always already in disguise) plays a Muslim character, who seeks cover under a Christian name.

### **A Parting Kiss – *Mistreated by Affluence* (1937)**

In *Doctor Farahat* the Levantine idiom I am mapping is articulated primarily through gender play as masquerade, with limited, but notable,

articulations of an ethics of coexistence. *Mistreated by Affluence* inverts this formula, emphasizing coexistence over masquerade. As noted earlier, at the start of *Mistreated by Affluence*, the protagonists, Chalom and °Abdu live together in a cramped room on the roof of an apartment building.<sup>31</sup> The families of their respective fiancées, Esther and Amina, reside side by side in modest middle class apartments on the floor below.<sup>32</sup> Although the families sleep in their separate quarters, they are frequently shown socializing in one another's apartments. This construction of domestic space, and the characters' actual or virtual cohabitation, serves as a microcosm for coexistence in the society at large.

*Mistreated by Affluence* is not about coexistence, though. The film neither interrogates nor problematizes difference. Nor does *Mistreated by Affluence* rely upon ethno-religious stereotypes as a source of comedy (Starr 2011). The narrative takes for granted that Jews and Muslims could be longstanding friends and neighbors in 1930s Egypt. This domiciled, or perhaps domesticated, coexistence serves as the solid foundation against which the film's contrived, farcical plot unfurls. Uncertainty lies beyond the confines of the domestic space and the quarter.

Buffeted along by chance, Chalom and °Abdu bumble into (comical) situations beyond their control. °Abdu is mistrusted, berated, and beaten by Hasan, the butcher for whom he works. But, when Hasan dies, he bequeaths the shop to his assistant. °Abdu shares his newfound wealth with Chalom, enabling his friend to open a small shop from which to sell lottery tickets and exchange currency. The money also enables the men to get married after lengthy engagements. Following the weddings, Chalom purchases a bundle of scrap paper on behalf of his friend to use for wrapping meat. He discovers that the papers are stock certificates worth over 650,000 Egyptian pounds. Chalom insists on splitting the newfound wealth evenly with °Abdu. They decide to purchase a bank, and settle into neighboring villas with their wives and in-laws. But the money sows discord, and the friends have an altercation. In the end, chance again prevails, the bank fails, and Chalom and °Abdu lose their wealth. Chalom and °Abdu reconcile, and they rejoice along with their families in the return to their homely coexistence.

The sharing of food and a shared food culture underpin the film's construction of coexistence between Jews and Muslims.<sup>33</sup> The families are regularly depicted eating together in a series of scenes that intertwine the film's Levantine ethics and aesthetics. Near the beginning of *Mistreated by Affluence*, the two families prepare a picnic for Shamm al-Nasim—a spring festival celebrated by Egyptians of all religious affiliations. On the night before the festival, the women, Vittoria, Esther, Umm Amina, and Amina are shown packing food, while the men, Solomon and Ibrahim,



play backgammon. Both families await the return of Chalom and °Abdu who are charged with purchasing *fisikh*, the salted fish traditionally eaten on Shamm al-Nasim. The day of the festival is heralded by a lively montage of documentary footage shot in the streets, parks, and beaches of Alexandria, accompanied by a festive, non-diegetic soundtrack. Following shots of celebrants on the beaches of Alexandria, the scene cuts to a long shot in which we see Jewish and Muslim families crowded around covered crates, picnicking together in front of a bank of cabanas.

The scene is shot (in a studio) to give the impression of a busy beach during a popular festival. The wide-angle establishing shot of the group picnic offers an inclusive vision of cosmopolitan Alexandria. Several figures from a range of classes cross between the seated picnickers and the camera: a male bather; a police officer; a woman in bourgeois, Western attire holding a parasol; a fisherman carrying his gear. Two barefoot children sit cross-legged in the foreground eating, and in the background another man in a bathing suit engages in calisthenics. Even as the camera zooms in to a tighter group shot of the picnic, the scene retains its inclusiveness as the camera pans to show all eight characters eating and conversing.

This vision of coexistence is disrupted only by Vittoria's verbal abuse of her future son-in-law. The continuous take is broken by a cut to a close-up of Chalom asking about a dish not included in the feast. Vittoria berates him, and Chalom, gathering up loaves of bread, excuses himself and prepares to retreat, inviting Esther to join him. But, even in this moment of familial discord, a Levantine aesthetic persists. The camera pans from Chalom to Vittoria and back. Rather than shooting the argument in a shot-reverse-shot sequence of the two characters, the interaction is shot panning from one character to another, with other members of the group in view. This continuous, inclusive camerawork mirrors the content of this scene in which Jews and Muslims break bread together in celebration of a shared festival (Shafik 2007: 31).

Vittoria's condemnation of Chalom turns to praise after the families relocate to posh estates. The Jewish and Muslim families remain neighbors, residing in adjacent villas. The families continue to gather in their new homes and share meals together. But the pleasures of eating are denied to them just as they can finally afford expensive delicacies. In a comic subplot, two nurses, Maurice and Wali, pretending to be doctors, insinuate themselves on the families. They diagnose imaginary diseases so they can be paid for providing ongoing care. In the meantime, they sidle up to the young brides, hoping to woo them away from their husbands. Their "medical advice" consists primarily of manipulating access to food.

In one scene, when Chalom and ‘Abdu are delayed at the bank, the families begin dining in their absence under the doctors’ vigilant eyes. The older generation is excoriated to abstain from anything but milk and boiled vegetables. The young women, by contrast, are plied with wine and rich foods. Like the picnic, the scene opens with a long establishing shot showing the families gathered together around a formal dining table. A servant enters carrying food to the table. But, the camerawork then mirrors the rupture between this dining experience and the former communal preparation and consumption of food; the dining room scene is constructed with a discontinuous series of two-shots, rather than the inclusive zoom and pan of the picnic scene.

In *Mistreated by Affluence* the masquerade is one of passing, involving Chalom and ‘Abdu’s (failed) efforts to act like members of the elite following their chance windfall. Their behavior is a comic exaggeration of the boorishness and ostentation of the nouveau riche. When they host a cocktail party for business associates, Chalom and ‘Abdu wear lapel pins identifying themselves as the bank’s directors. A bank manager charged with introducing the guests to the receiving line disdainfully flicks Chalom’s pin and asks in a scornful voice, “What are you wearing? What is that? Take that thing off!” Chalom, puzzled, responds, “Why? Shouldn’t people know that I am the director of the bank?” Gesturing toward ‘Abdu, he adds, “And him too?” The exasperated manager exclaims, “Director of the bank? Take it off! That is something janitors wear!” This misjudgment reflects the myriad missed codes and social cues of their adopted titles and assumed identities.

Chalom and ‘Abdu take advantage of their newfound wealth and position of power to chase women. In the dalliance that renders *Mistreated by Affluence* a bedroom farce, Chalom and ‘Abdu pursue the affections of a singer, Zuzu, and a dancer, Ruhiya. In contrast to *Doctor Farahat*, the heterosexual love triangle itself is the site of gender instability in *Mistreated by Affluence*.

Following their introduction at the nightclub where the women perform, Chalom and ‘Abdu agree to a date at the women’s apartment. Chalom and ‘Abdu are cowed by the women’s overt sexuality and forwardness. The viewer understands that these “artists” [*artistat*], are to be understood as loose women, if not downright prostitutes.<sup>34</sup> Ruhiya beckons ‘Abdu to enter her dressing room as she disrobes behind a shoulder-high barrier. While in this state of undress, she beckons ‘Abdu to give her a kiss. Meanwhile, Chalom is instructed to enter the adjoining room where he finds Zuzu soaking in a tub. Covering his eyes as he approaches, Chalom hands Zuzu a bouquet of flowers. He crouches next to the tub and presents her with a bracelet, which he accidentally drops

in the water. He pushes up his sleeve and reaches into the tub. Realizing what he has done, he runs out of the room, only to find that °Abdu has also retreated. Chalom is rendered speechless, and resorts to gesturing and whistling to describe his interaction with Zuzu.<sup>35</sup> The women's overt expression of sexual desire and, as in *Doctor Farahat*, predatory female sexuality poses an affront to the men's masculinity.

Chalom and °Abdu regroup and resolve to reassert their masculinity. °Abdu steels himself to return to Ruhiya saying: "Listen Chalom, *we need to be men*. Ruhiya! I must speak to her. I must tell her that I love her. I must hold her. I must kill her with my kisses. Yes, I must!" [my emphasis]. Pushing Chalom out of the way °Abdu warns, "Watch out!" and marches back toward Ruhiya's door. Thumping his chest Chalom concurs, "Yes! Men!" He attempts to repeat °Abdu's rousing speech, but gives up when he is unable remember the exact words. Instead, Chalom tips his tarbush forward, puffs up his chest, and, as he dramatically prepares to march himself toward Zuzu's quarters, he says "Men! I will go! Watch out!"

The men, however, remain passive recipients of the women's affections. When Chalom enters Zuzu's boudoir, she is toweling her thighs, wearing only a bathrobe. She invites a nervous Chalom to kiss her, and he hesitantly responds with a chaste kiss on the top of her head. With further prompting, he kisses her on the cheek. Zuzu finally takes charge, throws herself into Chalom's arms and passionately embraces him. Likewise, after the encounter, a grinning °Abdu is shown with lipstick marks all over his face (but not on his lips). Although the camera does not follow °Abdu's second encounter with Ruhiya, the visible evidence also places him in a passive role.

Zuzu and Ruhiya's emasculating rhetoric sets into motion a sequence of events that devolve into a fight between Chalom and °Abdu as they seek to reassert their masculinity. In the climactic party scene, Chalom and °Abdu hide behind a curtain planning to surprise Zuzu and Ruhiya with bouquets of flowers. Instead, they overhear the women disparaging them. Ruhiya calls °Abdu an oaf, but admits she likes the contents of his wallet. Zuzu casts aspersions on Chalom's virility, calling him a grasshopper, and likening his floppy mustache to a shrimp. She concludes with the kicker, "That half pint, you call that a man?"

From their hiding place, Chalom and °Abdu also overhear the nurses Maurice and Wali professing their love to Esther and Amina. Impotent to respond to these insults on their own, Chalom and °Abdu call for their in-laws to intervene. Following a chaotic shouting match, Maurice and Wali are escorted out of the party, but the protagonists are still smarting from the insults and spoiling for a fight. When Chalom overhears a guest

claiming that he would be nothing without ʿAbdu, it is the last straw. Chalom pours out his wrath upon ʿAbdu, and his friend reciprocates. In the heat of the argument, each claims to have made “a man” out of the other.

Destabilized gender identity threatens to upset the narrative of coexistence. Esther’s and Amina’s families appeal to Chalom and ʿAbdu to reconcile, urging the men not to let their fight undermine a thirty-year friendship between the families.

The emasculation of the bourgeois lifestyle and the threats it poses to coexistence are reversed only after Chalom and ʿAbdu lose their wealth and the characters all return to their old residences. Likewise, at the end of the film, the equal access to communal food—along with the inclusive Levantine aesthetic—is restored. In the penultimate scene, the Jewish and Muslim families once again crowd around a table to share their favorite food together. As with the picnic, this scene is comprised of a single shot that includes all of the characters in the frame. The closing shot of the film also serves to reassert Chalom’s virility. Chalom is shown returning to the street in the old neighborhood hawking lottery tickets—but this time he is carrying infant twins.

By way of conclusion, I would like return to a brief scene that depicts the intersection of the two idioms of Levantine fluidity I have traced:



**Figure 5.8.** Chalom and ʿAbdu kiss. Screenshot, *Mistreated by Affluence* (1937).

communal, or ethno-religious identity on one hand; gender and sexuality on the other. On their way to their first encounter with their prospective mistresses, Chalom assuages 'Abdu's performance anxiety by offering him a tutorial on kissing. Holding up a bouquet of flowers, Chalom advises: "Say to her, 'take this present.' Say to her also, 'come here my love.'<sup>36</sup> And just like in the movies ..." Chalom then leans over and plants a kiss on 'Abdu's lips.

For Mizrahi, it was not sufficient to draw laughs by depicting the two men kissing. The camera cuts to a second angle showing the driver observing the embrace in the rear view mirror (figure 9). The presence of a witness, an audience, signals the film's self-awareness of the act as a performance. The narratives of coexistence and the queering of identity evidenced in Mizrahi's films meet with the touch of Chalom and 'Abdu's lips.

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**Figure 5.9.** Driver watches Chalom and 'Abdu kiss. Screenshot, *Mistreated by Affluence* (1937).

of Egyptian Jewish literature, as well as the cultural production of other Egyptian minorities have appeared in *Prooftexts*, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, and *The Journal of Levantine Studies*. This essay grows out of her current book project on the films of Togo Mizrahi.

### Notes

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1. I have adopted Viola Shafik's (2007: 29) translation of the film's title from Arabic into English. The French title of the film at the time of its release was *Les Deux Banquiers* [*The Two Bankers*]. I am using a simplified version of the IJMES transliteration system; I use "e" for ʿayin and an apostrophe for hamza, but I have omitted diacritical marks. Upon first mention, I identify films by both their Arabic title and the title translated into English; on subsequent reference, I refer to films exclusively by their title in English.
2. My contention here is not unlike that made by Steven Cohan about the 1940s Bob Hope and Bing Crosby "Road to" movies, about which he writes: "I do not mean to propose that the 'Road to' films openly represent a gay sexual relation between the two male stars; but I am arguing that the comedic framework of the series plays upon intimations of homoeroticism, and that the queer shading of their buddy relation must be taken into account when understanding the immense popularity of Hope and Crosby's teaming in the 1940s" (Cohan 1999: 25).
3. I refer to the film in English as *Doctor Farahat*, rather than "Doctor Farhat," following the lead of Mizrahi's own romanization of the title into French in the credits as *Le Docteur Farahat*.
4. The film was released in Alexandria as *al-Hawiya* [*The Abyss*] and later screened in Cairo under the title *al-Kukayin* [*Cocaine*].
5. Little is known about *5001*, and the film is unavailable. Ahmad al-Hadari does not include a plot summary in his entry on the film in his encyclopedic work on 1930s Egyptian cinema (al-Hadari 2007). The "Alex Cinema" website hosted by Bibliotheca Alexandrina offers the following synopsis: "By a stroke of luck Shalom wins lottery ticket number 5001 and becomes rich. Rather than bring him happiness, this wealth causes him trouble. He therefore goes back to his old way of life." ("Films Set or Filmed in Alexandria," Bibliotheca Alexandrina, [http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/films/Filmed\\_Alexandria.html](http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/films/Filmed_Alexandria.html).) This plot could either be played as comedy (as it is in *Mistreated by Affluence*) or as a drama. The editors at "Alex Cinema"

- mistakenly assume that the film is a drama that “tackle[s] social issues.” (“Togo Mizrahi,” Bibliotheca Alexandrina, [http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/cinematographers/Togo\\_Mizrahi.html](http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/cinematographers/Togo_Mizrahi.html).) Publicity around *5001* at the time of release identifies the film as a sports comedy.
6. During this four-year period Mizrahi also released a musical melodrama *al-Bahhar* [*The Sailor* (1935)]. I emphasize “Arabic films” because between 1937 and 1943 Mizrahi also directed four Greek-speaking films. Two of the films were Greek versions of his Arabic films *Doctor Farahat* [1935 Arabic; 1937 Greek], and *The Sailor* [1935 Arabic; 1943 Greek] (“Greek-Speaking Films,” Bibliotheca Alexandrina, <http://www.bibalex.org/alexcinema/films/Greek.html>).
  7. *Fi Layla Mumtira* [*On a Rainy Night*], released on 9 March 1939, and *Salafini 3 ginayh* [*Lend Me 3 Pounds*], released on 28 September 1939, were shot at Studio Wahbi (al-Hadari 2007: 365–69).
  8. For more on Umm Kulthum’s career see Danielson (1997).
  9. Chalom starred in three films directed by Togo Mizrahi: *5001*; *The Two Delegates*; and *Mistreated by Affluence*.
  10. Ahmad al-Hadari also cites the Egyptian actor Bishara Wakim as a source of influence on Chalom’s acting style. Wakim had debuted a down-on-his-luck character on screen in a silent comedy shot in Alexandria, *Barsum Yabhath ʿan al-Wathifa* [*Barsum Looks for a Job* (1925), directed by Muhammad Bayumi] (al-Hadari 2007: 255).
  11. Al-Kassar starred in five films directed by Togo Mizrahi in his Alexandria studio: *Miʿat alf ginayh* [*One Hundred Thousand Pounds* (1936)], *Khafir al-darak* [*The Watchman* (1936)], *al-Saʿa Sabʿa* [*Seven O’Clock* (1937)], *al-Tili-graf* [*The Telegraph* (1938)], and *ʿUthman wa-ʿAli* [*Usman and ʿAli* (1939)].
  12. In the 1930s Fawzi al-Jazayirli starred in two films directed by Mizrahi: *Doctor Farahat* and *The Sailor*. He also appeared in a supporting role in *The Two Delegates*.
  13. Most of the later nostalgia literature about cosmopolitan Alexandria, by contrast, largely represents the foreign-minority bourgeoisie; see Starr (2009). This phenomenon is not limited to Alexandria, as Anagnostopoulos notes in this volume: “The way scholars and laypeople approach and recreate images of peaceful coexistence in the Ottoman Empire is oftentimes markedly aestheticized by the heritage industry of today, especially in the context of cosmopolitan Mediterranean ports, and often prevents them from understanding the context of coexistence in the past” (p. 87).
  14. Mizrahi’s 1930s sound comedies tend to include musical numbers. I have, however, chosen not to designate them as “musicals.” Mizrahi’s 1940s musical melodramas feature a singer in a starring role, whereas the stars in the 1930s Alexandria comedies are non-singing comic actors. While musical performance features in these films, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in a sustained analysis of its significance.
  15. All three 1935 reviews are cited in al-Hadari (2007: 169). Tahiya Carioca’s given name was Badiya Muhammad ʿAli al-Nidani. In *Doctor Farahat* she is credited as Tahiya Muhammad.

16. For example, there is a very small body of academic literature on the Victorian farce *Charley's Aunt* (1892), by Brandon Thomas, an enormously popular play with a record-breaking run on stage for its time, and multiple translations and adaptations—including a short Egyptian silent film in 1920 starring ‘Ali al-Kassar, *al-Khala al-Amrikiyya*. By contrast, Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), which is widely viewed as a subversion of the genre, has received extensive critical attention.
17. 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 under-studied periods, and of critically under-appreciated popular genres such as musicals and comedies. This present 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, in Yusuf (1996). See also Armbrust (2000).
18. Joel Gordon’s *Revolutionary Melodrama* maps the centrality of melodrama to the construction of national identity in the 1950s (Gordon 2002).
19. I am not suggesting that the terms I am using (or their equivalents, such as they might be, in Arabic, French, or Italian, etc.) would have had currency in 1930s Alexandria—neither among Egyptians nor the resident minorities and foreigners. Rather, the notions of “queerness” and “the Levantine” in tandem provide a language and critical framework for understanding and unpacking the significance of Mizrahi’s fluid construction of identity in these films.
20. In the American literary and film vernacular in the same period, Dashiell Hammett’s *Joel Cairo* offers a notable example of the slipperiness attributed to both the Levantine and to queerness (Hammett 1984). I am not suggesting that *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) nor its 1930s film adaptations [*The Maltese Falcon*, Roy Del Ruth, dir. (1931); *Satan Met a Lady*, William Dieterle, dir. (1936)] should be read as direct intertexts for Mizrahi’s work. Rather, I wish to point out the parallel associations between queer and what I have termed “Levantine” identities in Mizrahi’s films.
21. I do not assume in my analysis that queerness need align with progressive or radical politics. While Mizrahi’s queer Levantine disrupts emerging parochial ethno-religious nationalisms in 1930s Egypt, his liberal, pluralist, ethics of coexistence could hardly be termed radical.
22. A film Togo Mizrahi produced, *al-Riyadi* [*The Athlete* (1937)], garners brief mention in Jacob’s discussion of the place of sport and fitness in the emergence of effendi masculinity (Jacob 2011: 156). The film, starring Chalom, was directed by L. Nagel and Clément Mizrahi.
23. Bryant, “Introduction,” p. 4.
24. For example, elsewhere I have examined Niyazi Mustafa’s *Salama fi khayr* [*Salama is Fine* (1937)] as an articulation of this Levantine idiom (Starr 2011). Garay Menicucci (1998: 32) analyzes the homoerotic content of another contemporaneous film, *Bint al-Basha al-Mudir* [*The Pasha Director’s Daughter*, Ahmad Galal, dir. (1938)], about a young woman who dresses as



- a man for purposes of employment, precipitating a love triangle where she becomes the object of both male and female desire. *The Pasha Director's Daughter* shares a fluidity of gender identities with Mizrahi's films from the 1930s.
25. The actor Ahmad al-Haddad also plays 'Abdu in *Mistreated by Affluence*.
  26. Vito Russo (1987: 37) lists legions of examples from Hollywood cinema in the 1910s through the 1930s in which homoerotic innuendo between men was played comically. He also notes that the American press, which took issue with more directly subversive characters and plots, tended not to comment on "open signs of homosexuality in a comic context." The screenwriters of the documentary film based on Russo's book put it more succinctly: "In a hundred years of movies, homosexuality has only rarely been depicted on screen. When it did appear, it was there as something to laugh at, or something to pity, or even something to fear." *The Celluloid Closet*, Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, dir. (1995).
  27. Although polygamy is permitted by Islam and remains legal in Egypt, it was not commonly practiced in Mizrahi's time (Kholoussy 2010: 83).
  28. I am thinking here of Eric Bentley's (1964: 219–56) contention about the centrality of violence to farce, and the inherent dialectic within the genre between gentleness and violence. I would like to thank Nick Salvato for pointing me to this reference.
  29. Little has been written about female same-sex desire in the Middle East and its representation in literature and film. Stephen Murray (1997) provides a very brief introduction to the topic in "Woman-Woman Love in Islamic Societies." Samar Habib's (2000) monograph *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East* offers the most extensive study of the topic, although her discussion skips from Medieval texts to late twentieth century, and her analysis of Arab film begins in the 1970s.
  30. While writing and directing credits appeared in all of his films as "Togo Mizrahi," as an actor, he appeared under a pseudonym. Togo Mizrahi acted in two films under the name Ahmad al-Mashriqi: *The Abyss / Cocaine* and *Awlad Misr [Children of Egypt]* (1933). An actor credited in those same two films as 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Mashriqi is believed to be Togo's brother. In *Doctor Farahat*, Togo Mizrahi, not his brother, is the actor credited as 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Mashriqi (al-Hadari 2007: 168). I would also like to thank Jacques Mizart, Togo Mizrahi's nephew, for confirming the identity of the actor.
  31. In his 2002 novel *'Imarat Ya'qubiyān (The Yacoubian Building)*, 'Ala al-Aswani (2002; 2006) returns to roof-dwellers to reflect anew upon Egypt's multi-cultural past and its bearing on the present and future of Egyptian society. For analyses of the signification of the homosexual relationship between a resident of the building and a roof-dweller in *The Yacoubian Building*, see al-Samman (2008) and Hadeed (2013).
  32. *Mistreated by Affluence* is the second of two films Mizrahi made about the friendship between Chalom and 'Abdu, Esther and Amina. The first was *al-Manduban [The Two Delegates]* (1934).

33. In the introduction to this volume, Rebecca Bryant offered shared meals as an example of commensality (p. 2). She notes that the invocation of such shared experiences points to their exceptionality, and to the pre-existence of notions of difference overcome by the shared practice. The shared meals in *Mistreated by Affluence* could be read in this way, too: the emerging forms of Arab-Islamic nationalism in 1930s Egypt threw into relief the differences between Muslims and Jews that Mizrahi's meal scenes seek to overcome.
34. For more on popular assumptions about this association in the Egyptian context, see Nieuwkerk (1995).
35. Chalom's expressive whistling in this scene is reminiscent of Harpo Marx. *Mistreated by Affluence* appears to borrow from and reference Marx Brothers' movies at other junctures as well.
36. The Arabic "*ta'ali ya ruhi*" plays on Ruhiya's name.

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