

## 'Last Glimmers': Voice and Sound as Intercultural Meaning in Hagar Kadima's Music<sup>12</sup>

Edith Zack

“She was their eleventh child; the youngest daughter of a well-off orthodox family in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century. And she had a beautiful operatic voice. Yet her parents thought that philology is the discipline for her. So, she was sent to one of the prestigious universities to study philology. She was unhappy but then she came up with an idea; she will use her pocket money for singing lessons and she will eat less. Yes, Zina thought, this is the solution; yet no one should know about it for in an orthodox family women were not allowed to sing in public. It was her secret; hers and her teacher's who started to introduce her to the musical community. But one day she met a young man and decided to connect her life with his. They got married and were happy. She went on with her singing and everything seemed to go right until their daughter was born (Hagar's mother). It was then that the husband turned to his wife begging her to give up singing. And so, she did. End of an unaccomplished singing career.”

When Hagar Kadima tells the story of her grandmother, Zina, her voice softens. It is only recently, after her grandmother's death that she came to terms with the fact that her grandmother gave up an operatic career for serving as the little woman in a patriarchal family. “Last Glimmers” for a mezzo soprano soloist, a women's choir,

---

<sup>1</sup> See original poem in Hebrew, and my free translation into English in Appendix I

<sup>2</sup> Paper presented at the conference ‘Women's Voice as Cultural Space’, held at The University of Turku, Finland.

three flutes and an accordion manifest her reconciliation with what seemed to her for years a submissive (and wrong) decision.

Kadima's music is based on a poem by the same name; "Last Glimmers" by Rachel, who was considered at certain times, the national poet of Israel. I will not go in detail into Rachel's biography for it is a cause for ten other papers, but since you are not familiar with her life and her work, I will briefly tell the story. She was born on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1890 in Russia as Rachel Blubstein. Her mother lead a high cultured house and she was a close friend of many of the writers of the time and especially of Leb Tolstoy. But after her mother's death Rachel's father remarried and from this moment on Rachel and her two sisters learned to know what stepmother meant in real life.

Palestine was always her dreamland, so the sisters decided to leave Russia and go on a voyage to the Middle East. She settled in the village Kinneret, overlooking the northern part of the sea of Galilee. There she met the man to whom she dedicated most her love songs: Zalman Rubashof who became Zalman Shazar, the third president of Israel. Like in all the stories he was married and their love couldn't have been fulfilled. She died of tuberculosis on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1931 and was buried in the place she loved most of all – Kinneret.

Rachel's poem consists of a schizophrenic voice that deals with woman's identity and woman's subjectivity. The speaking subject is the poet who appears in two versions: with indirect speech in the third person on the one hand (Part A) and with an I-her reference in the first person (Part B). The tritone between the two parts (part A centers

on C and part B starts on F#) emphasizes the conflict between the two parts of the subject; the conflict between the subject who speaks and the object who is spoken for, between the submissive object whose voice is not heard and the speaking subject who belongs to a different generation. Between the living and the dead. The pale candles are a metaphor of the pale entity that resigns and submits to the death of spirituality, death of art.

When the music takes over Kadima becomes the subject who speaks; her grandmother becomes the object who is spoken for. With Middle Eastern elements that remind us of biblical cantillation the subject frees herself from the traditional European contrapuntal inheritance. The Russian and Polish roots of her grandmother melt into the subject's culture; a culture that Kadima understands as HER Israeli art music that is connected directly to Rachel's poem. In the score she marks explicitly: non-vibrato, clear, accurate, non-dramatic singing. The melodic line speaks to such an extent that there is almost no distance left between poetic line and melodic line. The recitative style evokes the idea biblical cantillation whereas the monophonic elements hint at the idea of traditional music of the Middle East.

I say "idea" because as you hear there is nothing 'Middle Eastern' about Kadima's music; nor is there anything European. If one looks for either 'oriental' features in the music, or, traces of Jewish-Russian motives. It is not there. Last Glimmers conveys Kadima's subjectivity within which final acceptance of her grandmother's choice is manifested.

Kadima says that when she was in her 20s, she could not bear the idea of her grandmother giving up the opportunity for a brilliant career. But after her grandmother's death, and with Kadima's own development as a woman in general

and a feminist in particular, she came to terms with the fact that some women decide to dedicate their lives to their family and there is nothing wrong with such a decision. Kadima understood that this is what feminism is all about; the ability to accept, and respect, every decision made by women, whether it is a brilliant career on stage, or, a career within one's household that consists of being a wife and a mother whose main concern is the well being of her family. Kadima of the turn of the twenty first century is able to respect either decision. The pale candles are a metaphor of her acceptance; the reconciliation with the decision to stay pale, as she expresses it. This, she says, is a respectable decision.

Kadima's work, then, becomes a manifestation of an intercultural web in which the idea of Difference and Otherness is reconstructed, in the sense of gender conceptions as well as on the cultural level. On the level of gender conception there is a reversal of roles within feminine Othernesses. At end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century feminine Otherness was manifested by an independent entity, an assertive woman who rebelled against the idea of patriarchy as opposed to the domestic woman who was characterized by her tasks as wife and mother. Here the Other is not the woman who seeks her personal and spiritual freedom but Kadima's grandma who follows the rules of patriarchy. Paradoxical as it may sound both women, though apparently opposed to each other, follow their personal idea of femininity. With Kadima's reconciliation a third Otherness is created, in which, as mentioned before, both Othernesses are merged. I would call it 'interotherness'.

The 'interotherness' is manifested by two levels of voice; the voice of the mezzo-soprano and woman's choir on the one hand and the minimalist instrumentation of the

work that consists of three flutes and accordion. Thus, while the voice of the soloist and the choir with its recitative style evokes the idea biblical cantillation Middle East style, the flute and its rhythmic triad figure represent an Israeli musical topic; a sub-topic of the European pastoral; the shepherd's recorder that plays the 6/8 structure. One of the pastoral scenes drawn by folk musicians in the 1920s was drawn from the European pastoral. The newcomers who left Europe were confronted with shepherds playing the recorder (Halil that rhymes with Galil (Galilee in Hebrew) and is onomatopoeic: Halil, lilili. The playing shepherd, sitting on a hill, as his cattle is scattered around, became a symbol of the Israeli scenery in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet unlike the European shepherd the music which this shepherd played was of Middle Eastern flavor. The typical flute motive is – li li li; a triad figure.

Clearly this musical sign has past from literal imitation (iconism) into signification by association; Rachel's poetry was, is, and will always be connected to Love and to pastoral scenes associated with the Sea of Galilee. Its level of conventionality reveals a new topic in which cultures and feminine Othernesses are juxtaposed and reconciled. Sounds too ideal to be true? I challenge you with further research on this topic.

**Appendix I:****נגוהות אחרונים / רחל**

היא אחרה לבוא ובבואה לא העזה  
לא העזה לקרוא הנני! בדפקה על דלתות הלב,  
כעמוד ענייה עמדה, וידיה דומם הושיטה,  
ועצב היה מבטה, מתחנן, נכנע ועצב.

ועל כן חיוורים הנרות, אשר לכבודה העליתי,  
כאחרוני נגוהות בהאפיר דמדומי סתיו:  
ועל כן חרישית שמחתי, חרישית, מהססת, מדאבת,  
כהדאב תקווה נכזבה, כענות צפיית סתיו.

**Last Glimmers / Rachel (English:E.Z.)**

A

- 1 She came late and when she came, she did not dare,
- 2 She did not dare cry out: here am I! As she was knocking on  
the doors of heart.
- 3 Wretched there she stood, her hands reaching out quietly,
- 4 And sad was the look in her eyes; beseeched, yielding and  
sad.

B

- 5 And it is therefore so pale are the candles I offered in her honor,
- 6 Like the last glimmers when gray autumn declines:
- 7 And it is therefore, so silent is my joy, silent, hesitated, faint,
- 8 Like languish of deceptive hope, like affliction of false expectation.