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### ON INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS AND HYBRIDITY IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM "PRESENTING PRINCESS SHAW" (2016)

#### Abstract:

The documentary film by Ido Haar, "Presenting Princess Shaw" (Israel, 2016) depicts a cultural encounter between Samantha Montgomery - a lesbian African-American woman who uses the stage name "Princess Show" - and the Israeli composer and musician, Ophir Kutiel, who goes by the nickname "Kutiman". Kutiman collects YouTube clips that have been uploaded to the web by amateurs and professional YouTubers. He then re-edits and "mixes" them visually and musically into an independent art-work defined as Mashups. As in reality-shows that constitute a "star" from an anonymous person, the film follows the process of transforming Samantha from an anonymous, socially incompetent and marginal black woman, into a cultural heroine. Samantha works for a living as a nurse in a retirement home in New Orleans until she becomes a celebrity. Throughout the film she is not aware that at the other end of the world, in a kibbutz in southern Israel, Kutiman, one of Israel's leading music producers and one of the world's most accomplished producers, is creating a movie/music project, that will become a viral hit. Only at the end of the film, after the music clip/movie is published on the web, Kutiman and Samantha meet and prepare for a collaborative performance at "Habimah", Israel's National Theatre.

Most of the criticisms of the film and Kutiman's 'mashup' practice underscore the subversive aspect of Kutiman's work and the democratic nature of the Internet that makes it possible. The film is described by critics as a 'story of Cinderella' penetrating the journey of a poor heroine who lives on the margins - to the mainstream through the altruistic mediation of Kutiman and Haar. Yair Raveh (2016), for example, views this inter-cultural encounter as an egalitarian ideal and calls it "a creative meeting." Similarly, Ohad Landesman (2016) claims that Kutiman and the film's director Haar redeem Samantha from her anonymity and give her an opportunity to fulfill herself as a musician.

This paper will examine the issues that arise from transitions and intercultural contacts in the film. It will examine whether the Internet is a democratic space that undermines social strife or rather preserves the existing balance of power in society. At the center of the paper questions such as, if Kutiman's hybrid symphony manages to undermine the power balance (or relations) between the 'center' and the 'periphery', and whether this project can be treated as an honest cooperation between artists or rather an example of exploitative relations will be discussed. The paper will explore the role that the virtual space (www) plays in this context and the contemporary meanings of the Internet.

In order to discuss the role of the web in the film, several theories that analyze the impact of the Internet on social dynamics will be presented. In addition, postcolonial theories (i.e. Franz Fanon, Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha) will be implemented in order to analyze the power dynamics between Kutiman and Samantha. The virtual space of the web will be put to test in the case of Kutiman's praxis as a "third space" according to Bhabha's terminology. Furthermore, it will examine if this "third space" undermines the social hierarchy, whether Kutiman's hybrid 'mashup' technique/strategy - and Haar's directorial approach - is subversive, as Bhabha's theory suggests, or does it rather pave a new path to exploitative relationships. Later, it will be argued that the 'exoticism' that Samantha's character undergoes in Kutiman's project - and in the film alike -

enables her 'unappealing' to penetrate the heart of the mainstream. Yet, at the end she returns to her grim life as an attendant.

The methodology applied includes an elaborate analysis of film reviews and theories dealing with the practice of 'mashup' and the Internet. In addition, the film's cinematic expressions will be analyzed along with an elucidation on how these cinematic tools serve the thesis of the film.

**Keywords:**

Gender, Hybridity, Inter-cultural, Post-colonialism, Social justice, Video-Music, "Mash Up", YouTubers, Exoticism

## Introduction

“Presenting Princess Shaw” - The film

The documentary film by Ido Haar, "Presenting Princess Shaw" (2016) manifests a cultural encounter between Samantha Montgomery, a LGBT (lesbian) African-American woman who uses the stage name "Princess Show" and the Israeli composer and musician Ofir Yekutieli, who goes by the nickname "Kutiman". Kutiman collects YouTube clips that have been uploaded to the web by amateurs and professionals, and enriches them visually and musically, into independent artistic work. As in reality TV shows that create a star out of the anonymous person, the film follows the process of transforming Samantha from an anonymous, socially incompetent and marginal figure, into a cultural heroine. Samantha works as a nurse in a retirement home in New Orleans until she becomes a social media celebrity. During the film she does not know that at the other end of the world, in a Kibbutz in southern Israel, Kutiman - one of Israel's leading music producers and one of the world's highly acclaimed producers - is creating a "Mash up" symphony which is bound to go viral. Only at the end of the film, after the clip is published on the Internet, Kutiman and Samantha meet and prepare for a joint concert at 'Habimah', Israel's National Theatre.

Most of the critics on the film and about Kutiman's mash-up practice underscore the subversive aspect of Kutiman's work and the democratic nature of the Internet that makes it possible. The film is described by critics as a 'Story of Cinderella' - the poor, marginalized heroine who finally enters the heart of the mainstream - through the altruistic mediation of Kutiman and Haar. Yair Raveh (2016), for example, views this inter-cultural encounter as an egalitarian ideal and calls it "a creative meeting." Ohad Landesman (2016) claims that Kutiman and the film's director redeem Samantha from her anonymity and give her an opportunity to fulfill herself as a musician. This paper examines the issues that arise in the film as a result of intercultural encounters and transitions. It discusses whether the Internet is a democratic space that undermines social strife - or - preserves the existing balance of power in society? It will examine whether Kutiman's hybrid symphony manages to undermine the power balance between the center and the periphery, and whether this project can be treated as cooperation or rather as exploitative relations. It will also question what role does virtual space play in this context?

In order to discuss the importance of the World Wide Web (www.) in the film, this paper presents a number of theories that analyze the impact of the Internet on social dynamics. In addition, it will put to practice the theories of postcolonial thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha to analyze the dynamics between Kutiman and Samantha. It will examine whether the virtual space of the web is used by Kutiman as a "Third Space" according to Bhabha's definition - and if this space undermines the social hierarchy? It will also question whether Kutiman's hybrid mash-up and Haar's work is subversive, as Bhabha's theory suggests, or rather paves a new path for exploitative relationships? Later, it will be argued that the exoticism that Samantha's character undergoes in Kutiman's project, and in the film, enables her to enter the heart of the mainstream. However, at the end of the film the heroine returns to her work in America and to her gloomy life.

The methodology applied will include analysis of film reviews written about the movie and theories dealing with the mash-up practice of and the Internet. In addition, the paper will analyze the film's

cinematic expressions and language – cinematography, shooting angles, frame design and size, use of "ready-made" footage, lighting, sound, editing - and examine how these cinematic tools serve the thesis of the film.

## **Analysis of the Means of Cinematic Expression and the Genre of the Personal Film (iMovie)**

This section will analyze the film focusing on cinematic expression. In the course of the analysis, the differences between Samantha's cinematographic depictions as she portrays herself versus the way she is portrayed in the film will be highlighted. Following Zohar Wagner (2016) it will be argued that like Kutiman's mash-up technique, the director of the film also creates a movie mash-up<sup>1</sup>. The visual contrast between Samantha's world and Kutiman's world will emphasize the class tensions that underlie the film and the unbridgeable distance between the periphery and the center. Later, it will be argued that the film's mash-up is possible due to the practices of displacement, alienation and hybridism that not only do not undermine the power relations between the center and the periphery, but also replicate them.

The gaze plays a major role in the film. The intertwining of the different footage types - live photography, archival footage from Samantha's YouTube channel, Samantha's 'Selfie' Vlog broadcasts, video shots of various characters watching Samantha's videos, the GoPro camera connected to Kutiman's bicycle - influence the viewer's "gaze." Moreover, the combination of shots styled like the ones that remind viewers of reality shows create a sense that the film is transparent, stressing that it does not structure reality but reflects it. It will be argued that the combination of Samantha's personal videos in the film change their character and provide the viewer with a voyeuristic and judgmental point of view. While in the genre of the personal film (iMovie) to which Samantha's videos can be attributed to they are used as a therapeutic tool, Haar manipulates them into gossip-like footage.

Film researcher Shmuel Duvdevani (2010) defines the 'personal films' (iMovie) that belong to the genre as "documentary films centered on the creator himself, and they focus on his life, his memories, his family, his encounters with his surroundings and the conflicts that preoccupy him" (ibid., P. 31). These films, according to Duvdevani (2010), serve as a definite therapeutic tool, pointing out, for example, a recurring theme of dealing with guilt in Israeli personal journal films, especially since the 1990s" (ibid., P. 32). Like Duvdevani, Stephanie Merry (Merry, 2016) points to the therapeutic aspect of Samantha's videos. "She isn't necessarily using YouTube to become rich and famous, although that would be nice, given her tough life. Music is her therapy" (Merry, 2016). Samantha's creating of YouTube videos helps her overcome her trauma. She reveals the story of her life through it, confronts her difficult past and the present, in which she tries to break through as a singer. Even when she is momentarily successful through Kutiman's project, and through the film, she does not fully identify with her success.

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<sup>1</sup> The practice of combining many snippets of video or audio into a new piece of digital art is a phenomenon that has recently been gaining interest. ...Ophir Kutiél (stage name 'Kutiman') received international media attention for his ingenious music videos comprised entirely of fragments from YouTube clips. Projects like Kutiman's have been dubbed mashups.. (Griffin & Kim, 2010).

The use of different video materials, of diverse qualities and genres, throughout the film highlights the gaps between the parties. The amateurish and crude shots in Samantha's "Selfie" genre stand in contrast to static high-end shots which Haar executes, and reflect the class and cultural power imbalance. Thus, like Kutiman's artistic style, Haar develops a cinematic style analogous to Mash-up. This characteristic is also present in Kutiman's work and in the integration of Samantha's videos in his Mash-up.

Kutiman's surroundings are often portrayed, from afar, with long shots and exterior shots, while Samantha is mostly shot indoors, in a compressed and dense atmosphere, close by, in close-ups. In the most intimate and difficult scene in the film, Samantha reveals her personal story and talks about the physical and sexual abuse she experienced in her childhood (00: 20: 00- 00:21:54). The spectator, like a reality TV show consumer, gets a glimpse into the life of an African-American woman on the fringes of American society who is not usually represented in films and television programs. Kutiman, on the other hand, is usually represented in close proximity to nature, as someone who lives in a holistic environment that distances itself from the capitalist center. Even when filmed at home while eating dinner, he watches a nature program about elephants (00:32:27). Gradually as the film progresses and the plot unfolds, the long shots are replaced – and Kutiman finally appears in close-ups. The camera approaches Kutiman to a medium shot, for example, as he sweeps the balcony of his house (00:47:47).

In contrast to Samantha's colorful and vocal presence, Kutiman is portrayed in monochromatic colors and is characterized by silence. In difference to Samantha, whose life is exposed throughout the film, it reveals only a little about Kutiman's personal life. The relationship between the two is one-sided. Kutiman explores Samantha's YouTube videos while maintaining a passive role, whereas throughout most of the film Samantha is unaware of the Mash up project being made behind her back. These relations become prominent in the scene in which Kutiman views Samantha's ready-made footage materials on the editing screen in his home. In this scene, Kutiman is shot for the first time in a close-up, but in profile (from the side), which emphasizes the distance between him and his research object. The turning point in the plot takes place toward the end of the film. While Samantha is on the verge of despair, the dramatic climax arrives: Kutiman publishes the edited clip live (00:50:00). Samantha, who is not aware of this, receives a message from a friend informing her about the clip that was released on YouTube (00:52:00). Happiness, confusion and surprise erupt in a moment of catharsis (00:53:45), and Samantha's face, shot in a zoom-in, to an extreme close-up, seem to express shock and disbelief. She repeats the sentence "this is so awesome" and the words "really, Bro?" as if in uncertainty that it is actually happening (00:59:29). While Samantha cries with excitement, Kutiman appears in parallel conducting his ordinary and simple everyday life of the kibbutz (01:00:00). Once again, he is shot from a distance, in banal and daily activity, as if success does not affect him. This scene highlights the tension between Kutiman's simple life and Samantha's excitement. It serves also to demonstrate that despite the money and finances that he receives for the work of "others", Kutiman does not take advantage of it for his personal needs and leads a simple life.

Samantha's spontaneous joy was orchestrated in a manipulative manner by Haar and Kutiman who did not reveal to her that she was unknowingly sharing a musical project and starring in a movie about her. In this way the director, Haar, intensifies the 'narrative of redemption' and the supremacy of Kutiman's as a savior. The attempt to present the film as transparent and to share a

'reality TV show' experience with viewers raises moral questions about the project and Kutiman and Haar's excessive use of their power to shape the plot. This problem also arises in scenes that emphasize Samantha's loneliness and distress. For example, in the scene where she is forced to repair her car by herself (00:10:52), or load heavy equipment and crates when moving out from her old flat (00:09:18). These scenes intensify her loneliness, but at the same time raise questions about a director who takes a "fly on the wall" stance and does not help her. Moreover, at the end of the film, Samantha returns to her monotonous life. Fixed shots and static cinematography create a sense of stagnation, back to earth, to the harsh daily reality (1:17:33). The dream dissipates. The surge to life was momentary. It is not clear what will happen to the relationship between Kutiman and Samantha and whether it will continue to develop.

## The Internet as a Democratic Space

The film tells the story of the relationship between two central characters, Samantha and Kutiman. This section will focus on analyzing this relationship with reference to another agent involved in the making of the film, the director. It will be argued that these relationships (Samantha-Kutiman, Samantha-Haar, Kutiman-Haar) are shaped and based on a social hierarchy that the film, by emphasizing the Internet's democratic characteristics, tries to blur. The status of the web as an accessible platform and the focus of egalitarianism are at the center of the analysis proposed by various researchers in relation to Kutiman's mash-up practice. From the point of view of Kutiman and Haar, Kutiman's project redeems Samantha from her anonymity, as formulated in the film's official synopsis. "[Samantha] does not imagine that on the other side of the world there is someone who listens to her and believes in her"<sup>1</sup>. Also film critic, Eric Kohn, (2015) views Kutiman as a hero who succeeds in blurring class boundaries and removing social barriers, suggesting that the film "offers a more optimistic alternative to the gloomy perceptions of the concept of identity in the digital era." Kohn further argues that Kutiman frees Samantha from class constraints and social exclusion. Similarly, claims the American academic and activist, Lawrence Lessig (2004) that the Internet and the 'Open Code' express an ethic of inclusive and democratic co-existence, and argues that Kutiman's work demonstrates how the subject of copyright in its old form becomes redundant in the age of the Internet. Similarly, argues Stina Jørgensen (2010), that the web has the potential to eliminate hierarchical and class differences, and suggests that Kutiman's mash-up art requires an alternative and more flexible formulation of copyright, one that preserves the economic interests of the creators but allows for quotation and hybridization practices.

Like Lessig and Jørgensen, the vast majority of film critics emphasize the positive potential of the Internet and the mash-up practice. Merry (2016) emphasizes the ability of the Internet to serve as a catalyst for connecting people to create "great art". For her, Samantha's success story was made possible only due to the Internet. Michael O'Sullivan (2016) also optimistically analyzes the relationship between Kutiman and Samantha, "two strangers who create beautiful music together." O'Sullivan quotes Samantha as describing her first encounter with Kutiman as the

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<sup>1</sup><http://nfct.org.il/blog/movies/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%A1%D7%A1-%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%90%D7%95>

discovery of a lost sibling, and Kutiman describing the virtual encounter with Samantha as falling in love. Similarly, Rave (2016) describes the inter-cultural encounter as an egalitarian idealism. Landesman (2016) argues that the blurring of geographical boundaries intensifies the cinematic drama and that the director "marvels at his ability to paint Samantha's portrait with great sensitivity and without concessions, and place her in the cruel and oppressive reality of *Americana*." Moreover, Landesman argues that the film seeks to create a change in the life of the documented subject.

Unlike Lessig and critics who view the Internet as a subversive creative platform and one based on democratic cooperation, Eran Fisher (2011) presents a critical analysis of the technological discourse and terms it as perpetuating and legitimizing exploitative capitalism and preserving the social hierarchy. Fischer (2010) argues that "at the center of the discourse is the promise of capitalism - a promise derived from network technology - to enhance the well-being of the individual by quelling alienation. At the same time, the new discourse shuts aside the promise of technological legitimization at the 'Fordism era': to increase social welfare by alleviating exploitation" (Fisher, 2010: 168). Fisher (2010) deals with the aggressive political aspect that characterizes contemporary technological society and criticizes the absence of this approach from the hegemonic technological discourse. Is Fisher's critique relevant to Kutiman's project and Haar's film? To answer this question, the film will be analyzed through postcolonial theories that examine the relationships between the center and the periphery. It will be argued that although Kutiman's mash-up practice may be evaluated as a hybrid practice of the Internet or "Third Space," which according to Bhabha's theory (1994) challenges social hierarchy, the relations between Samantha and Kutiman do not create a more egalitarian space.

### **Black Skin, White Directors**

Various thinkers analyzed the balance of power between the center and the periphery, and explored how to liberate themselves from the symbolic coercion dictated by the hegemonic culture. Frantz Fanon (2004) emphasizes the gap in opportunities for whites versus blacks, and claims that they are the product of oppression and exploitation. Fanon reveals the mechanisms that construct and shape the dichotomist categories of black and white and which attribute to blacks inferior mentality. For him, the solution to the problem of inferiority is awareness to the fact that the dichotomy between white and black is rooted in cultural-historical construct. Similarly, Edward W. Said (1978) describes the arrogant attitude of the West toward the East and seeks to expose the mechanisms that shape this perception (ibid., P. 44). The differences between East and West are not "natural," but are rooted in the artificial construction of the West, which seeks to present these differences as inherent in order to serve its interests (1978). As part of the discussion, this may be applied to the film's heroine, Samantha, and consider her character as one placed in the "East", on the margins. Despite being an American Samantha is an African woman, a lesbian and lacks relevant knowledge and economic means. Accordingly, Kutiman and Haar may be referred to as figures operating from the "Western" center even though they live in Israel. I will argue that this inequality is the basis of the film and is woven along it.

However, this film uses a distinct hybrid practice. The musical project which the film documents, challenges social dichotomies and cultural differences. The mash-up technique that characterizes both Kutiman's work and the way the film was cinematographically shot is a product of postmodern culture that undermines the dichotomies of high / low, familiar / foreign, original / synthetic. Bhabha (1994) develops Said's theory and analyzes the relations between East and West from a postmodern perspective. Bhabha (1994) argues that in the postmodern era, following the collapse of the Meta-narratives, there is a sense of disorientation (ibid, 2). Moreover, national narratives are now replaced by alternative narratives of oppressed minorities. The ultra-capitalist and class-based narratives serve as catalysts for socialization but do not serve as models for social identification or as a basis for intercultural communication. This change, for Bhabha, modifies the relationship between cultures (ibid, 8). In contrast to Said, Bhabha seeks to break down the rigid dichotomy that characterizes analyzes of intercultural relations, and to propose a plausible and flexible model that enables the creation of a hybrid intermediate identity that simultaneously nourishes and nurtures both sides. In the intermediate space between the two cultures, identities are created based on mutual influence and are freed from the ostensibly natural and normative opposites imposed on them. The uncertainty and blurring of the old identities that characterize this liminal space undermine social hierarchies and challenges the conventional distinctions between high / low, black / white, I / other (Bhabha, 1994, 5). Bhabha coins the terms "Third Space" and "Un-homely"<sup>1</sup> in order to characterize the symbolic space in which different cultures form contact with one another and are exposed to different languages and customs. In this supra-domestic space, which does not belong to any of the parties, a different encounter with the 'other' becomes possible (ibid., P. 13). The 'un-homely' - as a mental state of a person outside a recognized territory - allows the creation of a hybrid identity (ibid., P. 13). In this space one can adopt the identity of the 'other' and establish a stratified and complex identity that is not dichotomous, hierarchical or pre-defined.

In the film, the virtual space of the Internet may be defined as a 'third space'. The Internet enables the establishment of alternative identities that do not have dichotomous characteristics, which blur and obscure cultural differences. Moreover, Kutiman's mash-up style, developed through the Internet, is an example of hybrid creation. Kutiman collects a variety of works created by people of different cultures and produces a hybrid work that blurs cultural gaps. The analysis of the cinematic means emphasizes the presence of a 'third space' in the film and the ability of the project and film to bridge social gaps. In one of the scenes filmed in an 'over the shoulder' shot (00:27:20) Kutiman appears sitting in front of his computer at home, watching Samantha's YouTube channel. This shot, which presents the two protagonists in a single frame before they meet, creates a sense that the protagonists inhabit a shared space, a kind of "third space." Similarly, at the end of the film, after Kutiman's video was aired on the net and won more than a million views, Samantha arrives in Israel and meets him for the first time in person. Samantha embraces Kutiman (01:03:50) and is greeted warmly by members of his Orchestra (01:05:00). Later on, Samantha and Kutiman appear together on screen in a medium-shot as they dance together, like one body, to the music's rhythm (01:07:00).

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<sup>1</sup> *Unheimlich* is a Freudian term used by Bhabha to describe the third space (Baba, 1994: 14-15).



Kutiman's mash-up project is successful in creating an intercultural fusion, but does this practice undermine the power-balance between the center and the periphery as Bhabha suggests, or does it rather widen the gaps? In the next section it will be argued – in parallel to the analysis of the film - that cultural influence is not mutual, but one-way, and that the hybrid option does not undermine the balance of power between center and periphery. Bhabha's concept (1994) sheds light on intercultural encounters and the ramification of new ways of social solidarity. However, Bhabha's solution to the issue of transitions between cultures is only partial, and the danger is that this theory may soften the criticism of the center. Under the influence of (so called) mutual influence, this theory may promote cultural imperialism and subordination of the "other".

### Center, Margins and Hybridity

The contrasts between Samantha and Kutiman's characters are already prominent in the film's early scenes. The film opens with Kutiman's exposition. The Guggenheim Museum building in New York is filmed in a long-night-shot, with a video-art screened on to the building (00:01:00). In the next shot, Kutiman appears on stage. The low angle of the camera intensifies his image. The Symphony Orchestra is waiting on stage for Kutiman's overture (00:01:38). In sharp contrast to Kutiman's representation, Samantha is introduced to the viewer in the next shot wearing the uniform of the nursing home where she works. Her back is directed at the camera, and she tells one of the elderly women that she is going to appear in a film "about YouTubers" (00:05:38)<sup>1</sup>. The hall of the nursing home is shot from a static position, highlighting the contrasts between the museum's glamor and the griminess of the nursing home. The contrasts between Samantha's environment and Kutiman's environment are also evident later in the film. Samantha struggles for her existential survival in a hyper-capitalist environment. She is forced to work through exhausting night shifts and has to repair her car on her own. Kutiman, on the other hand, lives in harmony with nature. He rides his bicycle in the open fields, smokes 'joints' and seems to lead a 'Shanti-like' lifestyle (00:14:40). Unlike the romantization of the Orient that Said criticizes and which identifies the Orient with nature and the West with culture, the film creates an opposite dichotomy, but one that preserves the balance of power between the center and the periphery. Samantha usually appears in close-ups and closed shots, at night, and in dark frames. Even when she records herself, she is confined in a closed frame, usually inside a closed space. The quality of her cinematography is artistically and technically poor. In contrast, Kutiman often appears in extreme long shots which reverberates a sense of space and control. Even when he video-shoots himself (in parallel to Samantha's self-portrait), he seems to be in control of space and uses expensive technology – i.e. a GoPro camera mounted on his bicycle. The curved fisheye lens distorts his face but gives him a playful, childlike image.

These contrasts are also evident in the technical means of Samantha, Kutiman and Haar, the film's director. The gap between the meticulous, well-planned cinematography of the film versus the almost random way in which Samantha video-records herself<sup>2</sup> using a mobile phone -

<sup>1</sup> At this point Samantha does not know she is the heroine of the film.

<sup>2</sup> Samantha does not know how to use professional lighting, and her face is dark and blurred in most of the videos. Also instead of shooting a horizontal frame she uses a vertical frame (which later will be redesigned by Kutiman and Haar).

accentuates unequal relationships. While Haar is backed by a production house, Samantha records herself intuitively and spontaneously. Like Haar, Kutiman too, is surrounded by technical aids and professional knowledge that enable him to create a rich and sophisticated video symphony. This privileged status is reflected in the scene in which Kutiman is seen in a recording studio with popular musicians. Despite the independent production and the supposedly "low tech" ambience, famous superstars work with Kutiman. The hidden hierarchy between Kutiman and Samantha is what allows him to remix her materials (00:18:00). The power balance and professional knowledge play in favor of Kutiman and Haar. While Kutiman collects his footage materials from the Internet, without rewarding any of the creators, he himself enjoys the fruits of his creation. Moreover, at the end of the film Samantha returns to her grimy life. Kutiman's project and the film did not undermine the balance of power in which Samantha was imprisoned, but rather created an 'exoticization' of the margins.

### **Hybridization or Exoticization**

What is exoticism and how does it function in this film? This section will argue that Kutiman not only appropriates Samantha's voice but also adapts it to the 'delicate' ear of the Western consumer. Kutiman and Haar's choice to focus on an anti-heroine, that is, someone who does not meet the beauty and aesthetics requirements governing the media today, seemingly break and undermine the values of the mainstream. Samantha is a black woman, whose stride is not particularly stylish, she stumbles on heels too high, still has braces in her teeth; she is poor and traumatized by sexual assault. Her image is an anti-thesis of a star that is usually accepted by white hegemony. Similarly, Wagner (2016) claims that "Princess Show ... is not a classic heroine. She is an African-American from a slum in New Orleans. She is heavy, her teeth sticking out. As a child she suffered from abuse. Her life is stuck, and the chances of realizing her dreams are low". Wagner also argues that "the choice of a heroine whose appearance does not meet the criteria of the dominant culture is appropriate for a film that deals, among other things, with a cultural hierarchy and free culture." For her, the film applies a subversive method by choosing a heroine who does not meet the conventional beauty criteria. However, Kutiman's visual symphony and Haar's directing make sure to 'soften' Samantha's 'Otherness'. The bourgeois audience of Habimah - Israel's National Theater and the film's viewers can only contain Samantha after she is transformed and exoticized. Sender Gilman (1999) argues that people of marginal cultures tend to change their physical characteristics in order to be accepted into the "center." Similarly, Samantha converts her eternal 'hoodie' and nursing-home uniform into a glittering dress, smoothens her frizzy hair as part of her journey into the heart of the consensus. While her curly hair marks the unruly and disruptive, its straitening signifies alignment and acceptance of dominant social norms. Samantha is accepted only by concealing her cultural diversity and adapting it to a narrative model of American - or Cinderella-like - redemption. Samantha will be accepted by white hegemony only on the basis of adoption of appropriate cultural 'habitus'. Only after Samantha undergoes transformation and domestication, among other things via fashion and makeup suitable for the stage, is she accepted by the general audience and the hegemonic center.

In the film, too, the director interweaves and converts the simple YouTube videos taken by Samantha into 'clean', pleasant framing and focuses on the visual transformation she is undergoing before she climbs onto the stage. Similarly, the hybridization created by Kutiman's mash-up is actually a process of alienation that makes Samantha's voice easier to 'digest'. The mash-up adapts Samantha's vocal vortex to aesthetic conventions and the rules of the capitalist market. While Kutiman takes over Samantha's voice and speaks through it, Haar beautifies Samantha's image and makes it easy for the viewers to visually accept. Haar activates a *montage*<sup>1</sup> strategy while countering reverse shots. The combination between Samantha's raw footage, the aesthetic shots and the "correct" shots meeting the standards of television and film taken by Haar, reflect Samantha's exoticization process.

In the scene that precedes the gala event at the Israeli National Theater, Samantha appears to be filming another 'Selfie' video of her. She is situated the front of the frame and in the background is the large, empty hall. Samantha prepares for the performance, makeup is applied by a makeup artist, she is dressed by a designer, her hair is arranged in a way that suits the event (01:11:00). Samantha undergoes a process of "adaptation" and aestheticization in order to meet the classical and conventional definitions that Habima's tasteful audience can contain. In contrast to Kutiman, who goes on the stage with a disheveled beard and a sloppy appearance, Samantha appears with a full blown hairstyle, a dress with deep cleavage, heavy makeup, earrings and jewelry that suit the soulful image of a soul singer (1:13:00). In order to integrate into the center, Samantha undergoes a process of adaptation and change. In the same way, footage of a mash-up created by Kutiman is screened during the performance, away from the audience and in a softened manner. Kutiman's video-art is a softened version of Samantha's video-blog. During the editing, Kutiman takes care to shorten Samantha's dark and depressing shots, which weighs on viewers and interferes with the desired entertaining experience. Kutiman understands that in order to make the project a success, he must disconnect Samantha from the gloomy environment in which she lives. The way in which she is presented and represents herself must be altered. Samantha's 'otherness' undergoes a process of aestheticization, only then can she be accepted into the mainstream.

The process of exoticizing the 'other' transforms it from a foreign and threatening object into an object that Western construction can contain in terms of its values. Graham Huggan (2001) argues that the "black" must be "domesticated" in order to be accepted into the Western, white and hegemonic consensus (Huggan, 2001). Only in an artificial and controlled environment can the threat be removed. Only when the 'Other' appears in a softened version does the fear of it vanish. When the 'Other' is under the control of the hegemonic apparatuses it can be perceived by the western observer as exotic. The adoption of the exotic object is a process in which cultural diversity is emphasized but it is rooted in familiar consumer mechanisms. The exotic object is exorcised from its natural context and imbibed into a controlled environment. Its otherness castrated and located at a safe distance from the viewer. Only when Samantha is cut off from her daily surroundings and performs in a public concert does she become exotic and interesting. In

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<sup>1</sup> Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein developed a contrasting editing technique called *Montage*, in which he uses the first shot as a thesis, the shot that follows immediately contradicts it (mathematically or aesthetically) and the result of their connection is a synthesis that creates a new meaning.

Israel and Europe Samantha's Otherness may be accepted due to her unique, different, exotic voice. However, in the United States she is rooted in her poverty and her social and economic surroundings. She cannot break away from it, because she lacks the required exoticism. Only in a completely detached environment Samantha may be considered 'interesting' and exotic where she can attract attention. Also, it is only after Samantha succeeds to gain recognition through external discovery, she is accepted in her home-culture.

The "exotic" produces a fetish of the 'other' which masks the unequal power relations. As a symbol that undergoes displacement from its usual environment, the object loses its properties and absorbs the desires that the viewer imposes upon it. Huggan (2001) argues that this encounter creates a false sense of familiarity that reproduces and replicates flat stereotypes. Such a meeting exposes the 'other' to symbolic indicators that are convenient for Western audiences to digest. Huggan (2001) focuses on the fetishism of consumer goods in the regime of cultural production in the postmodern era (*ibid.*, P. 18).

Kutiman and Haar allegedly redeem Samantha from the poor and marginal place she comes from. I.e. At the beginning of the process - her YouTube channel barely attracts several individual viewers, yet at the same time an exploitative relationship of a woman who does not have the knowledge or money to break out - persist. After the completion of the glamorous project it is likely that Samantha is the one to go back to ground zero, without change or progress, while Kutiman (and Haar) accumulate cultural (and economic) capital that she will not benefit from. They make her the heroine of the night, which eventually returns, or is forced to return, to her real life. Samantha herself becomes an aesthetic commodity, a kind of object for the director and producer of the Mash-up.

## Summary and Conclusions

This paper analyzed the relationship between the two main characters in "Presenting Princess Shaw". The film presents complex relations between the center and margins that characterize the postmodern condition. The notion that the relationship between Kutiman and Samantha is not equal was pointed out. In the context of the film, the center is located in the east (Israel), while the margins are located in the American periphery. Kutiman and Haar possess the economic means and institutional support. Kutiman appears on globally important platforms and Haar receives generous support from film funds and broadcasting channels in order to produce films, whereas, on the other hand, Samantha is a black woman with a difficult past and uncertain future. The dialogue between them takes place according to the terms dictated by Kutiman and Haar. The center contains the margins as long as it manages to shape and soften them (exoticism). In order to break into the public consciousness, Samantha is bound to become a passive object in Kutiman's work.

In the course of the analysis, Bhabha's (1994) hybrid theory was referred to. The Internet theories and the mash-up practice - was characterized as a "third space." In addition, it was suggested, following Wagner (2016), that the film be seen as a sort of cinematic "mash-up". However, despite the hybridity, Kutiman's work does not undermine the balance of power between the periphery and the center. It was also argued that the film as a whole creates an uncomfortable

sense of manipulation and voyeurism. In fact, the hybrid nature of the project's theme allows the center to exploit the margins and act as it pleases. The *bricolage* character of Kutiman's work and the film undermine the binary dichotomy, however this does not create new identities, stratified and varied, but rather paves the way to preserving the power relations between the center and the margins.

How, then, is it possible to conduct a true dialogue between the center and the periphery, one which does not subordinate the weak side? A solution to this problem may be found in the school of thought of bell hooks (1990), who articulates a discourse that defines the spatial relations between the center and the periphery differently. hooks (1990) criticizes the discourse of "otherness," which was constructed, among others, by radical theorists and the academic preoccupation with the term "difference" (ibid., P. 151). She argues that this discourse creates an exoticization of the 'other', marginalizes it and emphasizes the importance of the center. Instead of meeting at the center, or on the symbolic border between the cultures as suggested by Bhabha, hooks demands that a dialogue takes place at the margins and in the language of the marginalized. It will be from there that a common opposition to hegemony is to evolve.

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