

COMMUNAL WEBS

*Communication
and
Culture in
Contemporary
Israel*

TAMAR KATRIEL

COMMUNAL WEBS

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Communication and Culture
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Tamar Katriel

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The studies included here have colored my personal and family life in many subtle ways. Indeed, many of the native terms, which have served as points of cultural access in my inquiries, have found their way into our household conversations with many layers of meaning and irony. The amused native interest and familial support I have received from my husband, Jacob, have probably been more significant than I can ever say. My children, Hagai and Irit, have been my most important partners to these inquiries not only as invaluable brokers into the Israeli world of childhood, and as commentators on Israeli schooling practices, but also as careful critics of my writing. As they move into the world of adulthood, I dedicate these pages to them, to the memory of all that we have shared, and to their continued thriving.

1

Introduction

BETWEEN METAPHORS

For the past ten years I have been playing ethnographer in my own back yard, the everyday world of middle-class Israelis, mainly of European heritage, which we tend to think of as mainstream Israeli culture. Making ethnography my strategy for encompassing situations (Burke 1957[1941]), I have paused at various junctures to puzzle over what presented themselves as mundane, taken for granted, but potentially intriguing moments in my own, my friends' and my children's lives. Some of what I have seen, heard, felt, and thought is given in these pages. Some has been written elsewhere (Katriel 1986a).

I have deliberately invoked C. Geertz's famous "spider-web" metaphor in the title of this book, trying to signal my striving toward an ethnographic tale woven out of a set of mutually conversant "symbols and meanings." At the same time, the book's essential organizational pattern involves the juxtaposition of studies that loosely connect cultural symbols and public performances—each one of them a central, though somewhat arbitrary juncture in my ethnographic journey. This organization points to an alternative conception of both culture and the ethnographic enterprise to the one implied by the spider-web metaphor. Thus, as I turn from chapter to chapter, I move between such diverse studies as the exploration of a key verbal symbol (*gibush*), a central speech mode (gripping), a key visual symbol (fire), emotion-laden, semi-ritualized familial occasions (picnics in military zones), hegemonic, mass-mediated pedagogical discourses (radio for young listeners), and children's self-regulated peer group communicative exchanges. The juxtaposition of these ethnographic fragments, which were culled out from the same cultural world, brings forth mutually reinforcing strands of meaning and form. At the same time, they manifest the kind of modernist sensibility J. Clifford (1988:147) has recently spoken of as "ethnographic surrealism," saying: "Ethnography cut with surrealism emerges as the theory and practice of juxtaposition. It studies, and is part of, the invention and interruption of meaningful wholes in works of cultural import-export."

I find myself very much in sympathy with this surrealist conception of the ethnographic enterprise. The collage metaphor Clifford proposes as a paradigm for understanding culture and ethnography seems to me as illuminating in considering the case of an ethnographer studying his or her own culture as it is in the case of the ethnographer venturing into the domain of the cultural 'other.' This metaphor brings out not only the essential constructedness of

cultural accounts, but also highlights the movement of de-familiarization, which I consider to be so basic to my craft. Each of the chapters in this book is the product of such a movement, a gesture of “encirclement” as I like to think of it, the intellectual moment in which an ethnographic exploration begins to take shape as a mundane term (such as *gibush*), or a mundane social practice (such as griping), or a mundane public performance (such as a daily news-for-kids program) inexplicably shed their accustomed air of “naturalness” and become interpretive sites for the exploration of cultural sense. However arduous, intricate, drawn-out and richly textured an ethnographic project may become, it is to this momentary shift of consciousness that it owes its life. The collage metaphor, therefore, by acknowledging that our accounts are inevitably constructed out of cultural fragments, grants that the art of ethnography has its genesis in a disjunctive movement of de-contextualization whose effect is never fully obliterated or smoothed over in our subsequent ethnographic reconstructions.

Thus, even while my work has been an ongoing effort to capture the unifying threads, which underlie cultural members’ sense of “Israeliness,” the conception of ethnography informing these pages is self-consciously a form of “ethnographic surrealist practice,” which “attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness—the unexpected” (Clifford: 145). The sense of otherness invoked in this case, however, has nothing of the exotic about it. It is, rather, the sense of discovery associated with the experience of delving deep into one’s cultural ‘self,’ and experiencing oneself as an objectified ‘other.’ Working in one’s own culture indeed implies a never ending search for ways to identify, foreground, and estrange aspects of one’s deeply felt cultural experience. The use of objectifying, reifying analytic techniques—the identification of “key symbols” and processes of ritualization, the elucidation of native terms, the formulation of communicative rules—has been helpful in accomplishing this gesture of self-estrangement. Thinking of “*gibush*” as a root metaphor, of “griping” as a verbal ritual, of children’s exchanges as rule-governed communicative processes has been a way of providing a theoretically grounded interpretation on the one hand, and of establishing the necessary analytic distance on the other.

In R. Williams’ (1977) terms, this analytic move marks a process of articulation, a process whereby the pre-emergent “structures of feeling” that shape our lives in so many imperceptible ways become somewhat fixed and given to reflection. To me this implies recognizing the as-yet-unformed but highly potent affective elements of consciousness and relationship that ground our social experience, and make themselves present in our myriad, fleeting communicative exchanges. This very recognition thus begins a new process of cultural formation, so that our ethnographers’ voices may become uniquely positioned participants in the larger communal conversation.

Over the years, I have lived and relived moments of deep anxiety as well as moments of wonderful excitement as I had the opportunity to share my explorations and interpretations with friends and colleagues, students and accidental readers, my fellow “natives.” The presentation and discussion of my work, the “aha” responses I often encounter as well as the challenges to render my analyses more nuanced, to venture into regions of meaning and experience I have not thought to explore, have been invaluable resources in my work. Whether experienced as an unmatched moment of encouragement, or as a test of endurance, each presentation of my work, or even casual conversation relating to it, becomes another step in the ethnography, turning it into an essentially open-ended project. Furthermore, each new project throws fresh, retrospective light on ethnographic studies I had seemingly concluded years earlier, beguiling even the elusive sense of closure that the publication of one’s work can bring.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the questions I am most persistently asked by my fellow Israelis have to do with beginnings and endings: “How on earth did you come upon the term ‘*gibush*’?” is an example of the kind of question I am repeatedly asked, often with a collusive chuckle, and “Are you still working on ‘gripping rituals’?” is an example of another question, which often signals more data. I always answer positively to the latter—how can I resist new data—but have never been able to fully respond to the former. Though I often remember the insignificant, whimsical moment when a term or a cultural practice first jumped into view, I cannot fully account for what I have earlier called the “movement of encirclement” in either analytic or experiential terms. But I believe that behind such moments of cultural self-recognition there lies a set of concerns that ground the perspective that unifies these studies, guiding my topical choices and analytic focus.

The set of concerns that informs my inquiries relates to the role of communicative forms and processes in the creation, affirmation, and negotiation of shared identity. G. Philipsen (1987) has proposed the notion of the “cultural communication” function as an umbrella term for the role of community-specific discursive forms (e.g. native terms, speech events, stories) in the ongoing process of linking the individual with a social group, arguing that the individual / community dialectic is a universal dimension of social experience, but is variously shaped and played out in different cultural contexts (Philipsen 1989).

The problematics of cultural identity and communal affiliation are, of course, a central theme in the social sciences, and the role played by symbolic processes in communal integration and identity formation is well recognized. The exploration of the role communicative forms play in articulating the individual / community dialectic therefore makes a great deal of sense from a disciplinary perspective. More importantly, perhaps, the individual / community interplay is experienced as a central point of tension in Israeli cultural

experience. The strong accent on community, on the primacy of the collective voice has been a central strand in the Israeli nation-building ethos. Although this cultural orientation has undergone a gradual shift for many years now, it is still a point of reference for much cultural reflection, whether related to public affairs or to personal choices. It is thus commonplace to talk about sociocultural changes on the Israeli scene in terms of a gradual shift from a communal or collective orientation to a more individualistic focus.

Given my personal participation in this tension filled juncture, which marks the social and personal career of many Israelis of my generation, it is no wonder, therefore, that much of my work has centered on the communicative implications of the individual / communal dialectic. It is also probably no wonder that my outsider's response to the American scene has resulted in ethnographies exploring the contours of the American accent on the 'self' and its relationships through a consideration of the cultural concept of 'communication' (Katriel & Philipsen 1981), or the study of American scrapbooks as a cultural genre of self-articulation (Katriel & Farrell 1991). Moving between the American and the Israeli cultural scenes has given me the opportunity to juxtapose the distinctive shapings given the individual / community dialectic in each of these cultural worlds. I believe this movement between cultures has helped me retain a much needed freshness of outlook, a second-best to the celebrated culture shock ethnographers have traditionally thrived on. In particular, my exposure to American versions of the celebration of the 'self' has helped me recognize the profound communal focus that still permeates Israeli culture despite the much discussed "Americanization of Israel" (cf. Sobel 1986).

Thus, a major theme that runs as a thread through this book involves experiences of solidarity and community as they are played out in the Israeli context. One way or another, the communicative production of community is a central theme in each of the book's chapters: the cultural semantics of *gibush* most clearly defines a communal idiom; gripping rituals serve as a grudging affirmation of solidarity; fire rituals celebrate the culturally potent youth movement ethos in terms of a communally shared symbolic idiom; picnics in military zones and mass-mediated radio discourses provide occasions in and through which participants are lured into a communal conversation whose tenor and substance they might not otherwise endorse; children's peer-group engagements communicatively define a world of childhood whose contours, especially the strong accent on group solidarity, define for children and adults alike the roots of their "Israeli experience."

This shared thematic thread should not, however, blur the distinctive tonalities associated with the experience of community as variously articulated in the book's chapters. Here I return to the "spider webs" metaphor. This metaphor connotes not only a sense of the active production of symbols and

meanings, but also a sense of cultural members' enmeshment in their own meaning productions. Thus, some of what this book seeks to capture in attending to the weaving of Israeli communal webs responds to Williams' (1976) wry observation that "community" as a term for a social grouping is a word that is never used unfavorably. The focus on the positive aura of the collective, on the weaving of shared communal bonds in both casual and formal encounters is a central aspect of the Israeli experience. It has been noted in one way or another by other students of Israeli mainstream culture and symbolism as well (cf., for example, Rubinstein 1977; Zerubavel 1980; Oring 1981; Even-Zohar 1981; Bruner and Gorfain 1984; Gertz 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988; Shamgar-Handelman and Handelman 1986; Weil 1986; Shenhar 1987; Dolev-Gandelman 1987; Shokeid 1988; Dominguez 1989). The sense of enmeshment, the loss of personal voice, the institutionalization of silencing strategies—all these are no less part of Israelis' experience of the culture's communal focus. This dimension of communal experience, the constraining force of the webs no less than their supportive embrace, is attended to in many of the chapters of this book. It is this focus that gives the book its critical perspective, adding the voice of the cultural critic to that of the more traditional, descriptive ethnographer.

I could say my work has responded to recent calls to practice anthropology as a form of cultural critique as well as to study one's own culture (Marcus and Fischer 1986). In fact, I consider the communication-centered brand of anthropology I have been practicing as informed by a much older tradition of rhetorical criticism (cf., for example, Golden, Berquist & Coleman 1978), whose influence on contemporary cultural studies is unmistakable, though it is not always fully or explicitly acknowledged.¹

It may be the peculiar position of the ethnographer working literally and metaphorically at home that has made it impossible for me to even try and efface my personal voice. The voice of the neutral observer would have been as much a deflection of reality as the voice of the engaged participant. Like all my fellow Israelis I have at least one opinion on every issue. I have tried to make my position explicit wherever such a move seemed relevant. Some of these chapters are thus written with a tinge of painful recognition, some with ironic self-reflection, some—especially the ones dealing with the culture of childhood—with a sense of sheer delight. All these voices are my own, intermingling the participant and the observer, echoing and interpreting my informants' voices and actions, all of which have joined to create the uneasy cultural collage that makes this book.

Thus, throughout this volume I move dialectically between the spider web and the collage as underlying metaphors for the doing of ethnography, shifting between a sensibility that values coherence and systemic connections, and one that values the fragmentary and the unexpected juxtapositions. In so doing,

I attempt to give shape and voice to structures of feeling that have emerged as central to my understanding of the contemporary Israeli scene as a lived cultural reality.

As Clifford points out, however, these very different sensibilities presuppose and reinforce each other. Indeed, it is just by attending to a relatively broad spread of contexts and cultural performances that the common underlying threads and themes that produce an overall sense of coherence for both cultural members and analyst can be most fruitfully identified. On the other hand, as the reading of the book will reveal, however topically varied it is, it offers a series of studies constructed and framed within a particular perspective on communication and culture, as well as a shared methodological stance towards their study. Let me say a few words about my ethnographic procedures before I let the studies speak for themselves.

METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

The data collection for these studies has involved the standard ethnographic procedures of participant observation, nonparticipant observation, interviewing, and the analysis of public texts, both written and spoken. As noted, the cultural world some of whose contours I have sought to capture is the world of middle-class Jews, largely of Ashkenazi heritage, who would be most appropriately identified as members of mainstream Israeli culture, the socially privileged group, whose self-definition does not involve an "ethnic" component. As is the case in many ethnographic studies of this kind, my sample is not a random but a convenience sample. Most of my informants came from the northern part of Israel, and tended to be city dwellers or inhabitants of middle-class suburban communities. I would like to claim greater generality for the cultural performances I describe, even those that are not a priori nationwide like the radio discourses. They are characteristic of the Israeli middle class at large, and are part and parcel of growing up in Israel and growing up Israeli. Some of these studies, particularly the ones dealing with children's peer-group culture, have also been "replicated" by dozens of my students in small scale fieldwork exercises for ethnography of communication classes at the University of Haifa, thus allowing me to scan a much broader and diversified sociocultural domain. This was an invaluable accompaniment to my work, whether I found myself reinforced in my interpretations, or whether I was prodded to take back to the "field" and clarify matters raised in class. Indeed, I believe the symbols and meanings dramatized in and through the cultural performances considered in this book (and others) are part of what "ethnic" (mainly, Sephardic) groups in Israel have been reacting to in striving to maintain their separate identities, as well as part of what socially mobile ethnic Israelis, as well as newcomers to the land, have been learning about "Israeliness" as they moved closer to the core of the local sociocultural scene.

The level and nature of my participation in the communicative activities and cultural worlds I describe has naturally been variable. At times, my voice is that of the participant observer (e.g. my position as a “native griper”); at times that of the observing participant (e.g. my parental position as non-focal participant in family picnics or “fire rituals”). At times, I have played the role of nonparticipant observer, notably in the studies of children’s peer-group culture. In all cases, I have supplemented my participant role with a researcher’s removed stance, probing into others’ perceptions in a concerted and at least partially systematic fashion through the use of formal interviews (many of them taped) and consistent recording of casual conversations. I also considered relevant mass-mediated materials, whether artistic (the novel considered in the chapter on “*gibush*”) or more ephemeral media material (radio discourses and a variety of press commentary used in different chapters of the book). Given the various contexts in which the studies were conducted, the nature of my participation varied as well—from full-fledged, undifferentiated participation in griping rituals to partial, role-differentiated participation in fire rituals and family picnics. My adult (parental) role in these occasions has positioned me in a particular way with respect to my field of inquiry, although I have tried to enlarge my field of vision in each case so as to gain access to other participants’ experiences and points of view.

Even though I have been working within my own cultural group, the research process was always attended by a sense of discovery. Through a willful act of suspending familiarity, and the intellectual effort of noting, framing, and articulating my familiar world I could retain some of the riddling quality (a sense of “breakdown” in M. Agar’s [1986] terms), which is so much part of the anthropological experience. The children’s studies were the closest I got to the traditional ethnographer’s position of studying the ‘other,’ though they, too, were permeated with the profound sense of familiarity, even a somewhat nostalgic flavor.²

Anchoring my inquiry in widely recognized “native terms” has been most helpful, as this provided a way to discuss common realities even while inducing a sense of distance from them, talking about them in a way that was new to both myself and my informants. The many interviews I held, both formal and informal, some of them in my own home, some in the respondents’ homes, some in public places, were always animated and revealing. I talked to both men and women, people I knew well, casual acquaintances as well as total strangers, whom I would engage in conversation as I joined friends in a cafe, or on an outing. I often found myself being introduced as a person who studies interesting things, at times a particular study being cited as an example (the “griping” study would be a frequent one), which made such conversations all the more natural and easygoing. Thus, although the first draft of a paper would be written after I had satisfied myself of my interpretation based on

data derived from observations and interviews with about twenty to thirty informants, by the time the paper went into print I lost count of the number of people I had talked to, constantly testing my understanding of the phenomena I was interested in with new audiences, either as readers or conversational partners. I couldn't help keeping alert to new variations or what appeared to be attitudinal changes over time. Life and work became so utterly blurred that one memorable morning at breakfast, my (then) ten-year-old daughter, Irit, suddenly interrupted our talk, her almond eyes filled with a questioning look, as she asked: "Mummy, are we talking or are we interviewing?" As we both burst into laughter, she promptly continued her story: "Never mind, and she said . . ."

This conversation was one of many we had been having about herself, her friends, who did what to whom, who said what about whom, who was *brogez* with whom, who refused to share a treat, who had a marvelous collection of stationary paper (full description of each item), or who cheated whom (and how) in trading a collectible. For a whole year I took notes of the events and concerns that such conversations with my children and their friends brought to light. I told them I was writing a book about children, which they interpreted as writing a children's book. This gave me a more elevated status in their eyes than these pages would probably warrant. In any event, when I culled from my notes what emerged as central communication-related junctures in the children's social life and was ready to conduct more focused interviews, many children were quite ready to discuss with me the culturally "named" social-communicative institutions of *brogez*, *hibudim*, *hahlafot* and *sodot*. Most of the interviews were conducted in groups of two and three children, usually in my home, with one child selecting friends he or she would like to bring along. This provided a congenial atmosphere and an opportunity to have not just a child's accounts and stories but also other children's immediate reactions to them. Children's willingness to participate was not only a matter of being given an opportunity to talk to an adult about themselves and their world in their own terms (a rare enough opportunity for many of them), but also the impetus and context this gave them for self-reflection. Children I had interviewed, like some adults I interviewed for the other studies, would come up to me a week or two following an interview and offer more stories, more examples. Once I told my daughter how grateful I was to all the kids who were willing to spend whole summer afternoons in our home, talking about all these things they do all the time, and she responded: "Oh, they like it. It is as if we stand on the side (*omdim batsad*) and look at ourselves. It's fun."

The children she was talking about belonged to the preadolescent group (about 9 to 11 years old). I found that it was among children of this age that peer-group life was communicatively sustained with the greatest vitality and zest. I have also interviewed children aged five to seven, in an attempt to capture

the kind of learning children have to do in order to become full-fledged members of their peer group. In some cases I could identify partial learnings, and these are indicated in the text. I also interviewed some teenagers (around fifteen) to see how they would talk about the child-marked patterns I had been studying. They were quite familiar with them but considered them “babyish” stuff, not something they would engage in. When I had formulated my interpretations, I always proceeded to check them with some key informants, children or adults, as the case may be, and used their commentaries to further refine and extend my analysis. This process, as indicated earlier, was to repeat itself with other “natives” many times as I had occasion to talk about my work both informally and formally, to both lay and professional audiences.

Interviews, of course, are a major source for what V. Turner (1977) has called “exegetical meanings,” that is, the meanings attributed by cultural participants themselves to elements of their symbolic conduct. These are not sufficient, however. A full-scale symbolic analysis must also incorporate “operational meanings,” as Turner calls them, the meanings constructed by the analyst based on what he or she hears, but also on observed events whose analysis forms the basis for interpretation even if participants are not able to verbalize all of their dimensions. Thus, I have conducted a variety of observations related to the phenomena I have been studying and these were incorporated in each of the chapters as relevant. This observational component implies not only an additional fieldwork technique and source of data concerning members’ communicative behaviors, but also the incorporation of an analytic perspective, which is distinct from (though it will articulate with) the exegetical meanings provided by cultural members. Finally, an analysis of symbolic expressions, according to Turner, would also attend to “positional meanings,” that is, the meanings symbols can be said to derive from their relationship to other cultural symbols. I have tried to indicate this dimension of sense-making both within the text and in the conclusion to each chapter, as I attempted to consider my analyses of the various experiential domains they demarcate in relation to each other.

These pages thus present selected portions of Israeli everyday life as I and my informants have experienced it, reflected upon it, and communicated it to ourselves and to others. Although the ideological idioms, which so often dominate discussions of Israeli reality are echoed in many of the book’s chapters, I hope they communicate a sense of Israeli ideology not as official political stance but as lived experience, as embedded within humanly shaped and negotiated communication processes, and their attendant costs and rewards.³

Notes Chapter 1: Introduction:

1. Cf. D. Conquergood’s, “Rhetoric and Ritual: Implications of Victor Turner’s Dramaturgical Theory for Rhetorical Criticism.” Paper presented

at the Western Speech Communication Association Convention (1984), Seattle, Washington. This paper examines strands of affinity between two major intellectual traditions I have drawn upon in my ethnographic work in exploring the symbolic dimensions of Israeli ways of speaking.

2. The communication patterns studied here represent ritualized dimensions of Israeli children's peer-group culture within a sociolinguistic framework, incorporating (where relevant) discussion of folkloristic elements of the kind documented in I. Opie and P. Opie, *The Lore and Language of School Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) and M. Knapp and H. Knapp, *One Potato, Two Potato: The Folklore of American Children* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976).

3. All translations from Hebrew are my own. I have used the notation ḥ for Hebrew ḥet (rather than x) so as to facilitate the reading.

Gibush: The Crystallization Metaphor in Israeli Cultural Semantics

INTRODUCTION

The distinctive tonalities attending the notion of *gibush* in Israeli discourse have initially come to my attention in listening to massive doses of talk about social problems in school classes in which I was making observations as part of an educational project. Very often, the problems teachers and children were having were described as difficulties in attaining *gibush* in the class, and the image of a crystallized school class (*kita megubeshet*) loomed large as an educational ideal in their talk. Indeed, as an ethnosociological term “*gibush*” is extremely salient in Israeli discourse, part of the taken for granted vocabulary of all participants on the Israeli educational scene. It routinely appears in conversations concerning students’ experience of their social life in school, and is immediately recognized by native informants as an emotionally and ideationally loaded term. It is also widely employed in Israeli colloquial speech with reference to a variety of out-of-school social groupings. In fact, where Americans are likely to complain about lack of communication (Katriel and Philipsen 1981), Israelis may be heard to complain about lack of *gibush*. Given its salience in members’ discourse, tracing the uses of the term “*gibush*” in its various contexts of deployment can thus provide some important insights into central domains of Israeli cultural organization, just as tracing the uses of “communication” has illuminated significant aspects of the American cultural scene. Both these terms are, in S. Ortner’s (1973:1338) formulation, “key cultural symbols,” each of them an item that “in an ill-defined way, is crucial to its [a culture’s] distinctive organization.”

Ortner’s discussion of “key symbols” addresses two issues: (1) the question of how one determines the “key” status of a symbol, and (2) the nature of symbols with respect to the ways in which they operate in relation to cultural thought and action. She offers a (non-exhaustive) list of “indicators of cultural interest” that suggest the key position of a cultural element. Such elements come up in a variety of semantic contexts and are subject to considerable discursive elaboration; cultural members consider them important and they carry strong evaluative and emotional accents.

Ortner further distinguishes between two major categories of “key symbols,” or better still, two dimensions of symbolic expression, which she

conceives as ordered along a continuum, and whose two ends are “summarizing” vs. “elaborating” symbols:

Summarizing symbols. These are symbols “which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them” (1973:1339). This condensation of meaning into symbolic forms is the hallmark of the domain of the sacred in the broadest sense of the term (e.g. the cross, the flag, etc.), and it speaks primarily to the shaping of attitudes, to the crystallization of commitment.

Elaborating symbols. These symbols are essentially analytic, providing “vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action” (1973:1340). The “key” status of these symbols is predicated upon their capacity to order experience, and is indicated by their recurrence in cultural behavior or cultural symbolic systems, not by the aura of sacredness attending them. Ortner further distinguishes two modes in which symbols can have elaborating power: “They may have primarily conceptual elaborating power, that is, they are valued as implying mechanisms for successful social action” (1973:1340). A prime example of symbols with great conceptual elaborating power, Ortner argues, are the “root metaphors,” which have an integrative function within a cultural system, that is, they formulate the unity, or coherence, of a cultural orientation by virtue of the fact that central aspects of experience can be likened to it. She says: “A root metaphor, then, is one type of key symbol in the elaborating mode, i.e., a symbol which operates to sort out experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us think how it all hangs together. They are symbols which are ‘good to think’ . . . in that one can conceptualize the relationships among phenomena by analogy to the interrelations among the parts of the root metaphor” (1973:1341).

In sum, the term “*gibush*,” as it is employed in Israeli cultural discourse, functions as a “key symbol” in both the elaborating and the summarizing modes. On the one hand, it is a root metaphor that anchors members’ discourses of self and society, of intentional action as well as of artistic expression. The *gibush* metaphor also has action elaborating power, at least in some of the cultural domains in which it figures. Specifically, in Israeli ethnosociology the *gibush* metaphor offers not only an image of order but also what Ortner calls “key scenarios,” which suggest socially valued modes of action designed to promote *gibush*. On the other hand, the term “*gibush*” has assumed the power of a summarizing symbol as it has come to be viewed as “a value in itself,” in the words of a school administrator.

In what follows, I will elaborate on this claim, and probe into the cultural understandings it can yield. I begin with a closer examination of the

discursive contexts in which the term “*gibush*” is typically found. The systematic exploration of the discursive uses of “*gibush*,” in which attention will be paid to both its contexts of occurrence and to domains in which its non-applicability is instructive, will serve to identify themes that are central to Israeli ethnosociology and ethnopsychology. By way of conclusion, I will offer a cultural, necessarily partial, reading of a novel by a contemporary Israeli author (*Daniel's Trials* [1973] by Yitshak Orpaz), demonstrating that a fuller appreciation of the novel's symbolism can be gained through a recognition of the cultural force of the *gibush* metaphor as discussed in this chapter.

'GIBUSH' IN ISRAELI ETHNOSOCIOLOGY

Educational contexts are prime settings in which the notion of *gibush* as an ethnosociological metaphor is played out. I will therefore attempt to unpack its cultural meanings by examining the rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli school culture, weaving my account around the study of the term “*gibush*” and its derivatives as they are routinely employed within and outside the classroom walls.

Since the notion of *gibush* is so commonly applied to the school class, exploring the semantics of the terms as used in educational contexts will highlight the cultural presumptions that underlie the notion of the school class as a social unit in mainstream Israeli school culture. In Israel, as in many Western schooling systems, the school class is a central structural unit, and is considered “the constituent cell of the school structure” (Aries 1962:176). It is so much part of the schooling scene that it tends to be treated as an organizational fixture rather than as a culturally constituted phenomenon. It is therefore rather sobering to learn that in European education “this structure, without which it is hard to imagine school life, dates back no further than the sixteenth or late fifteenth century, and did not assume its final form until the beginning of the seventeenth” (ibid., p. 176).

The modern school class, according to Aries, corresponds (a) to a stage in the progressive acquisition of knowledge (represented by the curriculum); (b) to an average age; (c) to a physical, spatial unit; and (d) to a period of time. Interestingly, this account leaves out an additional sense of the term “class” as it is currently employed both in everyday and in scholarly educational discourse: the “class” also corresponds (e) to a particular grouping of students. This latter understanding of the notion of the class as an emergent, transcendent social unit—that is, as a collective possessing properties that are not reducible to the properties of the individual students in it—is already hinted at in Aries's observation that “each class acquires from its curriculum, its classroom and its master a distinctive complexion” (ibid., p. 176), but the idea of the class as a social grouping in the sense discussed in this paper does not come in. Aries's discussion is thus of particular interest both for what it

does and does not do. This chapter, in a sense, begins where Aries's leaves off, making an essentially similar interrogating move, though in the direction of cultural rather than historical analysis. It likewise emphasizes that the school class is a sociohistorical phenomenon shaped by and shaping the cultural world of which it is a part. By focusing on the crystallization metaphor, it will undertake to demonstrate that an understanding of the school class as a socializing agent must take into account its culturally coded nature as a social grouping, which is articulated in the particular forms of sociation promoted in the classroom context.

"KITA MEGUBESHET": PORTRAIT OF A COHESIVE SCHOOL CLASS

As a first step, I will attempt to clarify the meanings and images that underlie the notion of a "crystallized" or cohesive class in Israeli school culture.¹ As the term jumped out at me from the flow of everyday discourse, and became encircled through ethnographic attention, it lost much of its taken-for-granted air, and I often found myself wondering, "What exactly do they mean?" when I heard it used as part of the unquestioned vocabulary of cultural members.

For example, how should one interpret the published advice of a psychologist in a national children's monthly magazine to a reader's question about how to deal with conflicts and violence among the children in his class, which reads: "In your case, the best way would be to approach your homeroom teacher,² tell her about the tension in the class, and together plan some activities designed to promote better *gibush* and cohesion in the class, and to create a more pleasant atmosphere. It is important to note that, in approaching her, you should avoid accusations and simply ask her to help "crystallize" the social group in which you study and spend time." (*Mashehu*, Sept. 1988:51) Or, how should one understand the image of the school class that impelled a student teacher to shout with obvious agitation following a lecture dealing with the principles of Individualized Instruction, "Where is the class in all this? Where is the social cohesion?" ("*Eifo kan hakita? Eifo hagibush hahevrat?*") Similarly, how should one understand the statement of a senior high school teacher who said in private conversation: "I've thought about these things a lot. Senior high school students nowadays often resent the pressure to make the class a social grouping (*hevra*). They say they come to school to learn, that's all. But I don't agree. I think if we give up the goal of cohesion in the class (*gibush hevrat bakita*), the state will fall apart (*hamedina titporer*). We can't afford it, the way things are." This position was apparently upheld by the mother of a seventh grader who, in the first teacher-parents meeting of the year, responded to a query about her expectations for her daughter's new school by stating the wish that "there should be social cohesion in the class" (*gibush hevrat bakita*). Expressed disappointments about school life leave one similarly wondering about the cultural injunction to promote *gibush*

in the classroom. Thus, one could ask, what were the unmet expectations behind a seventh grader's statement, "We have a lousy class. There's no cohesion at all" (*ein gibush bihlal*), or behind a teacher's self-deprecation when, on evaluating a whole year's educational work, he declared: "It is a total failure!" The class, of which he was the homeroom teacher, had not become "crystallized."

Clearly, the attainment of social cohesion in the class is a generally recognized educational goal, shared to different degrees by the various participants in the educational enterprise on the Israeli scene. The particular form of students' "social career" in the Israeli school is interesting to consider in relation to the educational goal of achieving *gibush*. A child who enters first grade is arbitrarily assigned to a class that will go together as one group till the end of the sixth grade, when they graduate from elementary school. Usually, the same teacher accompanies an elementary school class for two or three years. Changing a homeroom teacher every year is considered educationally undesirable and detrimental to the attainment of children's social and emotional stability.

After transfer to junior high school, where students from several elementary schools come together, new classes are formed and care is taken to mix students from different schools. This point of transition is marked by concerted efforts to promote *gibush* in the newly formed class, and the initial period is filled with conflicts over competing loyalties between the current and the previous class, conflicts that have been known to embroil not only the children but also their homeroom teacher. The breaking up and reforming of the class is repeated at entry to the senior high school, although, at this stage, the increased emphasis on academic matters serves to attenuate the social strain accompanying the transition.

From the point of view of this study, this organizational arrangement serves a two-pronged socializing function. On the one hand, the school class provides a context for the promulgation of a long-term, stable social structure. On the other hand, the inevitable transitions from one institution to another, as well as the quasi-utopian ideal of *gibush*, suggest that social life is not a given, but something that must be continuously made and remade. By actively participating in the social constitution of their school class—not only in its informal but also in its formal aspects—children learn that the form and quality of group life are a product of an ongoing social dynamic rather than an expression of a preestablished pattern.

Let me now turn to an interpretive reading of several cultural texts, both written and spoken, in order to explicate in as systematic a fashion as possible the cultural understandings and emotive coloring that ground the notion of *gibush* in the universe of discourse under investigation. The texts cited have been selected as typical from a much larger data base. They give voice to the various participants in the educational scene.

Text 1 is the “classroom contract” (*heskem kitati*) found on the wall of a seventh grade classroom in the junior high school of a small, predominantly middle-class town in the greater Haifa area. It was composed in the first days of September 1984 by the children as their first collective activity in their new school. This text reflects, in an authentically scrambled fashion, the discursive and ideational domain of which *gibush* forms a part:

“Expectations: To get to know the school and its surroundings / To get to know the teachers and new friends / That there will be sports and fun activities / Mutual acquaintance / That they will be nice and cohesive [*megubashim*] / That there will be discussions and parties / That there will be friendly relations / That there will be cooperation / That there will be fairness to friends and teachers / That there will be no fights. How shall we do it? In theory: To be good friends / That there will be no inner divisions in the class / Cooperation / Understanding between teachers and students / No fighting, mutual respect, fairness, cohesion [*gibush*], equal treatment. In practice: That there will be trips on foot and on bike / Parties, class evenings [*arvei kita*, that is, parties held at the homes of the students on Friday nights], bonfires [*kumzitsim*] / No fighting / Sports contests / Not much homework / Not taking advantage of other kids / Regular committees and activities / No fighting during the break.”

Note that in articulating their expectations of school life, the children (as well as their teacher) naturally assumed the class to be the social arena in which their hopes, desires, and moral ideals could be acted out, and that no expectations concerning academic matters were mentioned (with the exception of a plea for little homework). The expectations articulated in this document involved a range of issues and levels of abstraction: moral issues such as fairness and equality were mentioned alongside interpersonal issues such as friendliness and cooperation or organizational issues such as the establishment of committees, as well as leisure activities such as sports and parties.

The same issues and expectations were articulated in children’s written and spoken accounts of what a cohesive class was like, as the following texts, written by ninth graders in a junior high school in the city of Haifa, illustrate:

Text 2: “A cohesive class, in my opinion, is a class where everybody is part of the society, is active in it, and contributes to it. The whole class is a single and cohesive body [*guf ehad umgubash*] and not several groups. A class should be cohesive. Cohesion is an advantage and not a disadvantage.”

Text 3: “In my opinion a cohesive class is one in which every individual has a feeling of belonging to the class as a whole [*shajahut el klal hakita*]. Each child has to feel a sense of closeness, even to the smallest degree, to every other child in the class and to avoid forming separate groups or associations within the body of the class. It is pleasant to learn and live in a friendly, agreeable and warm class.”

Text 4: “A cohesive class, in my opinion, is a class in which relations among students are as good as among citizens: relations of consideration,

understanding, help, etc. . . . The class is not divided into different subclasses (economic, social and all that this implies) but there is understanding and liking among the students. There are joint social activities such as parties, class evenings, or just shared activities in the afternoons. In such a class no cliques form as a result of engaging in separate social activities.”

Text 5: “A cohesive class is in my opinion a class that holds extracurricular activities. All the students in it are equal and there is no group of students that holds itself above the other students. Such a class has its own private framework and its own rules.”

These descriptions are typical and could be multiplied many times; although each child had his or her own way of expressing the idea of a “cohesive class,” emphasizing the elements that he or she felt were salient, these formulations were indeed variations on a common theme. The youngsters’ accounts of *gibush* in the classroom were basically congruent with those given by the adults interviewed. They similarly stressed the elements of togetherness (*hajahad*), involvement (*meoravut*), or caring (*ihpatijut*), all terms carrying highly positive connotations in Israeli discourse. Intragroup harmony, as measured by little fighting and group pride, was also considered a concomitant of a cohesive class.

Both teachers and students, however, suggested that this image of a cohesive class was an idealized one, not to be found in real life school situations. “This is, of course, an ideal.” One teacher concluded her account of what a cohesive class would be like, “but we can talk of degrees of cohesiveness, a class can be more or less cohesive.” One of the ninth graders followed his account of a cohesive class with the following comment: “But to my mind this is a utopia that cannot be put into effect.” Similarly, in a written note that was brought to my attention, an eleventh grade student, the leader of a school-sponsored social group of ninth graders, responded to one of the girls’ complaints about lack of cohesion in the group, saying, “You are right, but you must remember that ultimate cohesion is not something that can be attained, but something we must strive for all the time.”

The above descriptions bring out central elements of the historical roots to the communal utopia of socialist Zionism, which has been an important strand in the formation of mainstream Israeli culture and whose traces can be found in dominant social and educational ideologies to this day (Even-Zohar 1981; Liebman and Don-Yehia 1983; Gertz 1988; Shapira 1989). Thus, the rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli school culture is both an outgrowth of a particular cultural view of social being and a contributing factor in its sustainment. This vision of sociality is encapsulated in the root metaphor of “crystallization,” which is one that participants in mainstream Israeli culture “live by” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The foregoing portrait of a “well-crystallized” school class has suggested some of what is entailed by this concept. The next section is

devoted to a further elaboration of the implications of the *gibush* metaphor as it relates to the social reality of the school class.

METAPHORICAL IMPLICATIONS

The *gibush* metaphor is used to describe both a process and a product: both the process of attaining crystallization and the ideal of cohesion in the school class as a social state are routinely thematized in Israeli educational discourse. In what follows I attempt to point out the educational implications of the metaphor, relating them to the nature of the Israeli school class as a sociocultural context. Four features of the crystal metaphor seem to have defining value for the property of cohesion or crystallization in the school class. Thus, a class with a high degree of *gibush* (*a*) has clearly demarcated boundaries; (*b*) has a high degree of integration and hence inner strength; (*c*) is internally undifferentiated; and (*d*) presupposes particular conditions under which it can form. In the remainder of this section, I discuss each of these properties in turn, noting the ways in which they are manifested in the reality of school life.

CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Like a crystal, a social unit such as a school class that enjoys a high degree of *gibush* has well-demarcated, highly contoured boundaries that mark a concern with matters of inclusion vs. exclusion. There are two problematic domains repeatedly mentioned by informants, which derive from the strong boundaries orientation implied by the *gibush* metaphor:

Defining the external boundaries of the group so that membership is a clear-cut matter and ambiguity around the group boundaries is not well tolerated. This is manifested in the anxiety occasioned by any transfer from one educational context to another, expressed as a concern for the newcomer child's "social adaptation" and his or her degree of "integration within" the new class community, natively referred to as "*hishtalvut bakita*." Indeed, one of the measures of social cohesion mentioned by some of the teachers interviewed is the degree to which it can accommodate the arrival of newcomers. In this, again, a cohesive class is ideally like a crystal, which grows by attaching to itself new, unattached elements in its immediate environment. In fact, however, transfers to a new class are highly problematic, dreaded, and avoided as far as possible by students and parents alike, because of the difficulty of penetrating the social boundaries of the group. Indeed, I recorded a few cases that involved the extreme exclusionary measure of a *herem* (excommunication) declared by the whole class against a newly arrived child. These were the subject of much reproach and consternation by both teachers and parents, but adult intervention was needed to put a stop to them and save the newcomer child. These cases were cited as examples of *gibush shlili* (negative crystallization), an expression whose emergence attests to the awareness of the moral

problematics attending the cohesion potential of the class as a social grouping. More generally, it suggests that presenting *gibush* as an ultimate value, as “an end in itself,” may leave children peculiarly vulnerable in responding to issues of right and wrong.

The ever present threat from within to the integrity of the class unit by children's tendency to form cliques within it. Although it is grudgingly recognized that these cliques represent the students' spontaneous, self-guided, highly absorbing involvements, their formation is deplored by students, teachers, and parents alike as they refer to the problem of *havurot bakita* (cliques within the class). Cliques, which are based on voluntary association rather than on ascribed membership in the school class as a whole, were cited as the major impediment to attaining *gibush*, whereas “best friend” dyadic or triadic relationships are encouraged as a source of social support and are considered too fragmentary to be detrimental to *gibush* in the class. It is not that an ingroup / outgroup orientation is rejected; rather, the point is that it is promoted as long as the boundaries coincide with those of the formal school class.

Thus, any attempt to extend the class boundaries—for example, by socializing extensively with nonmembers of the class, or inviting a nonmember to a class function, including one's own birthday party—is interpreted as denying the preferentiality and validity of one's school class as a unit of socialization. Similarly, any attempt to reduce them by forming cliques within the class is taken to undercut the hold and validity of the school class unit as formally defined, eroding it from within, as it were. Both disloyalty and cliquishness are negatively sanctioned.

Integration and Inner Strength

The *gibush* metaphor implies the stable integration of the constituent elements that make up the crystal. In the social analogue, it is the internal strength and solidity of both the individual and the group that flows from the unifying sense of belonging, of being securely “in place.” As we have seen, the social ideal of *gibush* involves an emphasis on the undifferentiated collectivity—on joint endeavors, on cooperation and shared sentiments, on solidarity and a sense of togetherness. Indeed, discussions of *gibush* invariably invoked this image in the use of such locutions as *bejahad* / *hajahad* (together / togetherness), *keguf ehad* (as one body), *kegush ehad* (as one block), all of which suggest the idea of a well-demarcated, strongly held together social unit.

The attainment of *gibush*, as a ninth grader put it, is predicated on “the ability to overcome individual differences.” This ability is seen as developing with age and school experience so that expectations for *gibush* grow as the children ascend the educational ladder: it is usually only in the fourth or fifth grade that it becomes an explicitly stated educational goal. With the move to

senior high school, *gibush* becomes less problematic. As a tenth grader, who responded to my query about *gibush* efforts in the first days of the school year, put it, “Not much, really. We are programmed to it. In a week our class will be crystallized [*megubeshet*]”. The school-sponsored *gibush* ethos is gradually internalized by the students to a greater or lesser degree and is incorporated into the fabric of their social life so that it is not necessarily experienced as a pressure to conform. Some of the informants, however, expressed their irritation at the school’s unrelenting efforts to shape the students’ social life and the demands of participation involved. A refusal of participation—for example, not attending a Friday night class party, dodging a class trip organized by the school—is interpreted as a refusal to sustain the collectivity.

This kind of passive resistance was the most common form of self-conscious resistance encountered among those relatively few who disliked the *gibush* ethos enough to resist the promise of unquestioned affiliation. The possibility of resistance was, nevertheless, recognized as in the often expressed concern with the class becoming *meforeret* (disintegrated), which marks another metaphorical link to the language of crystals. It testifies to an awareness of the inherent precariousness of cohesive social units, which, like a crystal, can be broken up by external forces whose impact would be most keenly felt at points of internal imperfections. Thus, *gibush* can never be taken for granted, and its sustainment requires a continual investment in social energy to promote the conditions that favor its emergence.

Lack of Internal Differentiation

Like the equally distanced constituent elements of the crystal, members of a cohesive school class are ideally undifferentiated in terms of their social value or standing, and none is subject to preferential treatment. Also, having “overcome individual differences,” they are effectively undifferentiated in terms of their personalities and interests. This strong egalitarian orientation was expressed by both teachers and students, who claimed that in a cohesive class all are equal (*kulam shavim*) and that nobody is left “on the side” (*batsad*). More indirectly, this egalitarian orientation found its expression in a pronounced ideological concern for “the exceptional” (*haharig*), that is, children whose life circumstances set them apart, whether due to physical handicaps or psychosocial conditions.

Further support for the reality of the equalizing implications of the *gibush* ethos is found in a recent study comparing conceptions of open education in Israel, Britain, and the United States. Notably, Israeli definitions of the aims of open education—unlike their British and American counterparts—did not at all include the three goals relevant to our present concern: “expand individual differences,” “develop originality,” and “develop self-awareness” (Harrison and Glaubman 1982). At the same time, developing the whole child was

considered as a goal of open education by many. This relative lack of concern for uniqueness or originality is congruent with the homogeneity and lack of differentiation implied by the *gibush* metaphor.

All this is not to say that Israeli teachers and students, who would undertake to promote *gibush* do not recognize individual differences. Such differences in talent and personality indeed form the basis of academic differentiation and selection on the one hand and of informal peer grouping on the other. The point is that the ethos of *gibush* marks the Israeli school class as a ritual context, in which an idealized image of social order as well-demarcated, solidly integrated, and internally undifferentiated is played out. I believe that it is to this image of order and to the sense of communal participation that it implies that an Israeli child is socialized as his or her bonds of commitment are forged and reformed in the interest of *gibush*.

Initial Conditions

Particular initial conditions must obtain for the separate constituent elements of the crystal to form a solidified unit, although the presence of these conditions cannot fully determine that a single, cohesive crystal will form. Similarly, in the social domain, there must be an initial impetus for the formation of a cohesive unit. In the case of the school class, the most explicitly recognized condition for *gibush* is charismatic leadership of the homeroom teacher or of some of the students. A second set of conditions relates to shared experiences, concerns, and goals, which can mobilize students' sense of involvement. These conditions can facilitate, though not guarantee, the emergence of a state of *gibush*. Thus, many institutionalized efforts are made to promote *gibush*, and these disclose the general feeling that in the absence of such efforts *gibush* would not arise. Charismatic leadership may not be an ever-present condition of classroom life, but shared academic experiences, concerns, and goal-directed activities are certainly a defining element of it. These, however, are considered insufficient for the generation of *gibush*, even irrelevant to it, as *gibush* is relegated to the social expressive domain, which is considered to be independent of the academic aspects of the school. Insofar as links were mentioned between the socially desirable state of *gibush* and learning as an educational goal, *gibush* was said to enhance children's willingness and motivation to engage in instructional tasks. Academic learning itself is seen as an individualizing activity and is rarely considered involving and engaging enough to serve as an impetus for "crystallization." Therefore, a concerted effort has to be made to devise educational procedures that can meet the rather elusive task of promoting *gibush*.

PROMOTING GIBUSH

Tracing the uses of the *gibush* metaphor in the rhetoric of Israeli school discourse reveals that it is interpreted in terms of other, lower-level slogans,

all of which form a slogan system (Komisar and McClellan 1961) that serves to unify a range of different proposals for the domain of social education in Israeli schooling. Among the major sub-slogans that interpret the umbrella notion of *gibush* are such notions as cooperation, mutual understanding, belonging, respect, acceptance, and tolerance—in brief, all things that are socially good. These sub-slogans are further interpreted as a set of proposals, or “scenarios” for the design of “social value education,” which is usually entrusted to the homeroom teacher.

Such a specification of *gibush*-related educational practices can be found in a special Ministry of Education directive issued by the head of the national Social Education Department in October 1983. In this document, the goals and means of social education are reiterated and to some extent codified in the form of specific recommendations.³ It lists “the frameworks and activity contents which can contribute to social cohesion in the class.” These include: (1) party games, (2) group and class discussions about social problems within the class (e.g. cliques in the class, parent-child relations, academic failure), (3) teacher-student encounters to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as honorary examinations, student evaluation needs, politeness and mutual relations, and verbal violence, (4) encouraging student self-government through the formulation of consensual classroom rules, (5) encouraging mutual help among students, (6) initiating special projects centered on extracurricular interests, and (7) organizing class trips, excursions, and parties.

All the educational procedures recommended in this document involve the intentional production of shared activities and experiences that are designed to promote *gibush*. *Gibush* can be generated, it is suggested, indirectly—as a by-product of intensive engagement in sociable, extracurricular activities such as trips and parties and in cooperative enterprises involving students, teachers, and parents. Or, it can be generated directly, by explicitly attending to the quality of social relations in the class, through public engagement in “relational talk,” or through the formulation of publicly shared rules of conduct codified in the form of explicit “social contracts.”

Whatever technique is employed in promoting *gibush*, the very need to devise, recommend, and continuously use such indirect techniques is an indication that a state of *gibush* cannot be willed into existence. Thus, the ever-present tension between the solidity of the crystal and the danger of its disintegration is further compounded by the uncertain interplay between planned cultivation and the contingent, spontaneous emergence of a state of *gibush*. This tension and the unreliability of outcome are at the heart of the crystallization metaphor. Its particular aptness is indeed striking, since, as scientists tell us,⁴ the initiation of the process of crystal formation is still one of nature’s mysteries: no specification of initial conditions in given cases can predict whether the formation of a crystal will actually be initiated or not.

Given this paradoxical potential, I would like to argue that *gibush* belongs to the family of social states that J. Elster (1983) has called “states that are essentially by-products” (ibid., p. 43). Although it is experientially identifiable and linguistically marked, the state of *gibush*, like other by-product states, cannot be intentionally produced in a direct way. Any attempt to do so would involve an “intentional fallacy” and would thus be self-defeating (much in the way that trying to be spontaneous would be). Elster talks of two kinds of fallacies associated with states that are essentially by-products, saying: “Since some of these states are useful or desirable, it is often tempting to try and bring them about—even though the attempt is certain to fail. This is the moral fallacy of by-products. Moreover, whenever we observe that some such state is in fact present, it is tempting to explain it as the result of action designed to bring it about—even though it is rather a sign that no such action was undertaken. This is the intellectual fallacy of by-products” (ibid., p. 43)

As Elster points out, however, and as Israeli educators have discovered for themselves, “indirect” technologies can be devised to generate by-product states, that is, create the conditions that would facilitate their emergence. He says: “It is true that one cannot will love, but one can nevertheless put oneself in the way of love, i.e. place oneself in the kind of situation where one is liable to fall in love” (ibid., p. 53). I would argue, therefore, that many of the *gibush* promoting mechanisms that we have identified seek to—and can only hope to—put students in the way of *gibush*.

Indeed, paradoxically, the more vocal and explicit the rhetoric of *gibush*, the stronger the sense of frustration it generates. *Gibush*—like other human ideals—is most typically thematized in its absence, so that direct efforts to promote it work to intensify the sense of unattainability attached to it as a Utopian state in the first place. Examples of such efforts would be class discussions devoted to the question of, “What can be done to promote *gibush* in our class,” which often take place at the beginning of the school year; teachers’ pep talks about the virtues of *gibush*, which often follow incidents of social discord; or even casual comments, such as the one made by a seventh grade homeroom teacher to her class in preparing them for a trip: “There will be a lot of walking on this trip. There will be difficult moments that will require cooperation and that will be good for our *gibush*.” Even though such direct practices can be routinely observed, most of the teacher informants said that they would not recommend explicitly preaching *gibush* but would rather opt for more subtle, indirect ways to promote it.

Notably, the *gibush*-promoting techniques recommended in the above Ministry of Education document and mentioned by the informants are highly reminiscent of the “commitment mechanisms” discussed by R. Kanter (1972) in her sociological analysis of American utopian communes of the nineteenth

and twentieth centuries. Kanter's phenomenological description of the committed member of a utopian community seems to capture the experience of members of a school class marked by a high degree of *gibush*. She says, "A committed person is loyal and involved; he has a sense of belonging, a feeling that the group is an extension of himself and he is an extension of the group. Through commitment, person and group are inextricably linked. . . . Commitment thus refers to the willingness of people to do what will maintain the group because it provides what they need. In sociological terms, commitment means the attachment of the self to the requirements of social relations that are seen as self-expressive" (ibid., p. 66).

The relevance of this account to the form of sociality espoused in a cohesive class seems straightforward enough. In a class that enjoys a high degree of *gibush*, children's attachment to the social requirements are, indeed, seen as self-expressive; at the same time, expressive activities such as creative drama are valued—even justified—as promoting *gibush*. In this perspective, self-expression and communal expression become inextricably intertwined. The prime behavioral indicators of *gibush* thus involve the suggestion that a group of children, who have been arbitrarily put together in the same class, do in fact want to be together. They have come to cherish their "togetherness," as is indicated, for example, by their choosing to spend time together of their own free will, in parties and in after school activities.

Thus, the *gibush* metaphor discloses a particular model of sociality, that is, of what society is like and of the individuals' relationship to it, and specifies a range of symbolic practices designed toward its enactment. Whether in explicit or implicit terms, this is an aspect of cultural knowledge that must be transmitted to the young in all social groups. Employing V. Turner's (1969) distinction between the social modalities of *communitas* and *societas*, we might say that the kind of social modality that is promoted by the Israeli school through the cultivation of the school class is the spontaneous, egalitarian, immediate, holistic modality of *communitas*, which has been given the shape of an explicit ideology and subsequently routinized in many revolutionary contexts, including the Zionist revolution (Katriel 1986a; Shapira 1989). The emergence of *communitas* is predicated on the suspension of the differentiating features characteristic of the rules and statuses associated with the social-structural relations of *societas*. The latter define the mainstream, instrumental, and productive engagements of social life rather than those ritualized pockets or peripheral margins, where the normative order loosens its hold. The spirit of *communitas*, with its element of spontaneity, can emerge as an essential by-product of social and interactional conditions that can arise as a result of intensive mutual engagements in joint endeavors, or in response to affectively loaded, shared, often stressful, experiences (which thereby become a transformed expression of self and relationship).

Alternatively, *gibush* can be ritually produced in specialized contexts. Although rarely successful in attaining their goal, the efforts to promote *gibush* produce a pattern of sentiment that supports the Utopian mythology that still animates Israeli official rhetoric, in school and out of it, however dissociated it is from its social reality, which manifests the far-reaching social changes that Israeli society has undergone since its national myths were originally spun. In recent years, school—particularly junior high schools but increasingly also grade schools—have established several days' long orientation programs for incoming students, sometimes referring to them as “*gibush* days.” Students are given information about the school and an attempt is made to promote a spirit of good fellowship among them. Notably, these occasions differ from ritualized attempts to promote the *gibush* of a class as a social group; they are oriented towards cultivating a sense of well-being for the individual student through interpersonal contact within the larger group rather than through a collectively oriented sense of “togetherness.” This new individually and interpersonally oriented semantics of the notion of *gibush* is indicative of one direction of change in Israeli sociocultural orientation. The “test semantics” attending the use of the term *gibush* in military settings, as discussed in the next section, marks another direction of change. Both, however, involve a new cultural focus on the individual *vis-à-vis* the collectivity.

GIBUSH IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL GROUPINGS

The term *gibush* is routinely applied to other social groupings than the school class as well: it can be used in the causative form of the verb to apply, for example, to a work team, *legabesh et hatsevet* (to crystallize the work team), or one can use the reflexive form to speak of the spontaneous crystallization of a team, *hatsevet hitgabesh bli be'ajot* (the work team became crystallized without any problems). I have also heard the term applied to such a loose unit as a friendship network (*havurat jedidim megubeshet*, a crystallized group of friends), and to such highly institutionalized groupings as military units (*mahlaka / pluga megubeshet*). Finally, one can find moralistic statements in the press and in speeches by public figures concerning the need to generate *gibush* in the nation at large, as a remedy to problems of low morale, for example. In all such contexts, the crystallization metaphor refers to either a valorized social end-state or to a valorized social process.

Given its applicability to such a wide range of social groupings, one cannot but note that it is jarring, if not semantically anomalous, to speak of a crystallized family (*mishpaha megubeshet*), or the need to crystallize the family (*legabesh et hamishpaha*), or even about a spontaneous process of crystallization *vis-à-vis* the family (*hamishpaha hitgabsha*, the family became crystallized). One is, rather, likely to speak of a warm family, of the need to bring family members closer together, or apply organismic metaphors to it (family branches,

roots, etc.). This exclusion of the family from the discursive domain of *gibush* as a social metaphor does not seem to be incidental. Indeed, it suggests that the family unit as a social grouping has a special place in the cultural imagination. Basically, it is considered as a sociocultural given rather than being subject to the making and shaping spirit of an ever precarious social enterprise.

Since the state of *gibush* has become valorized, the extent to which *gibush* has been attained within a social grouping has become a measure of its quality. The goal of attaining *gibush*, conceived as “a value in itself,” has thus taken on the role of an important test of quality for the social process as a whole.

In the army, the term *gibush* is used in a similar way.⁵ As R. Gal (1986) points out in his extensive study of the Israeli soldier, in combat units group cohesion and camaraderie have been translated “into a code of behavior, a sacred norm” (ibid., p. 235), a norm which is highly functional in the military context since “the relationship of unit cohesiveness to heroism under fire has also been demonstrated in the Israeli military” (Gal 1986:154).

In elaborating on the notion of *gibush* within the military, Gal situates it within the wider ideological context and socialization practices in Israeli society in a way that recalls our discussion of the rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli school culture:

As has been detailed earlier, the organizational structure of IDF insures highly cohesive units both in the regular forces and among the reserves. This level of cohesion is expressed in a sense of brotherhood, especially among members of front-line units, hence its extreme impact on unit morale and combat effectiveness. However, the prevalence of cohesion in the IDF's units is not just the result of military organization. Above all, it reflects the nature of educational and social values in Israel. Israel is basically a group-oriented society, certainly not an individual-oriented one. Not only in the kibbutz but also in cities and townships, life centers around groups in the community. The Israeli schools, for example, are structured around stable homerooms, with student cohorts remaining together throughout their years of school. Youngsters are socialized from their early years to develop strong friendships which will continue throughout their lives with a deep sense of commitment. Youth movements flourish in Israel, and, indeed, recreation activities are always carried out in groups (ibid., p. 153).

In recent years, however, the meaning of the term “*gibush*” has been extended in army parlance, and is routinely used to apply to screening procedures performed by way of regulating acceptance to choice units. In this specialized sense, *gibush* refers to a period of concentrated training during which youngsters, who wish to join volunteer units, are tested for their suitability. Thus, “passing the *gibush*” implies acceptance to the unit of choice. The extent to which the term has become naturalized in this sense is indicated

by the fact that a shorter testing-training session of this kind, lasting only three or four days, has come to be called "*gibushon*," with the diminutive suffix "on" appended to it. Unlike the case of the school class, where attaining *gibush* is a collective enterprise and a collective test, in this case it is the individual who is tested in terms of his (rarely *her*) ability to "fit in" within a "crystallized," choice unit. This ability is assessed by commanders, but is heavily based on the use of sociometric (peer-evaluation) techniques. Gal (1986:89) accounts for the meaning extension the word has undergone as follows: "The special screening procedures are used with the special volunteer units which require more rigorous screening. . . . These situational screening procedures are called "*gibush*," which translates to "getting cohesive." This term was used in order to disguise the real purpose of these activities." The disguise has not worked, and the term's "test semantics" has become its central meaning feature.

The implied shift from a collective to an individual focus in the semantics of *gibush*, however, has gone largely unnoticed. This semantic shift may have been facilitated by the fact that *gibush* is also used as an attribute of personal identity, as an ethnopsychological term, partially grounding the Israeli semantics of personhood, to which I now turn.

GIBUSH IN ISRAELI ETHNOPSYSCHOLOGY

Life's learnings, experiences, and tribulations are believed to help "crystallize" an individual's identity or personality. Thus, the *gibush* metaphor serves as a conceptual guide for the culture's image of the well-formed, mature person, that is, a person, as informants put it, who "knows what he wants," "whose two feet are on the ground," one "who doesn't bend with every wind." The properties of personal strength stemming from a well-formed, solid inner-core of decisiveness, trustworthiness and of realism are all considered part of having a crystallized identity. A crystallized identity (*zehut*) or personality (*ishijut*) is felt to be the end-state of a long maturing process, an end to be attained in early adulthood, when "durability" and steadfastness become the desired goals. Thus, just as it is comical to talk about the crystallized identity of a child or baby, it is considered childish and undignified, and a mark of weakness, for an adult to be highly undecided and changeable. Whereas in the case of the Kaluli (Feld & Schieffelin 1982), sheer "hardness" is metaphorically associated with a stage of maturity, and is valorized as such, in this case it is the solidity and orderliness of the well-formed crystal that carries the metaphorical burden. Both orientations differ in similar ways from the organismic orientation implied by the notion of continuous self-growth or self-development found in some contemporary American discourse (Katriel and Philipsen 1981; Bellah et al. 1985).

Notably, while deliberate efforts to promote *gibush* in social groups are common, no such efforts are made in the intrapersonal domain. The crystallization of personality or identity is considered a gradual, spontaneous process that does not lend itself to similar degrees of manipulation. The social engineering machinery, so to speak, stops short of penetrating the psychic domain. Talk about the crystallization of personality is often cast in the past tense, as a comment about an attained state, as in “His personality became crystallized during the war,” or in the present as a state not yet achieved, as in “His personality is not yet crystallized, he may yet change his mind three times,” which I overheard a woman say by way of comforting a friend whose son had just made what appeared to be a rash career choice. The implication was that this was an inevitable passing phase, which, equally inevitably, would come to its end as part of a natural maturation process. This process may take a myriad of forms, and can be accomplished at different rates and to varying degrees, so that one of the crucial issues felt to affect the shape of a personality are the conditions under which it had become “crystallized.”

The sense of precariousness associated with a state of *gibush* in the social sphere, and the activististic orientation toward promoting it, are not part of the ethnopsychological image of the crystallized ‘self.’ This is not because it is felt that the process of maturation can be fully controlled but rather because it is felt to be beyond direct external control, part of the spontaneous life process. Linguistically, this conception is reflected in the simple observation that one speaks of the crystallization of personality using the reflexive form (*lehitgabesh*) rather than the causative (*legabesh*).

A further elucidation of this folk-psychological notion can be gained from a closer examination of the uses of *gibush* in relation to psychological states and processes. Thus, a person may have a crystallized world view (*hashkafat olam megubeshet*), a person or a team may work at crystallizing opinions, plans, policies, proposals, and so forth (*legabesh de’a / tohniyot / medinijut / hatsa’ot*). The ability to do so is a measure of one’s competence as an actor in the world, since stable opinions and well-formulated plans serve as antecedents for effective action. In this intrapersonal domain of will and action, the products of internal processes—whether cognitive or volitional (plans, opinions, intentions)—are spoken of as deliberate outcomes of the process of “crystallizing.”

It is interesting to note that the notion of *gibush* is not applicable to the realm of emotion—one cannot say that “x has crystallized emotions” (*regashot megubashim*) or that one’s emotions became crystallized during the war (*regashot hitgabshu*), as one might say about opinions or world views.

This is not to say that the social state of *gibush* is affectively neutral. Its affectivity, however, refers to a “social emotion,” to the sense of togetherness natively known as “*hajahad*.” Whereas this socially emotional state has the

status of a cultural ideal, and is considered part of that domain of cultural life that can be promoted and shaped, personal feelings are left beyond the pale of the culture's semantics of order; they are nonsocial, natural, spontaneous. Clearly, a much more detailed consideration of the language of emotion in Israeli cultural discourse is required. For our purposes, it is interesting to note the parallelism between the exclusion of the family as a social unit and of personal feelings as a psychological domain. This points to the central affective and expressive role of the family as the seat of personal emotion in Israeli culture, as is suggested by such other linguistic practices as the use of nicknames among family members (Blum-Kulka & Katriel, 1990).

Another link between the *gibush* metaphor and the domain of public expressive conduct is its inclusion as part of the critical vocabulary of art critics in commentaries about works of art of all sorts. Valuing a work of art as having attained a state of *gibush* is a recognition of its distinctiveness of style, its well-formedness and "maturity." Personal expression can thus be brought within the ordered domain of a (potentially) well-crystallized world either by being channeled into the social domain or by being sifted through a formalizing artistic endeavor.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As the foregoing exploration of the semantics of *gibush* has indicated, speaking of the "crystallized" group or the "crystallized" person suggests the attainment of some idealized standard of form and order in the social and personal domain, respectively. While used for such diverse "products," the *gibush* metaphor implies a cultural conception of sociological and psychological processes as involving a movement of solidification, of in-gathering from a scattered state of "atomized" particles to a state of well-integrated stability.⁶

A significant differentiating feature in the semantics of the term relates to its use in denoting a spontaneous process as compared to its use in denoting a deliberate process. This difference is linguistically encoded—*gibush* is used as a transitive verb, *legabesh*, in the discourse about groups as well as in the discourse about volitional, intentional action, but as a reflexive verb, *lehitgabesh*, in ethnopsychological descriptions of the gradual process of self-formation. Notably, the family as a social unit, and the domain of emotion—both the seats of spontaneity and naturalness, as culturally defined—are excluded from the discourse of *gibush*. This discourse, thus, defines a distinctively shaped cultural semantic of sociality and personhood, providing a metaphorical language through which the social and the personal can be apprehended.

An interesting structural implication of this metaphorical isomorphism is that it reveals a cultural perspective that places the individual and the community in an "echoing" relationship, so to speak, so that the processes of individual

formation and group formation are encompassed by the same metaphorical descriptor. That the making of a person and the making of society are spoken in the same metaphorical language suggests the possibility of the mutual articulation of the individual and the group as contrasted with the modern Western conception of the fundamental individual / society opposition, according to which the realization of individuality is an embattled accomplishment associated with the rejection of group-based roles and positions (cf. Carbaugh 1988 for a recent discussion of this cultural perspective in the American context). The conception implicit in the *gibush* ethos is in tune with both traditional Jewish understandings of the individual / community dialectic (Prell-Foldes 1980), and with the Utopian conceptions of community cultivated in the nation-building ethos of modern Israel (Katriel 1986a; Shapira 1989).

Although the term *gibush* is commonly used to refer to psychological processes (of a cognitive and volitional nature), as well as to the overall process of identity formation, it is with reference to group experience that it is felt to be most poignant. Both the problematics and the promise of *gibush* as a social modality are keenly felt, and are discussed with relish by cultural members once the subject is broached.

In Israeli educational ideology the school class is a paradigmatic social unit in which the highly valorized social modality encapsulated by the *gibush* metaphor is to be played out. The spirit of *gibush* is infused in various ways and to varying degrees in other social settings as well—the youth movement, the army, the workplace, or the friendship network, but it is the school class that is the major model *of* and *for* this culturally valorized mode of group life in the Israeli setting.⁷ The reinterpretation of the notion of *gibush* in the military context in a way that underscores its “test semantics,” as I have called it, illustrates one form of the cultural dynamics in which this “key symbol” participates. This usage illustrates the extension and specialization of meaning the term has undergone, while its application to looser units of sociation, such as the friendship network, or the labeling of interpersonal communication training as *gibush* exercises, illustrate its expansion and adaptation to contexts defined in terms of interpersonal rather than group relations.

Thus, while the *gibush* metaphor has been claimed to encapsulate a well-established mode of social being in Israeli mainstream culture, it must nevertheless be seen as part of a continuously and subtly negotiated dialectical process in and through which a culturally ordered yet contingent articulation between individual and community is temporarily achieved. Having become such an integral part of everyday discourse, the term has lost its metaphorical aura, and it apparently takes a cultural analyst to nudge it out of its well-established discursive existence and bring out its many-layered meanings.

Another place where such shaking of accepted categories occurs is, of course, the realm of art. Let me, therefore, conclude by considering a very

imaginative and effective literary allusion to the notion of *gibush* as an underlying cultural metaphor, which can be found in an Israeli novel, *Daniel's Trials* by Itshak Orpaz (1986[1973]). This novel has been included in the senior high school literature curriculum, and has thus reached many young readers.⁸ I would like to claim that the novel's depiction of the protagonist's journey of self-discovery is rendered both intelligible and compelling through an imaginative appropriation of the crystallization metaphor and the symbolic world associated with it.

The novel was written following the 1967 war and tells the story of Daniel, a young Tel-Aviv University student, whose participation in the war culminates in a traumatic experience—he kills an enemy soldier at short range—and, upon his return, all shaken and despondent, he interrupts his studies and runs away from home. Searching for new bearings, he hides away on a desolate stretch of Tel-Aviv beach, a liminal place-out-of-place, where he undergoes an extraordinary experience of self-transformation, emerging not only with a renewed sense of self, but also invested with the power to heal.

The bulk of the novel is devoted to the depiction of Daniel's internal, psychic journey. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that it does so, *inter alia*, through the use of landscape imagery, which, as I will try to show, harks back to the *gibush* metaphor, and thereby helps readers interpret Daniel's rather outlandish rite of passage in terms that are commensurate with cultural conceptions of the self-formation process. Indeed, the novel unfolds between the two dominant poles that demarcate its "scene"—between the daunting legend-laced rock that stands immutable off the coastline on the one hand, and the ever restless, shifty sands of the beach on the other. The solid rock and the scattered grains of sand represent the two poles of the crystallization process that Daniel must undergo. Thus, Daniel's movement of identity formation—his "pulling himself together," as it were—is conveyed through a literalization, or de-metaphorization, of the cultural metaphor of *gibush* translated into an aspect of scene (Burke 1969[1945]).

When Daniel first arrives at the beach, he tries to swim to a rock off the coast—the pole of solidity that would mark the end point of his journey, but is painfully unsuccessful: the piece of rock he tries to hang on to disintegrates in his hand and he finds himself thrown onto the sand, exhausted and delirious. As he recuperates and begins to make a home for himself on the sands of the beach, he realizes "that the rock would not come to him and that he had to go to the rock. And his journey had only just begun" (p. 71).

The culmination of this journey is punctuated by a mystical experience in the course of which the process of the crystallizing of identity is accomplished: "His hand was stretched in front of him and a few grains of sand were left in it. He fixed his eyes on one of them, and it grew and became larger and larger. And as it became larger, it opened up to the sun, as a crystal,

and the light was streaming through it and breaking into a thousand shapes, and then streaming again into these shapes. And Daniel's thoughts, as transparent as a crystal, began to move as well . . ." (p. 136).

Looking at the grain of sand he feels himself *becoming* a grain of sand, and in so doing he both embraces and transcends the polarities between which his beach existence—just like the metaphor of *gibush*—play themselves out. At that moment of illumination, he is able to affirm that there is flow in fixity, eternity in the passing moment, rocklike solidity in the frailty of the grain of sand. He emerges from the experience a re-formed person, and finds he is now able to swim to the rock, to come in touch with its newfound solidity, which now resonates with his newfound sense of self. The movement of personal "crystallization" has thus been metaphorically completed, and Daniel is ready to go home, to forge his new place in society, healed and giving.

That Daniel's journey of self-discovery naturally leads him back to society is a statement that makes good cultural sense in an ideational context permeated with the *gibush* metaphor, with both its personal and social ramifications. Finding oneself and finding one's social vocation are conceived of as one and the same process, a process tellingly translated into a language of place and scene, as captioned also by the epigraph Orpaz has chosen, which reads: "Sooner or later we must face ourselves, and start our journey home." This is a conception well understood and consistently cultivated in Israeli cultural discourse, whether articulated in its official rhetoric, in everyday discourse or in artistic expressions. The process of self-formation, in this conception, implies a movement between sands and rock, one leading both to personal knowledge, to a sense of place, and to a sense of social purpose. In my reading of *Daniel's Trials*, then, it is through the implicit use of the *gibush* metaphor that the author locates the protagonist's journey within a culturally intelligible frame. Part of what makes the story of Daniel so compelling is that, by invoking the root metaphor of crystallization, the author articulates the possibility and shape of the innermost process of self-formation in a cultural idiom that is both credible and resonant for Israeli readers. While in its everyday discursive uses "*gibush*" has lost much of its metaphorical aura, its artistic exploitation in this novel works to revitalize it by bringing into relief the two poles of self-contained solidity and open-ended dispersal, order and chaos, in a concrete language of visual imagery, the rock and the sand. In this, the novel functions as a liminoid phenomenon (Turner 1982): as we accompany Daniel on his transformative journey, his rite of passage, we are both "instructed" in how to *think* and how to *feel* about major categories of experience. In responding to the novel's imagery, readers' fundamental conceptions of sense and order, which are part of the taken-for granted, cultural logic that underlies both everyday and literary Israeli discourses of *gibush* are re-invoked, re-vitalized and, perhaps, subtly re-shaped.

Chapter 2: *Gibush*:

1. The data for the school aspects of this study were collected during a two year involvement in an individualized instruction project (1976–78), which involved a restructuring of classroom activities and a devaluation of a sense of *gibush*, as explicitly noted in teachers' worried comments. Having become attuned to the distinct tonalities of talk about the school class, further data was obtained over a period of four years (1980–1984) through participant observation and interviewing of various participants in the educational scene. In addition, written explications of the notion of *gibush* by twenty-two ninth graders and eighteen sixth graders attending two middle-class schools in the city of Haifa were obtained. Additional insights came from documents (e.g. school journals, Ministry of Education directives, teachers' published memoirs) in which a concern with "social value education" was thematized. This data was used in cumulative fashion in an attempt to construct a reading of the school class as a cultural category.

2. The term "homeroom" teacher is a best-possible approximation to the Hebrew notion of *mehaneh* (educator). See D. Gordon & W. Ackerman, "The Mechanech: Role Function and Myth in Israeli Secondary School," *Comparative Education Review* (1984) 28:105–115.

3. See also Y. Oren, *The Theory of Social Education* (Tel-Aviv: Yahad, 1984).

4. Jacob Katriel, personal communication.

5. Many examples of the uses of *gibush* are found in A. Liebllich's *Aviv Shnot* [The Spring of Their Years] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1987). This is an account of experience in the military service, which is based on conversations with Israeli men. G. Aran, "Parachuting," *American Journal of Sociology* (1974) 80(1):124–152. Aran's study of a paratrooper's unit similarly underscores the manipulation of group solidarity as related to its power to exert social control over its individual members, describing a state in which "social cohesion is further enhanced while individuality disappears" (ibid.: p. 131). Cf. also C. W. Greenbaum's, "The Small Group Under the Gun..." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (1979) 15:392–405. It discusses the socio-psychological implications of primary group cohesiveness in the Israeli army.

6. Several people, upon hearing the analysis presented here, have pointed out to me that the *gibush* metaphor also captures the basic movement of ingathering of Jews in the land of Israel. I have heard the term used with reference to the need to "crystallize" the nation in times of crisis and low public morale.

The terms most commonly used in this context, however, are “unity” and “unify.”

7. The term ‘*gibush*’ is illustrated by reference to the school class in a Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary published as early as 1943. The symbolic standing of the school class and the social relations cultivated in its context for the wider culture has been explicitly affirmed through the production of a rather pathetic series of TV programs that depict class reunions, portions of which were aired in 1989. Throughout the paper, however, I have talked of “mainstream” Israeli culture of schooling. The experience of several years of teaching in a high school in a development town in the southern part of the country, where most of my students came from North African “disadvantaged” backgrounds, suggests to me that the ethos of *gibush* did not play a central role in the schooling of disadvantaged children as it did in that of the middle-class children referred to in this study. Emphasis there was put on the academic aspects of schooling as a tool towards social mobility in a society implicitly recognized to be governed by class considerations rather than by a Utopian image of sociality. Although this pragmatic approach was more justified, to the extent that it prevailed it also served—if unintentionally and subtly—to exclude these students from intensive exposure to a central dimension of the Israeli ethos.

8. In its Hebrew title—*Masa Daniel*—the word *masa* is a homonym; as it is spelled in the book title, actually, it means “journey” rather than “trials,” as given in the English translation. *Masa*, spelled in yet a third way, would mean “burden.” Of course all three meanings capture some of the journey / burden / trials that make up Daniel’s tale, a multivocality that is unfortunately lost in the translation.

3

Kiturim: Griping as a Verbal Ritual In Israeli Discourse

INTRODUCTION

As many Israelis concede, and some lament, the speech mode known in colloquial Israeli Hebrew as *kiturim* or *kuterai*, whose closest English equivalent would be “griping,” has become an ever-present speech activity in informal encounters among Israelis. So much so that Friday night gatherings in Israeli homes, which form the major context for middle-class Israelis to get together socially, have earned the label *mesibot kiturim*, that is, “griping parties.”

The overall flavor of these parties is conveyed by the following lines from an article by a prominent Israeli journalist:

About a year ago a group of us were sitting at a friend's house and, as is the habit among Israelis, we were griping about the situation. The immediate pretext for this collective bathing in our national-frustration-puddle was a rumor which circulated at the time concerning some instance of corruption in an important government agency (and which, incidentally, later proved to be largely untrue) and some half-insane political act of a marginal group that manages to conquer the newspaper headlines from time to time (*Ma'ariv*, 29 Nov. 1980).

A few months later, the same author talks about “the masochistic griping parties held on Friday nights, which more than anything else reflect the attitudes of the public” (*Ma'ariv*, 24 April, 1981).

Although the Israeli griping mode finds its primordial expression in the type of speech event known as a “griping party,” it is by no means restricted to this prototypical context. It is a speech activity well-represented in many more casual and transient contexts. In what follows, I will delineate the structure and functions of griping in Israeli discourse, arguing that it constitutes a well-bounded and readily recognizable type of communicative event, both in its more and in its less paradigmatic forms. Moreover, I will not only argue that griping has evolved as an implicitly patterned interactional routine in Israeli social life, but also that its import and functions can be best understood by regarding it as a verbal ritual.

The term “ritual” as used here refers to patterned symbolic action whose function it is to reaffirm participants' relationship to a culturally sanctioned

“sacred object” (or “unquestionable” in the secularized language of contemporary anthropology [Moore and Myerhoff 1977]). According to R. Firth, symbolic actions of this kind “are communicative, but the information they convey refers to the control and regularization of a social situation rather than to some descriptive fact” (1973b:301).

Thus, whereas the “fire rituals” discussed in the next chapter are part of the officially recognized ceremonial idiom of contemporary Israel, and their ritual dimensions are clearly evident, griping parties are unofficial, unrecognized ceremonies of communal participation, in and through which the *gibush*-ethos plays itself out. This chapter, therefore, further explores the communicative contexts in which the Israeli accent on group solidarity and a collective orientation find their expression. It takes us from the more institutionalized rhetorics and ceremonial contexts of public life to the privatized domains of people’s living rooms, where a ritualized idiom of communally oriented expression of discontent has evolved.

The highly collectivistic orientation grounding griping rituals is brought out when they are compared to ritualized episodes for the expression of discontent, which are part of the American cultural repertoire. In a previous study of such episodic sequences and their attendant communication mode (Katriel & Phillipsen 1981), a similar attempt was made to apply the ritual metaphor to the description of the speech event we have dubbed the “communication ritual,” to which Americans refer by the locutions “sit down and talk” or “discuss our relationship.” This ritual pertains to the domain of intimate relationships and provides the major context for members of the culture to construct as well as to validate personal identities and generate intimacy through the form of talk known as “communication,” which is culturally interpreted as “supportive speech.” Throughout this chapter, wherever applicable, I will draw comparisons between the forms and functions associated with the American Communication Ritual, on the one hand, and the Israeli Griping Ritual on the other.

The observations contained in this chapter are based both on my own intuitions as a “native griper” and on discussions with over fifty informants of a predominantly middle-class background, of whom I recorded spontaneously expressed attitudes towards griping, descriptions of actual griping, as well as elicited responses to various appropriate and inappropriate uses of the term *lekater* “to gripe” and its morphologically related terms, such as *kuter* (which stands for an “habitual griper”) and *kuter miktzo’i* (which indicates a “professional griper,” i.e., a hopeless one). Following the article’s initial publication in Hebrew (Katriel 1982), it received some press coverage and I have had occasion to discuss it on numerous occasions with other self-acknowledged native gripers, who have read it with interest and some amusement. Both the original research procedures and the subsequent responses have

provided the data base for the analytic description of gripping as a distinct type of communicative mode, and for the outline of the symbolic structuring involved in its ritualistic enactment.

The colloquial term *lekater* is explicated in the popular dictionary of Hebrew slang compiled by Dan Ben-Amotz and Netiva Ben-Yehuda (1972), where it is rendered as "to complain" and is illustrated with an example that can be roughly translated as "Stop gripping, nothing will come of talk." It is said to be a Yiddish borrowing, but its etymology is not specified. Several informants, however, were familiar with the word's history and noted that it has sprung from the Yiddish word *kuter*, which denotes a male cat who is whining even while mounting a female, thus giving expression to an essential, basically unwarranted plaintive stance. The cat's gripping disposition and its metaphorical extension to the human domain were attributed to a generally defensive orientation, nourished by the belief that one should not appear overly contented so as not to attract the devil's attention (as happened, for example, to the biblical figure of Job). People also tended to see the gripping mode as an expression of a "national character," counting evidence as ancient as the exodus from Egypt. Thus, in its folkloristic roots, gripping is viewed as part of the national ethos, constituting both a spontaneous expression of lack of faith and a culturally sanctioned form of "preventive treatment."

Most informants, it should be noted, were not aware that *kuter* was a borrowing from Yiddish and related the word either to the Hebrew word *katar* "steam engine" or to the word *ktoret* "incense."¹ Both words conjure up the image of smoke and of the blowing out of surplus, waste material, which is quite in line with the way the gripping mode is generally conceptualized. In brief, the family of words related morphologically and semantically to *lekater* is felt by many Israelis to be a colloquial form with native roots rather than a foreign sounding borrowing. This is indicated both by the morphological productiveness of the root stem and by the semantic motivation it is felt to have.

The slang dictionary rendering of *lekater* as "to complain" is not upheld by native speakers of Hebrew, who draw a clear distinction between the two words, indicating that, although both verbs denote plaintive speech acts, they cannot be used interchangeably. Some of the semantic differences between the Hebrew equivalents of "to gripe" and "to complain" will be brought out by the forthcoming analysis.

Despite the general recognition of the long-standing cultural roots of the gripping mode, many informants pointed out that the family of terms related to *lekater* has gained currency in colloquial Hebrew mainly during the past two decades or so (some confidently dated its emergence in the days following the 1967 war; two clearly remembered learning it as a new word on returning to Israel after a few years' absence around that time). Informants also noted that gripping has become increasingly salient in recent years; some even referred to it as "the trademark of Israeli society."

This is corroborated by a passage from an autobiographical book by Ben-Yehuda (1981) that depicts the ethos of the *Palmah*, a major division of the pre-independence mainstream army. The passage describes the wholehearted commitment and sense of unquestionable rightfulness that filled the lives of the youngsters who had volunteered to assume the role of the “realizers,” through whose deeds the Zionist dream for national revival would come true:

“We sang with great enthusiasm, danced energetically, went out to camps, climbed mountains, prepared whole-heartedly to ‘realize’ . . . and we were happy, content with what we had, pleased with our goals, at peace with everything. . . . Nobody complained or criticized, nobody slandered, or noticed anything negative. We didn’t speak ill of ourselves. We didn’t speak ill of our leaders, and this was no mistake. We didn’t comment on anything. The very notion of ‘criticism’ was a negative concept. Absolutely negative. Like throwing mud. Making filthy. Slander and griping (*kiturim*)—these concepts didn’t even exist. In the state-to-become, among us, the ardent pioneers, there was not the slightest trace of these concepts” (Ben-Yehuda 1981:131).

This description of “then” is written against the background of the present. It is the prevalence of the griping mode in present-day Israel that hovers at the edges of this picture of enthusiastic, committed realizers who are actively engaged in the pursuit of communal goals. Conversely, it is the real or imagined memory of this wholehearted, “gripeless” commitment and active participation in communal life that nourishes some of the frustration that gives rise to griping. The above passage, then, suggests that the rise of the griping mode, indeed the very coinage of the term, has to do with an ideological crisis, some dimensions of which are due to the fact that, as A. Rubinstein (1977) puts it, social cohesiveness in Israel nowadays is predicated on a common fate rather than on a common faith. It is this common fate, and the problems surrounding it, which serve as a source of communal identification that griping rituals draw on in dramatizing members’ experience of, and commitment to the collective.

The griping ritual and the communication ritual are, thus, functionally comparable in that they each provide a major context for members of their respective cultures to give expression to, and form an experience of, a central problem area in their lives. The topic of each is, accordingly, a problem; but while the communication ritual addresses a problem whose focus is the ‘self’ in an attempt to reaffirm its standing as the culture’s “unquestionable,” the griping ritual locates the problem in the public domain and in its members’ participation in it, reaffirming the status of the collective as the culture’s “unquestionable.”

I will now turn to a description of the structure and functions of griping as a ritualized speech mode in Israeli communal conversation. As was done

in the case of the communication ritual, I will use a subset of D. Hymes' (1972b; 1974a) components of speech events to describe the "structure of experience" a communicative event must manifest for middle-class Israelis to identify it as having involved "gripping" rather than, say, "complaining" or "chatting."²

THE GRIPING RITUAL

The speech components to be used in organizing the description of the Griping Ritual are the following: topic, purpose, channel, participants, setting, key, act sequence.

Topic

One never gripes about something one feels good about: the topic of griping must always be a problem. As noted, the problem griped about has its focus in some aspect of that external reality Israelis refer to with the sweeping term *hamatzav*—the Situation writ large. The topic may be a more general one, such as the nation's economy or the public morale, or a more "localized" one, such as teachers' low salaries or the quality of one's neighborhood school. Personal problems can become the topic of griping only insofar as they are incorporated into the discussion of some aspect of the current Situation (e.g. as "an example of" or "evidence for") in which case these personal problems are dressed in a public language and presented, so to speak, in disguise.

Some informants consequently claimed that habitual gripers tend to project (and blame) their personal problems onto external factors rather than taking responsibility for their own lives. This is generally said in the anti-gripping mode, which will be discussed later. Whether this accusation is warranted or not, we might at least argue that the griping ritual channels the expression of discontent, providing an established pattern for the structuring of plaintive talk in informal encounters, so that feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction that might lead Americans to examine their personal lives through enactments of the communication ritual would tend to be cast in the form of the griping ritual in informal encounters among Israelis.

Notably, not all aspects of the general Situation are proper candidates as the topic of griping: we are unlikely to say that the inhabitants of a border settlement are griping about the frequent shelling they are subjected to, although this is part of their Situation *par excellence*. This shelling is conceived as being externally inflicted and outside the control of anybody who could be thought to be part of "us," directly or indirectly. Similarly, as one informant put it, when people who are reasonably well-off complain about inflation, we call it griping, but when a jobless father of twelve does so, we do not. This differentiation in the application of the term "gripping" relates to the sense of justification felt to attend the complaint. When a complaint is felt to be justified,

plaintive talk about it would not be labeled griping. On the other hand, the foreign policy of the U.S. might be subject to objections or criticism, but it is not likely to serve as the topic of griping. If it does, it will most likely be interpreted as an indirect comment on the inadequacy of Israeli foreign policy since griping, unlike complaining, is essentially interpreted as self-addressed. Grippers are basically consumers of their own plaintive talk.

The problem Israelis tend to gripe about, then, is a problem related to the domain of public life, and one which they feel society should have been able to deal with through some form of collective or institutional social effort. Israelis' disposition towards griping seems to be nourished by a deep sense of frustration related to their perceived inability to partake in social action and communal life in a way that would satisfy the high level of commitment and involvement that characterized the small community of "realizers" as described in the excerpt from Ben-Yehuda's book. The prevalence of griping suggests an overwhelming, culturally sanctioned concern with the public domain, on the one hand, coupled with a marked absence of satisfying participation channels, on the other.

In sum, the topic of griping is constrained in a number of ways: it must be a problem related to a more general or local Situation, that is, that shared fate around which Israeli communal life at large, or some more localized aspect of it, revolve, and on which participants' sense of solidarity is most clearly predicated. However, not all aspects of the Situation can be properly griped about. Griping is generally restricted to problems with the fabric of Israeli social life that are basically within control, problems that "somebody around here" (though not the grippers themselves) should be able to do something about. Problems that are felt to be overwhelming thrusts of fate or the subject of fully justified discontent would not be proper topics of griping.

Purpose

Most informants noted that the function of griping is to relieve pent up tensions and frustrations. This therapeutic orientation is similar to that of many Americans towards the communication ritual. In both cases, downplaying the sense of difficulty experienced by a fellow member of the culture—as expressed by an attempt to initiate either the griping or the communication ritual—would be interpreted as a rejection. Thus, responses of the form "I don't see what you mean; I'm quite pleased with the way the relationship is going" in the one case, or "People gripe about inflation but the standard of living is so much higher than it used to be" in the other, are not experienced as attempts at encouragement, but rather as refusals to validate the problem bearer, despite the content of the message.

There is, however, a difference between the kind of "therapy" provided by "communicating" among Americans and by "griping" among Israelis.

While communicating is actually perceived as talk that constitutes the solution to the problem forming the topic of the ritual, griping is perceived as an activity that constitutes an *anti-solution* to the problem griped about. Rather than being the preferred action strategy for dealing with the problem invoked, *talk* in the case of the griping ritual is seen as the dispreferred strategy: it is because grippers perceive the problem as being beyond their power to solve, but cannot rid themselves of their overall concern with problems of this type, that they opt for the dispreferred channel of talk in dealing with it.³

This cultural evaluation of talk as counterproductive, as a dispreferred alternative to social action, is epitomized in the often heard injunction: "Stop talking / griping, and do something." This injunction apparently lies behind recent institutionalized efforts to provide participation channels for the solution of communal problems, which have taken the form of highly dramatized fund-raising drives conducted through the mass media. The money is raised for causes that enjoy a high degree of consensus (the children of Cambodia, a special defense fund, disabled children). The economic need is recognized by all, but the impact and drama attending the drive is felt by many to go far beyond the monetary side of it. The donation of money, whatever the sum, is framed in terms of a rhetoric of participation. In the words of a major character of such a drama—a TV personality—as they appeared in countless previews of one of these events: "Let nobody find himself in the unpleasant position when getting to work the morning after the fund-raising drive of having to admit he is the only one who hasn't given a donation." Being in such a position is thus cast as tantamount to being a nonparticipant in Israeli communal life. Donating is interpreted as partaking in the life of the community: attesting to one's commitment to the public interest through the form of social action provided by the occasion.

That major events of this type are carried out on TV is particularly significant: these positively oriented anti-griping rituals are brought right into the main sanctuary of the griping ritual, the living room of the "average" Israeli, where he/she had spent many a Friday night "sitting and griping," that is, being socially useless. Also, the media, and TV in particular, are generally accused of being enemies of the public morale; they are said to be digging up all the Negative, painting a picture of a world one can really do nothing about but gripe. In fact, news items are often employed as starters in a griping chain. Here, they have blessedly reversed their role.

In addition to its overt, ventilating function, the griping ritual has a less recognized integrative function on its hidden agenda. In probing their experience of griping as a communicative event, people mentioned the sense of *tzavta* "togetherness" that it engendered. The proposition that griping produces solidarity was never contradicted. Some informants maintained that this sense of *tzavta* made griping a lot of fun for them. This is particularly notable if

we remember that griping is usually referred to in derogatory terms. Even when not talked about as “fun,” however, griping was never relegated metaphorically to the domain of “work”; in this, it is unlike “communicating,” which is conceptualized metaphorically as work-related (along with other concepts in the interpersonal domain; thus, you *work* on your *communication*, you *work* on your *self*, and you *work* on your *relationship*).

Indeed, griping and joke telling are two major, spontaneously employed interactional resources for Israelis to engender *gibush* in private settings by reaffirming their common fate (cf. Shokeid 1988).⁴ In joke telling, Israelis often poke fun at themselves and their Situation. In times of crisis, such as war, both griping and joke telling disappear from the social scene, as cohesion is spontaneously achieved by virtue of the criticalness of the moment. Moreover, those topics, which are too serious, or sacred, or delicate to be joked about, will not be appropriate topics for the griping ritual either.

Griping and joke telling are the two major types of speech activities that give form and predictability to the domain of everyday informal relationships among Israelis; they are the cornerstones of the mundane interpersonal task of socializing in communally approved ways. Someone I can gripe with or joke with shares with me at least one dimension of social experience, this shared dimension being both reflected in and produced by the possibility of griping or exchanging a joke (cf. Heilman 1982, ch. 6).

These two speech activities, as they become crystallized into culturally shared patterns of sociation, are also similar in their larger societal consequences. From a critical standpoint we might say that the temporary ventilation they provide has the secondary effect of contributing to the maintenance of the status quo. This is particularly paradoxical in the case of griping, which on the one hand involves a focus on problem areas through the articulation of discontent, but on the other hand serves to increase grippers' tolerance for the problems griped about, thereby contributing to their persistence.

Channel

The Griping Ritual typically involves face-to-face oral engagements, although phone conversations and perhaps personal letters might qualify as well.

Participants

The Griping Ritual typically takes place among friends, casual acquaintances, or even strangers, unlike the Communication Ritual, which is typically enacted among potential intimates. The less familiar the participants are with each other, the more general the theme that functions as the topic of the ritual. A general griping comment about the Situation is a ready-to-hand opener for a conversation between unacquainted Israelis who thereby legitimate their entrance into a state of talk by invoking and affirming their shared communal bond.

Gripping can proceed undisturbed as long as there are no outsiders, that is, non-Israelis such as tourists or newcomers, around. The very same talk that would be considered incidental griping among Israelis turns into malicious slander, *hashmatza*, when uttered in the presence of an outsider. The reason for this is that Israelis know very well that griping should not be taken at face value, that it commands a special interpretive norm according to which the referential function of the talk is, as it were, suspended. Gripping is not really an information-oriented speech activity. Although purporting to be a response to the Situation "as it is," it is by no means a reflection of reality. Outsiders are unlikely to be familiar with this interpretive convention, and may take the talk too literally, constructing for themselves a skewed picture of life in Israel.

Thus, a number of informants related anecdotes describing cases in which a group of loosely acquainted Israelis discovered that one of its members was a tourist or a prospective newcomer after griping had been underway for a while. This discovery generated a great deal of embarrassment as the "outsider" took the talk to be informative and literal, while the "insiders" were aware of its non-informative, ritual function. The link between the role of the outsider and that of the non-griper has been explicitly brought out in a journalist's humorous summing up of her homecoming experience after a prolonged stay in the United States. One of the sources of alienation from one's surroundings, she says, is the fact that, "one is not yet an active participant in griping parties. One still listens and finds it hard to believe the stories. One cannot yet grasp how come—if the country has it so bad—its citizens, who are griping all around us, seem to have it so good" (Tamar Avidar, *Ma'ariv*, 5 Aug. 1981).

In a similar vein, griping is not considered a verbal activity to be encouraged in the presence of children who, like tourists and newcomers, have not been fully socialized into the adult griping mode, and may be vulnerable to the content of the talk. Some informants noted the cumulative effect of exposure to griping on children and youths: the picture of the Situation they are presented with is so exaggeratedly bleak, the borderline between informative and non-informative talk so fuzzy that they "don't know what to think"—so goes the claim.

We might rephrase this by saying that many Israelis find themselves gearing their talk to the topical format that the structure of the Gripping Ritual suggests. Consequently, the Situation, as constructed through the talk about it, is perceived as more and more lamentable, that is, more and more amenable to griping. This state of affairs generates a sense of discrepancy between reality and the talk about it, and griping thus becomes a problem in the collective perception of reality, to whose aggravation all Israelis unwittingly contribute as they "sit down and gripe." In fact, the most immediate solution to the problem of griping that is proposed by anti-grippers involves a change in

perceptual emphasis rather than direct social action. It takes the form of a call to point out and talk about “the great and beautiful things that have been accomplished in this country” and to avoid a one-sided emphasis on the Negative.

A different type of constraint on participation in the Griping Ritual concerns more localized problems: if, say, a group of office employees are sitting and griping about their working conditions, the approach of their boss is most likely to silence them. In the presence of the person(s), who may hold the solution to the problem griped about, the same talk turns into complaining. This awareness of the potential change in the status of the talk lies behind many embarrassed conversational shifts in such contexts.

Setting

As indicated, the typical settings for the enacting of the Griping Ritual are Friday night gatherings in private homes, but griping is certainly not restricted to them. They must, however, be settings in which participants can make their talk a focal activity and in which people, who are not potential participants, are excluded.

Key

The key or tone that prevails in the Griping Ritual is that of plaintiveness and frustration, accompanied by a sense of entrapment and enmeshment in the event itself. Thus, informants said they felt themselves unwillingly “sliding” into the griping mode, expressing bewilderment at their own participation in it, since they held a very low opinion of this speech mode.

One important aspect of griping as far as its “key” is concerned is that participants in the ritual should achieve a synchronization of their emotive display in terms of the degree of frustration they express, so that the enacting of the ritual is felt to be reasonably well orchestrated. When this is the case, there emerges a sense of “togetherness” or solidarity, which forms a secondary strand in the key of the Griping Ritual. An extreme example of lack of synchronization is observed when a member of a gathering engaged in griping does not take part in the ritual, consistently keeping his or her silence. The non-participant’s behavior is construed as a critical comment on the verbal conduct of the grippers in attendance and tends to give rise to discomfort, if not resentment (much like the case of the non-drinker in a drinking party).

Loss of such synchronization is often accompanied by a disruption of the Griping Party. As some of the informants said, there is that feeling that griping had “gone too far”: either the topics touched upon were considered too delicate to be griped about, or the cumulative effect of the griping that had been going on became too oppressive for the participants in the ritual who felt they needed a change of key.

Gripping, unlike communicating in its role as supportive speech in interpersonal relations among Americans, is a speech activity deeply entrenched in the domain of casualness and triviality. This difference in the status of gripping and communicating as speech activities is also detectable in bodily postures that accompany these two rituals, and their tolerance for side involvements a la E. Goffman (1967): one can slouch and gripe, but one can hardly slouch and “communicate”; one can gripe while doing dishes, but one cannot accomplish the purposeful, concerted activity of communicating under these circumstances. A similar difference is observed between “complaining” and “gripping”: plaintive speech produced while slouching is more likely to be interpreted as gripping than as complaining. The same goes for plaintive speech produced while doing the dishes. For plaintive talk to be heard as a complaint, it must be addressed to an agent, who can act toward the solution of the problem referred to; the talk must be interpreted as a concerted, purposeful speech activity commanding the speaker’s full commitment.

Act Sequence

While the unfolding of the Communication Ritual has been shown to follow a linear pattern, proceeding from one phase of the talk to the next, the sequential organization of the Gripping Ritual can be said to follow a spiral pattern, proceeding from one round of talk to another. This may prove to be a more general distinction between communicative encounters oriented towards problem solving and those oriented toward the production of solidarity: the internal structure of the Gripping Ritual is reminiscent of the case of joking or anecdotal exchanges that are similarly structured around a common theme, for example, jokes about national characters, with each contribution linked to the others through the relation of “more of the same.” Among strangers, the Gripping Ritual tends to proceed in a centripetal pattern, from the more general to the more local theme; among well-acquainted people, the opposite pattern is possible, and often more natural: the talk proceeds in a centrifugal pattern, from a more local to a more general topic.

The overall structural differences between the sequential organization of the Gripping and the Communication Ritual are brought out when we consider what it would take for a participant to join either type of ritual in mid-session: for this to be properly accomplished in the case of the Communication Ritual, the talk must come to a halt and current participants will have to retrace and fill the newcomer in on what came before. In the case of the Gripping Ritual, all a new arrival has to know is the general theme currently engaged in. Even if he or she repeats some of what came before, it would not be a great disaster, just another expression of shared ground.

The gripping ritual, like the communication ritual, is usually initiated by a particular participant who voices a complaint of greater or lesser generality.

This is the *initiation phase*. A typical “opener” is a report or a comment on some news item that illustrates some unfavorable aspect of the Situation. A comment that elaborates on the opener, or suggests some comparable item, functions as an *acknowledgment phase*, indicating the participants’ willingness to enact the ritual (or else the attempt to enact it would be aborted). This phase triggers a “chain-effect” of individual contributions which are, by and large, more of the same. The ritual often proceeds by progression from one sub-theme to the next, each sub-theme dominating a “round” of talk; the rounds combine to form the aforementioned “spiral structure.”

Typical forms for terminating the ritual involve standardized ways for dramatizing the participants’ shared fate with such expressions as “That’s life,” or “It’s no joke, things are getting worse all the time,” or “The situation is real lousy.” This would be the case of “smooth” terminations. At other times, the ritual is disrupted with the loss of emotive synchronization as described in the discussion of its “key.” A special version of such terminations are outrageous suggestions such as: “We should blow up the Ministry of Education!” in capping off a griping session devoted to the failings of schools, or “We should shut down the state, and that’s it,” in concluding a general griping session about the Situation. The exaggeration heard in such statements makes them particularly effective as terminations of the Griping Ritual: they signal to the hearers that the talk has come to the far edge of reasonableness and there is no point in going on. At the same time, they throw a rather ironic light on the griping that preceded them, and suggest to the participants in the griping exchange that it should not have been taken at face value.

Finally, let me briefly note that the Griping Ritual has given rise to two subsidiary verbal modes that have become increasingly salient on the Israeli social scene: I have dubbed one of them *Kitur-al* “meta-griping” and the other *al-kitur* “anti-griping.”⁵

Meta-griping is itself an instance of griping, often taking the form of griping about the low morale among Israelis, as manifested, of course, in their disposition to “sit and gripe.” The increasing salience of meta-griping in public discourse seems to indicate a growing awareness of the griping mode’s underlying ideological erosion that marks our time and age. The purpose of meta-griping is to help grippers extricate themselves from the griping mode by drawing attention to questions of morale and their social-communicative manifestations. Since it is itself still located within the griping province, this form of talk is not likely to be effective in achieving the persuasive goals it set for itself.

The anti-griping mode, which was briefly illustrated in relation to the fund-raising dramas staged through the local media, is similarly geared toward the containment of the griping activity and its counterproductive implications.

Unlike meta-gripping, it is optimistic in tone, and is epitomized in the already mentioned injunction to "Stop griping and do something"; it may be said to represent a non-gripping variant of meta-gripping. This communicative mode is amply represented in public discourse as is exemplified by a huge advertisement or announcement issued by an independent group of citizens calling for "Renewal and Change," which appeared in the evening paper *Ma'ariv* (1 Feb. 1981). Its large-lettered title WE ARE TO BLAME is an attention-getter precisely because of its implied, contrastive reference to the customary griping mode (which involves laying the blame on unspecified others); its proper interpretation is predicated on our familiarity with the Gripping Ritual. It is interesting to note that the announcement sketches three alternatives faced by members of Israeli society: (a) to become stagnant, (b) to run away, and (c) to act. Obviously, readers are called upon to choose the third alternative, *viz* social action, which is the generally acknowledged alternative to griping. Let me just mention that "stagnation" and "escapism" were the very terms used by my American informants to refer to the state of "lack of communication"; here, the same metaphors refer to the state of lack of social action, typically filled in by griping in Israeli society. Thus, from the point of view of anti-grippers, griping occupies a place comparable in import to the state of "lack of communication" in some corners of American society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have tried to show that griping has evolved as a standardized, pervasive communicative mode among middle-class Israelis and that, as such, it constitutes a readily available pattern for the articulation of communally oriented plaintive talk in a considerable section of the community. It was pointed out that in the context around which griping revolves, talk is viewed as an ineffective social strategy, as the antithesis to social action.

One result of this is that any attempt by a rather dissatisfied group of people to clarify issues through discussions of problems pertaining to the social domain may be labeled as "gripping" and dismissed as such. A well-known manipulation of the format implicit in the Gripping Ritual occurs in the military where commanders will assemble their soldiers for what is known as "*erev kuterai*" or "gripping evening": in such contexts any justified complaint addressed to the commanders themselves is predefined as a "gripe," that is, as unwarranted and self-addressed. The function of the event is thus seen as strictly that of ventilation.

Throughout the paper, I have drawn comparisons between the Gripping Ritual as studied here, and the Communication Ritual, which in a previous paper has been argued to be a central communicative event for many Americans nowadays. Both rituals share the task of dramatizing major life problems. They both provide a preferred social context for the crystallization of feelings of

frustration, on the one hand, and a sense of (personal or communal) identity, on the other. The analysis has emphasized contextual constraints that govern the enacting of the rituals, while paying particular attention to the expressive, non-referential dimensions of the talk and the specialized interpretive norms they give rise to.

An intriguing, updated angle on the griping mode and its place in contemporary Israeli society was suggested by a young journalist, Doron Rosenblum, in an article in the weekly *Koteret Rashit* (7 Jan. 1987, 20–21). In it he announces the death of the folkloristic image of the Israeli griper, underscoring the sense of social commitment that is implicit in the Israeli griping mode. He contends that Israelis don't gripe anymore—not because of a newfound sense of satisfaction and avenues for action—but because the “mythological gripers” of past times, with their moralistic aspirations, have become part of the corrupt and corrupting establishment, and are as unconcerned about the common good as they are about their personal integrity. The disaffection that permeated those “mythological living-room conversations” has persuaded the generation raised after the establishment of the State that they live in the shadow of great, pure, and moralistic—personal and societal—possibilities, ones that were lost to the present generation somewhere along the line. Ironically, the griping mode itself is here presented as a dethroned symbol of an idealized past associated with an outdated version of the Israeli ethos of collective, committed dedication to unrealized communal goals and values. The new Israeli archetype that has come to replace the moralistic *kuter* of Friday-night griping parties, says Rosenblum, is the amoral, not even party-loyal politician, who is “nobody's *freier*” (sucker), who will not let the collective impinge on his or her personal interests, who is not, we might say, yearning for experiences that will help him relive moments of *gibush*. In this contemporary version of the story of *kiturim*, then, griping is no longer the deplorable, if perhaps understandable, speech mode of the communally disempowered, but rather the nostalgic symbol of communal engagement, not unlike the fire rituals that punctuate Israeli ceremonial calendar, and to which we turn in the next chapter.

As I have argued earlier, griping is at one and the same time a gesture of participation grounded in “caring” (*ihpatijut*) and the value of *gibush*, and an acknowledgment of personal ineffectiveness vis-à-vis the demands of public action. In fact, by providing privatized occasions for ventilation in the domestic sphere, griping rituals perform a highly conservative function at the societal level. Even though the griping individuals orient themselves to that which they feel needs to be changed, the well-contained frame within which the need for change is addressed decrees that things will remain the same, that individuals' disaffection with the way things are will not become a socially moving force.

An important implication of the analysis presented here is that informal verbal rituals of the kind studied here, just like their more stylized counterparts,

are both shaped by and formative of the sociocultural experience of the individuals participating in them. Like the fire rituals discussed in the next chapter, so the Gripping Rituals mundanely found in Israeli homes reflect and enact members' quest for participatory experiences, and both are clearly driven by the communal spirit of *gibush*.

Chapter 3: *Kiturim*:

1. The word *lekater* is, in fact, used in biblical language to refer to the ritual act of using incense, but it is not part of the active vocabulary of colloquial Hebrew.

2. The social status of "gripping" as a verbal activity is somewhat reminiscent of that of "self-talk" (Goffman 1978): neither of them is considered a proper engagement so that, like self-talk, gripping tends to be disavowed. Thus, it would be highly incongruous for someone to say: "I'm sorry, I can't come now. We are sitting and gripping."

3. On the other hand, a medical specialist was cited as saying that the Friday night "gripping parties" in Israeli homes serve as an antidote to the generally tense climate in which Israelis live, providing social support and thus helping to prevent heart diseases (*Ma'ariv*, winter 1989).

4. M. Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Shokeid discusses an additional, by now more institutionalized secular ritual of solidarity among Israelis—communal singing. Gossiping, that is, evaluative talk about absent others is another solidarity producing speech activity, as is widely recognized in the anthropological literature (cf., for example, Heilman 1982; Gluckman 1963; Abrahams 1970; Haviland 1977).

5. The rather fortunate rhyming effect is possible because / al / is a homophone in Hebrew meaning "about" and a form of negation, respectively. They are spelled differently and would, in fact, be also pronounced differently in some dialects of modern Hebrew.



Youth Movement Fire Ceremonial, October 1985. *Photograph by Hagai Katriel and Shimon Kogan.*

Rhetoric in Flames: Fire Inscriptions in Israeli Youth Movement Ceremonials

INTRODUCTION

Fire has become a central element in the ceremonial idiom of contemporary Israel, and is found in a variety of “civic rituals” (Bocock 1974; Liebman and Don-Yehia 1983; Kertzer 1988). For example, fire symbolism is used on such calendrical occasions as the festive lighting of “commemoration candles” in front of the Western Wall on Memorial Day, or the lighting of twelve torches by carefully selected members of the populace on Independence Day on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem. The Hanuka festival of lights is occasion for repeated reenactments of traditional Jewish symbolism of fire and light in a variety of private and public settings—from the lighting of the candelabra in private homes to the symbolic torch-run that connects Israel to Jewish communities abroad in a gesture of flames. The bonfires that nowadays serve as a focus for youngsters’ celebrations of the traditional annual holiday of *Lag Baomer* all over the country similarly highlight fire symbolism. These calendrical occasions are regularly televised by the National Television Network, and are participated in vicariously by large segments of the population. Even such home-centered, fire-related traditional practices as the lighting of the Hanuka or Sabbath candles are modeled on TV on a regular basis so that their symbolic communal import is underscored.

A special use of fire symbolism found in a variety of Israeli public ceremonies involves the practice of lighting “fire inscriptions” (natively known as “*ktovot esh*”) as a highly impressive celebratory move at the closing of public ceremonials. This particular practice, which involves the lighting of large-lettered slogans on festive occasions, was the subject of considerable elaboration in the Israeli youth movements in the nation-building era. Youth movement documents abound with references to the fire theme in general and to the art of pyrotechnics in particular, and publications specifically concerned with fire have been compiled (Naor 1949; Tal 1963; Zilka 1970). The effectiveness of fire inscriptions as enacted cultural forms is attested to by the fact that they have been in continuous use for about half a century now, and have become an official element of other traditional Israeli ceremonials, notably military ceremonials, kibbutz celebrations and high profile public occasions

such as Independence Day celebrations. They are also used more sporadically on such occasions as, for example, the closing ceremony of the Soviet Jewry Month celebrated in the spring of 1985, when Anatole Sharansky was honored by being invited to light a fire inscription in a highly visible, televised ceremonial gesture.

In attempting to account for the particular rhetorical effectiveness of these words-in-flames, fire inscriptions are considered here as a form of ephemeral art, a category of aesthetic objects found cross-culturally in a variety of ritual contexts. In M. Ravicz's explication of this notion, "'ephemeral' includes visual phenomena created or assembled with conscious knowledge that they will be destroyed, dismantled, or permitted to decompose within hours, days, or, at the most, several months. 'Art' designates visual phenomena created so that they incorporate structural, decorative, or other stimulatory characteristics perceived as aesthetically rewarding to the members of the culture concerned" (Ravicz 1980:115).

The frequent and integral part played by repetitively used ephemeral forms in ritual communication can be accounted for in terms of their role in bridging the two fundamental, formal aspects of the ritual experience, an experience described as encompassing "carefully orchestrated packages of (1) highly stereotypic activities, including familiar roles and ideas; and (2) what Turner has called 'mandatory improvisations,' or the liminal aspects, replete with change, ambiguities and surprise" (Ravicz 1980:124). In R. Rappaport's formulation (1979), these two aspects of ritual involve the transmission of two orders of information: (1) Canonical information, which involves messages not encoded by participants, but part of the "liturgy." These messages tend to be invariant, durable, and are mainly conveyed through the symbolic dimension of the signs participating in ritual communication; and (2) Indexical information, which concerns (or points to) participants' own current physical, psychic, or social states, especially as they relate to the manner and degree of their engagement in the ritual action. Ephemeral art forms are designed in such a way as to combine these two types of messages: Whereas the aesthetic forms in which they are cast and the symbolic vehicles used are part of a canonical, often sanctified, symbolic idiom, they are clearly designed to affect participants' current states and dispositions through their arousal potential. Ephemeral art forms, as used in ritual communication, thus serve as a medium of a particular kind of ritual learning, in which the kinetic, cognitive, and sensory systems of participants are engaged through specialized techniques and thereby "prepare the human organism to act by structuring attention and learning, and by mobilizing motivations and resources" (Ravicz 1980:124).

This approach to ritual communication has its theoretical foundation in C. S. Peirce's semiotics (Peirce 1955), specifically in his well-known trichotomy of signs, as comprising a symbolic, an indexical and an iconic

dimension. A number of anthropologists have explicitly drawn on Peirce's approach to the study of signs in exploring cultural communication processes in recent years (Silverstein 1976; Murray 1977; Rappaport 1979; Daniel 1984). A major contribution of these studies is to bring out the centrality of the indexical dimension of signs, and its role in the attainment of ritual efficacy.

Clearly, fire is only one of the many materials used cross-culturally in the construction of ephemeral art forms. Other such forms include body-enhancing decorations of various sorts (for example, headdresses, body paintings, masks, costumes, and others), paintings on walls, structured objects, kites, and skywriting. The analysis of fire inscriptions must, therefore, address the issue of the particular effectiveness of this specific visual metaphor in the context of the culture studied, as well as explore its shaping in verbal and emblematic signs.

SYMBOLIC ANTECEDENTS

Given the essentially pedagogical nature of ritual and ceremonial events, it is not surprising that youth movement ceremonials, with their explicit and implicit socializing agendas, should have proven such fertile grounds for the intense shaping of ritual symbolism during the Israeli Nation Building Era. The centrality of the youth movement ethos in the development of modern Israeli culture is widely recognized, as is summarily acknowledged in a retrospective account by a well-known literary critic, who went as far as to say: "Anybody who wanted to belong to the new Israeli culture had to accept the rules of the game formulated within the youth movement culture" (Shaked 1983:21).

The search for a language of word and symbolic gesture that would encapsulate the experience of a newly emerging culture in a publicly shared expressive idiom has been a persistent concern in Israel from the days of the early pioneers to this day (Zerubavel 1980; Even-Zohar 1981; Oring 1981; Liebman and Don-Yehia 1983; Katriel 1986a; Doleve-Gandelman 1987; Weil 1986). The youthful quest for new cultural symbols finds its vivid expression in both the documents and the literary writings of the early part of the century. Moreover, the forging of such symbols was a task explicitly entrusted to the young by members of the older generation of pioneers. For example, Berl Katzenelson, the influential leader of the Socialist-Zionist movement in pre-state Palestine, lamented his movement's overemphasis on matters of ideological content and its neglect of form and style. In a speech delivered in the 1927 convention of *Hanoar Haoved* youth movement, he called upon the young to take the lead in generating a distinctive ceremonial idiom, noting that "people are educated not only by the contents but also by the forms of life" (Katzenelson 1951:189).

Notably, despite the pioneers' conscious effort to reject both European and Jewish cultural ways, the task of symbolic reconstruction did not begin "from scratch," as the revolutionary stance would have it: Traditional Jewish as well as European cultural contents and forms were selectively—though not always consciously—drawn upon in this culture-creation enterprise. The use of fire inscriptions as a ritual symbol in youth movement ceremonials provides an intriguing example of such a newly elaborated symbolic form, whose meanings and shaping can be traced to general European traditions, specifically to the influential youth movement culture of the turn of the century, on the one hand, and to Jewish lore, on the other.

Fire has, of course, been used as a multivocal symbol in a great many cultures.¹ Psychoanalytically oriented scholars have adduced both mythological and clinical materials in exploring the symbolic role of fire in human experience, stressing its psychosexual underpinnings. Both S. Freud (1964) and C. G. Jung (1956) regard fire as a symbol of a life force (libido or energy), and G. Bachelard (1964) offers a phenomenological account of the human experience with fire along these lines. E. Canetti (1966) is similarly oriented to universal aspects of fire symbolism, but transports the discussion from the realm of individual to social psychology, offering an intriguing interpretation of fire as a symbol of the crowd.

Citing scores of fire-related practices associated with the fire festivals of Europe (and other lands), James Frazer is similarly oriented to that which cuts across cultural differences, identifying similarities in the underlying functions of fire symbols: "Whether applied in the form of bonfires blazing at fixed points, or of torches carried about from place to place, or of embers and ashes taken from the smouldering heap of fuel, the fire is believed to promote the growth of the crops and the welfare of man and beast, either positively by stimulating them, or negatively by averting the dangers and calamities which threaten them from such causes as thunder and lightning, conflagration, blight, mildew, vermin, sterility, disease, and not least of all witchcraft" (Frazer 1935:329).

The effect of fire was ascribed either to its function as a stimulant, ensuring a needful supply of sunshine (hence, the use sometimes made of disc or wheel-shaped fire contraptions), or as a purifying element, a disinfectant designed to burn up and destroy all harmful influences. The fascination with fire and what were originally divinatory practices (for example, jumping over a bonfire) became part of the ceremonial idiom of European youth movements at the turn of the century, most notably in Germany (Laqueur 1962; Schatzker 1969; Stachura 1981). These practices were appropriated in one form or another by subsequent generations of youth groups, including the Jewish youth movements, whose ethos was so influential in the development of modern Israeli culture. The bonfire, and the circle of light and warmth it defines, has been

a central symbol of youth movement solidarity since its very inception. The German poet Stefan George (1868–1933), who was an influential figure in the German youth revolution, articulated the force of the fire symbol, saying: “Who once has circled the flame / Always shall follow the flame . . .” (George 1943:211).

The conceptions of fire as a stimulant and as a purifying element have both found their way into the Israeli youth movement ethos, although, of course, in a different ideational context: The cosmological beliefs of earlier times have been replaced by a highly compelling psychic metaphor. An entry in a collective diary compiled by a group of young pioneers and first published in 1922 under the title of *Kehiliatenu* (our community), accordingly, reads: “I believe in fire, in its enormous power, in its symbolic power . . . Fire awakens the sleepy, it brings people closer” (*Kehiliatenu* 1968:34).

The centrality of fire symbolism in modern Israeli ceremonial idiom can only be partly attributed to the European youth movement heritage, however. Images of fire and light also echo deeper historical roots associated with the central role of fire in Jewish religious symbolism—from fire-related myths such as the story of Moses and the burning bush that was never consummated, which clearly brings out the role of fire as a mediator between God and humans, to central Jewish practices, such as the lighting of candles on various religious occasions, to collective memories of destruction by fire, notably the burning down of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. Furthermore, a tradition of using fire to relay messages and connect through a fire-borne act of communication, mainly in the form of fire kindled on the top of the hill, has a long history in ancient Israel. Despite the strong sense of a cultural revolution that permeated the Jewish youth movement, as it did the European youth culture in a more generalized way, a sense of continuity was nevertheless maintained through the use of symbolic media.

Fire inscriptions manifest a culturally distinctive shaping of the general theme of sacred fire: Unlike the ritual symbol of the bonfire, which is widespread in European and American youth movements, words-in-flames seem to be a uniquely inspired form of ephemeral art in the Israeli context (and have even been “exported” to some Jewish youth movements in the United States). They echo an age-old tradition that associated fire with writing and divine speech and in which the letters of the alphabet are the mystical instrument God placed in the hands of Man, making him partner to the act of creation through the gift of language and speech (Kahana 1985). In the letter-centered Judaic tradition, the letters of the alphabet are a source of enlightenment both literally and metaphorically. Indeed, the Hebrew word for letter, *ot*, can also mean sign or symbol. This link between letters, fire and light has found its expression in many legends associated with the bestowal of the Torah upon the children of Israel: According to some legends the Torah was written as black

letters of fire inscribed in white flames; other legends link the letters of the alphabet to the act of creation and the light of creation is said to inhere in them; and legends about the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple describe the indestructible letters of the Hebrew alphabet flying out of the burning Torah scrolls.²

Thus, like *gibush*, fire is a key symbol in contemporary Israeli culture. As such, it serves to mediate between the disparate, originally mutually exclusive cultural orientations that ground modern Israeli culture: traditional Judaism on the one hand, and the secular civil religions of Socialist Zionism and Statism on the other (Liebman and Don-Yehia 1983). Initially, the appropriation of European youth culture symbolism by Zionist youth groups was an act of rebellion, part of the larger Zionist revolt against traditional Judaism. Even then, however, the focal place given to fire was seen with reference to the place of fire in Jewish tradition. A German youth movement source explicitly articulates this symbolic conquest of fire by fire, saying: "In the radiance of the voluntarily embraced fire of Goethe, Fichte and George, we are putting out the candles of the candelabra lighted by our fathers who demanded obedience and assent to barely comprehensible religious formulas" (cited in Schatzker 1969: 151). Thus, the fire inscriptions kindled in present-day youth movement (and other) ceremonials draw some of their force from the fire images of times past, and at the same time they give renewed meaning and a new direction to the past by adding a link to this ancient fire-chain, a link shaped by the spirit of youth.

FIRE CEREMONIALS IN CONTEMPORARY YOUTH MOVEMENTS

The use of fire inscriptions is the most salient aspect of the youth movement ceremonials in which they figure, and these events are often generically labeled as fire events in both formal and informal discourse (formerly they were referred to as *mifkad esh*, fire parade, and nowadays the most common term of reference is *tekes esh*, fire ritual / ceremonial). These ceremonials tend to be punctuated by a solemn tone that stands in contrast to the gaiety associated with, for example, Fourth of July firecracker displays in the U.S., or the smaller-scale firework displays in Israeli Independence Day celebrations, or the intimacy and playfulness of youth movement bonfires.

The description given in this and the next section is based on material collected between the years 1982 and 1986 through participant observation (seven youth movement fire ceremonials were directly observed) and ethnographic interviewing of participants in such events. Additional information was drawn from discussions with Israelis of various ages and personal backgrounds, relating to both present and past occasions of this kind, as well as a consultation of relevant youth movement documents (for example, Tal 1963; Zilka 1970). The account offered here differs in its orientation from

available sociological discussions of the Israeli youth movement, which tend to focus on ideological and social structural issues (Adler 1963; Eisenstadt 1985; Eaton and Chen 1970; Shapira and Peleg 1984). The focus is on an interpretive account of enacted symbolic forms, along the lines of the “comparative symbology” approach developed by Victor Turner for the study of ritual symbolism.

Of the three different dimensions of meaning for the interpretation of dominant ritual symbols distinguished by Turner (1977)—the exegetical, the operational, and the positional dimensions, the first two dimensions—the exegetical and operational—will be specifically addressed in this section. The positional dimension, which refers to the “intertextual” relations of the symbol with other dominant symbols in the culture, was addressed in the discussion of the symbolic antecedents of fire inscriptions, and will be taken up again in the concluding remarks.

The exegetical dimension consists of explanations the actors themselves give the investigator. Discussions of fire inscriptions with participants in such ceremonials tended to lead in two directions: Comments of a historical flavor invoking the symbolic antecedents described in the previous section; and stories and descriptions relating to the art of pyrotechnics, interspersed with aesthetic evaluations of the events that were often expressed in animated, hyperbolic terms.

Elements of such exegetical discussion, which gave the original impetus to the whole inquiry, are incorporated in the following account, but my main focus in this section will be the operational dimension of fire inscriptions as enacted symbols. In studying this dimension of symbolic meaning, “the investigator equates a symbol’s meanings with its use—he observes what actors do with it and how they relate to one another in this process” (Turner 1977:190). This particular focus requires a detailed consideration of the contextual features and organization of the activities involved in these fire events. Their significance will be assessed by considering them as situated enactments, whose meanings derive from the complex interplay of the words conveyed, the medium of fire in which this is done, the organization of the activities (sequential ordering, participation roles) and aspects of the physical setting. In this section, I shall address relevant features of the situational context in which youth movement fire ceremonials typically take place, and in the section which follows I shall focus more specifically on the act of reading fire inscriptions.

Fire inscriptions are typically used as part of several celebratory events during the year. The most spectacular one is usually associated with the celebration of the youth movement itself, for example, *jom hashevet* (Troop Day) in the Scouts or *hag hama’alot* (Holiday of Ascendance), which marks the beginning of the activity year in *Hanoar Haoved* Socialist youth movement.

Other occasions, such as national holidays celebrated by the youth group, or summer camp celebrations, may also be concluded with a fire display of greater or lesser elaborateness whose function is to elevate the tone of the occasion, endowing it with a festive mood. These ceremonials are literally framed by fire: they start out with intimations of fire in the form of candle-like contraptions placed in sand-filled paper sacks that form a path leading to the as yet darkened area participants are to occupy, and the actual lighting of fire inscriptions is the climactic closing of the event. All the other ceremonial acts, such as speech making, music, and poetry reciting, are used as a means of leading up to the fire spectacle in a movement of ascending suspense.

The ideal location for such a ceremony is a relatively remote spot of natural elevation, preferably on the top or slope of a hill. When such a location is chosen, an ornamental effect is added through the scenery, as the hillslope becomes the page on which the words and images of fire are momentarily inscribed, before they turn into smoke, and disappear into nature again.³ The important point here is that fire inscriptions involve a magnifying effect as compared to regular writing, thus invoking a sense of the gigantic. As S. Stewart (1984) points out in her discussion of the gigantic and the miniature, these spatial manipulations have come to be associated with the public domain and with an enclosed personal domain, respectively. Thus, the size of the fire inscriptions bespeaks publicness in a way that, for example, the lighting of many candles does not do (a ceremonial practice I have observed in a Fourth of July celebration in a university stadium in the United States in 1979).⁴

Some of the events observed in the course of this study came close to this ideal, while others used different types of locations, such as a hilltop with a monument of historical value, which the children reached after a daylong hike, or the open-air village stadium, where most important communal events take place. In all cases, an open space bespeaking nonrestrictiveness was chosen, and a basically ground level orientation was maintained so that the event could embrace, or attempt to resurrect, the small-scale community in a way that the use of fireworks, an essentially mass-phenomenon, could not do.

Ceremonials of the type discussed usually involve two orders of participants: members of the youth group whose celebration it is, and guests (parents, siblings, and sometimes other community members). The two groups arrive independently and stand separately. The youngsters come first and stand closer to the ceremonial center, which punctuates their role as focal participants and "hosts" of the occasion. Parental presence and community involvement is a relatively new development: the parents of today emphatically note that they do not remember such involvement in the equivalent occasions of their youthful days. Contemporary youth movements have renounced the symbolic stance of youthful separateness of times past that was, paradoxically, accompanied by a wholehearted embracement of adult-sponsored ideologies.

Nowadays, parental participation in such high-profile ceremonials is both expected and solicited through written invitations (whose program may explicitly mention the prospect of fire inscriptions). At times the guests' presence is explicitly acknowledged in a fire inscription that reads *bruḥim haba'im* (welcome).

Contemporary fire ceremonials are partly a breathtaking show and partly a ritual-like shared experience, encompassing both parents-as-a-group and youngsters-as-a-group. The parents participate mainly in an audience capacity, and their representative may greet the assembled in their name. The youngsters alternate between the role of audience and of performers. Some perform in readings or music pieces (as representatives again; in none of the occasions I have observed was the identity of the performers emphasized). More significantly, however, they all perform as a group in call-and-response chants that occur at various points in the ceremony and which are always initiated by adult counselors (for example, as a completion marker, crowning the end of a speech, or as a controlling device used to command the youngsters' attention when it seems to wane). This differentiation in the participation roles is utterly obliterated when the climactic lighting of fire inscriptions is reached and all join in a moment of shared, silent appreciation, their eyes fixed on the images that take their shape in flames.

The preparation of fire contraptions is the youngsters' province, and it is in this collective task that the real test of performance lies. The inscriptions are made up of big letters of wire padded with jute cloth that are soaked in oil just prior to being kindled. As the detailed instruction manuals dealing with the art of pyrotechnics indicate, the construction of these inscriptions is considered a most serious matter requiring specialized skill and much care. In some youth troops, particular individuals are considered local "masters of fire," to borrow Mircea Eliade's term (1956). A successfully constructed fire inscription is one that burns itself out without falling apart. Even today, when many of the fire tricks mentioned in instructors' manuals are not usually practiced, this one performance test remains. Youngsters say it is a matter of pride to construct successful inscriptions, and the gift of skill is well-received by parents and community members whose representatives sound an appreciative note in praise of "the wonderful youth of this town."

A similarly appreciative note can be found in some of the lore surrounding the fire events, which relates to the value of commitment to communal goals. Year after year, I have heard tales of devotion as parents praised the commitment of the youngsters who worked hard to prepare the inscriptions, and then, fearful that they might be stolen or destroyed, stayed all night in the field to keep an eye on them.

The youngsters' own fire lore indicates their concern with a high level of performance in pyrotechnic arts. An example would be the story about the

stupid scouts who fastened the jute cloth with a plastic band so that it melted the moment it was touched by fire, causing the whole inscription to fall apart. A parent's comment in response to a similarly unfortunate occasion indicates that parents are attuned to the youngsters' interpretation of the fire event as primarily a test of performance with mildly sacrificial overtones. Commenting upon a recent fire event, a mother said: "My heart broke when those inscriptions suddenly began to fall apart." The valuation of effective performance in practical affairs is thus shared by children and adults alike, echoing the stress on pragmatism as an important value in Israeli daily life, in which the orientation of the "doers" rather than the "thinkers" is so often found to prevail (Hasdai 1982).

Even though the fire inscriptions are put together by the youngsters, their contents are drawn from a rather small repertoire of conventionalized expressions, whose pathos and elevated style mark them as particularly far removed from the youngsters' own expressive idiom. Indeed, my young informants, who were willing to go into the details of pyrotechnics practice with considerable zest, became singularly vague when asked about the choice of messages to be inscribed: These would generally be "one of those things we always use," or whatever the troop counselor found fit. The slogans used give expression to essentially adult-sponsored ideologies and values, and are rather obviously pedagogical in intent.

Notably, there is no slot at any point in the whole ceremonial in which youngsters' spontaneous self-expression is invited, or their verbal cleverness exercised, as is the case, for example, in the Boy Scout campfire programs described by J. Mechling (1980). Rather, the youngsters recite; sing in unison; provide set responses to set calls, which allow for no individual variation; or they call out formulaic yells of the "troop x is the greatest" variety, which are, again, a form of collective self-assertion. Moreover, throughout the ceremony the youngsters are addressed as a group, never as individuals: the change in status celebrated in some of these ceremonials relates to the ascendance of the whole group from one stage in the youth movement ladder to another. Even in more spontaneous address, as in disciplinary comments made by counselors in attempting to control unruly conduct, it is common to hear the whole group addressed by its group label, which signals their age-related position within the youth movement hierarchy, and is replaced with each change in the group's status.⁵

This quiescent and participatory attitude reaches its peak as all participants join in the ritualized act of discerning and admiring the fire inscriptions kindled at the close of the ceremony. The particular form of bonding thus achieved is most telling. Standing side by side, debarred by the dark from making eye contact, not touching, immersed in hushed silence, participants' attention and gaze are galvanized towards the fire spectacle. It is in this shared orientation

to a focal source of excitement and authority that they become joined, without, however, becoming interpersonally linked. Susan Sontag (1972) has pointed out the less savory aspects of the impersonal grouping of people around an all-powerful force, arguing that it is an aspect of what she calls “fascist aesthetics,” which “flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant action and the endurance of pain” (Sontag 1972:91). The more sinister implications of fire displays, however, were rarely mentioned by my informants.⁶

Somewhat paradoxically, this highly collectivist experience is primarily constructed by mobilizing the sense of sight, the most individuating of senses (Ong 1982). The specifics of the uniquely structured visual experience involved are discussed in the next section.

ON THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF READING FIRE INSCRIPTIONS

A youth movement instructor manual specifically devoted to the preparation of fire ceremonials recommends the use of fire inscriptions since “the fixed or moving fire has a strong experiential impact on the onlookers” (Tal 1963:2). Whether they take a verbal or an emblematic form, the signs used in contemporary youth movement ceremonials fall into two broad categories, which serve to anchor the ritual occasion in terms of its indexical meanings, as they relate to the social situation in which the ceremonial action takes place, and in terms of its symbolic meanings, as they relate to the broader cultural context in which it is embedded.

The social occasion is indexed by signs that provide a definition of the situation in terms of the identity of the group celebrated (the youth movement and local troop names and emblems), and the particular occasion thus marked in the youth movement calendar. Some of the messages inscribed have a similar indexical function: *heje nahon* (be prepared) was observed in a scouts’ ceremonial; *gar’in* (youth settlement group) was observed on the Holiday of Ascendance, which celebrates members’ ascendance up the *Noar Haoved* youth movement ladder, until they reach the ultimate official goal of settling the land; *nizkor tamid* (we shall always remember) was observed in commemoration ceremonies in both youth movement and other contexts.

The cultural meanings more broadly shared in the community at large are invoked by signs that are good for all seasons. These may depict both traditional and newly adapted emblems such as the Star of David, the Menora (candelabra) that symbolizes the State of Israel, the image of the pillar of fire that led the way of the Children of Israel to the Promised Land (and served as the title of a popular historical TV series aired in the early 1980s), or the image of the map of the State of Israel. Alongside these emblems are found formulaic expressions selected out of a more or less set repertoire of slogans and clichés: *shalom* (peace), *hazak* (strong), a formulaic phrase traditionally used in

completing the round of weekly readings of the Torah, which has come to have a general celebratory role in modern contexts). Although analytically distinguishable, these two levels of context (the situational and the cultural) often blend into each other. Notably, ideologically colored slogans such as the rather outmoded *la'avoda veleamal* (to work and labor), which was observed in a Socialist youth movement celebration, are often more of an index of affiliation to a particular social group than a statement of wider ideological commitment. Fire inscriptions frequently take the form of injunctions or vows; they draw their substance and force from the past as a source of shared communal values and patterns of sentiment, and yet are explicitly oriented to future action, conjuring a moment of renewed awareness and commitment.

My own and my informants' observations and memories, as well as the documentary material consulted, indicate interesting changes that have occurred within one generation with respect to the content, style, and number of fire inscriptions used in youth movement ceremonial occasions. Contemporary inscriptions tend to be less ideologically oriented, more cryptic and less elevated in style; at the same time, the overall number used in any given event has increased dramatically. Thus, an inscription photographed in 1943 in a youth movement ceremonial that read *batelem batelem neleḥ ad hasof* (we shall always take the appropriate path; literally, "in the furrow, in the furrow shall we go till the end") would be unthinkable today; not only is the message of total conformity and obedience no longer palatable to contemporary youth, but also, the language of this inscription is overly dramatic, too pathos filled. Similarly, the photograph of a fire inscription that reads *nitka jated ledorot* (we shall fasten our hold; literally, "stick a peg in the ground for generations to come") that was used in a ceremonial inaugurating a swimming pool in a young southern kibbutz in 1954, has made many of my informants smile. At the same time, photographs of a whole stadium sprinkled with over a dozen fire inscriptions, which are common fare today, were very surprising to older informants who have been out of touch with youth movement ceremonials since their own youth.

It appears, then, that contemporary youth movement fire ceremonials rely more heavily on the dramatization provided by the visual impact of fire than on the ritual invocation of shared values and ideological commitments. The frequent use made of group labels in a sheer assertion of existence seems to me to suggest that—given the present de-emphasis of ideology—group membership remains the most clearly shared common base beyond which no exhortation or vow can be meaningfully inscribed. Regardless of what the inscriptions signify, contemporary fire ceremonials are essentially about the act of signifying, drawing attention to themselves through what B. Babcock (1978) has called a "surplus of signifiers" expressed primarily as a sensory overload, a surfeit of signification which, by disrupting the complementarity of signifier and signified calls the meaning of everything into question and playfully "creates a realm of pure possibility" (Babcock 1978:294). Babcock's

comments on the semiotics of fire in firework displays seem to come in some respects close to describing the effect of the more flamboyant fire displays of contemporary youth movement ceremonials: “As pure pattern and pure possibility, fireworks are the epitome of a superabundance of signifiers. They are everything and nothing or, to be more precise, a lot of sound and light (*son et lumiere*) signifying nothing. And, like fireworks, a surplus of signifiers is potentially dangerous as well as entertaining and enlightening. A symbol of revolution, it is itself a revolution, a suspension of serious and normal modes of signification” (Babcock 1978:296).

The underlying visual metaphor of the spectacle, however, is not the free play of fire but rather its domestication—the channeling of the ravenous tongues of flame, incessantly struggling to find their own willful shape, in the form of letters, the paradigmatic embodiment of human culture. The constant movement of the flames is an ever present reminder of the potential danger of fire getting out of hand, and the ritual action is one of constraining it. The tension thus induced is keenly felt and often commented upon by participants. The natural, open setting in which the events take place serves to further accentuate the play of contrasts: Nature vs. culture, the chaotic vs. the orderly, the random and whimsical vs. the expected. This play of opposites, and with opposites, is carried into the structuring of the visual experience involved in the very act of reading fire inscriptions. A closer look at this act reveals some of the ways in which (as distinct from the grounds on which) fire inscriptions construct their rhetorical appeal.

The most immediately obvious contrast is, of course, the play of *light and dark*. The ceremonial center, the circle of light in which speeches are made and greetings extended, initially stands in sharp contrast to the surrounding darkness. As a result of the gradual manner in which the inscriptions are kindled, participants are faced with a crescendo of fire that then again becomes diminished in a gradual movement. The darkness / light binary contrast becomes transformed into an analogical dimension. The particular effect thus achieved is that of time stretched out, as in the experience of watching the sun rise or set.

Another effect has to do with the intricate play of *movement and fixity*: in reading fire inscriptions there is a reversal of the usual relationship holding between “the arrested image and the moving eye”—to use a phrase coined by the art critic E. H. Gombrich (1982). Rather than the eye moving along the fixed letters, the letters are moved along by the spreading fire. Once they have come into existence, the flaming letters keep waving in the wind, thus blurring their contours and further diminishing the sense of fixity they carry. At the same time, observers make an effort to fix their gaze so as to be able to identify the imperfectly shaping and jumping letters in front of them: this is truly a case of reversal with the image moving and the eye arrested. As a consequence, participants become highly involved in the visual construction

of the image. Moreover, a high level of outwardly directed attentiveness is maintained, which prevents them from falling into a reverie—that contemplative, inwardly directed look that is so often induced by gazing at a fire (Bachelard 1964). The hypnotic effect of the fire is balanced out by the alertness required by the deciphering effort.

At another nonmaterial level, however, the sense of movement is counteracted by the demarcation and fixity of the ideological message as a form of “authoritative discourse” in M. M. Bakhtin’s sense, a discourse that “remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance. . . its semantic structure is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it” (Bakhtin 1981:343).

The ever-shifting movement of the fire stands in sharp contrast to this underlying message of ideological fixity. The momentary, highly evocative clash of directional orientations further underscores its perceptual evocative force; the initial emphasis on the *vertical* dimension, associated with the positioning of the signs, the use of a hillslope as a preferred site, and the upward movement of the smoke is punctuated by the *horizontal* movement of flames as they run their course in giving shape to the letters.

Fire has a transformative effect when used in fire inscriptions both in terms of their material substance and in terms of their linguistic status. Indeed, as both G. Bachelard (1964) and E. Canetti (1966) have pointed out, one of the outstanding qualities of fire as a medium is that it produces quick changes in the form and substance of everything it touches, and also typically joins the things affected by it as they become welded together. In dramatizing the vitality of movement and change, fire inscriptions serve as a visual metaphor for a directed, rhetorically oriented, spiritual force that can bring people together in joint action as well as mediate disparate realms of experience, the realms of *inner-feeling* and of *public action*.

As forms of ephemeral art, fire inscriptions involve an extraordinary joining of *the fleeting* and *the timeless*: in what may be referred to as a dislocation of medium and message, the inscriptions give expression to what are taken to be (or strategically presented as) eternal communal values or truths, while the ritual action itself consists of their being literally consummated within minutes in a burst of flames. The contrast between the act of inscribing and the use of fire as a medium for so doing is punctuated by the gross, thing-like character of the inscriptions compared with their short, spiritualized, speech-like ephemeral life. Paradoxically, in their most grossly material state the inscriptions stand as a mere *language-potential*, as a skeletal language form waiting to be turned into *utterance*. It is only by going up in self-consuming flames that this language potential is actualized in an act of *speech*.

Thus, it seems that, ultimately, fire inscriptions provide a reflexive statement on the process of signification itself. Various aspects of this process are deconstructed and recombined in unusual ways: The surplus of signifiers disturbs the complementarity of signifier and signified; the fleetingness of the spoken word is combined with the materiality and fixedness of the inscribed letter; the conceptions of language as form, as event and as product are juxtaposed and contrasted in the course of the ceremonial action; the nature of the act of reading as a play of eye and image, and as a variously textured activity of recognition and decipherment is probed. It is by providing an unusual, complexly structured visual experience, one that self-reflexively dramatizes the possibility of signification, that fire inscriptions exert their "strong experiential impact on the onlookers."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The widespread use of fire symbolism, in the form of fire inscriptions or otherwise, as a persistent element in the rhetoric of identification that characterizes present-day Israeli communal conversation points to a consolidation of a public idiom of symbolic expression. In recent years, fire inscriptions have been observed (either by me or by my informants) in a variety of contexts in which their use was rather unexpected. This indicates the extent to which fire symbolism has become diffused: In a school-based ceremonial occasion, in a demonstration by orthodox Jews in Jerusalem, in Bar-Mitzva parties and wedding celebrations held in private suburban gardens, and—in Arabic letters—in ceremonials held by agricultural clubs whose membership consists of Israeli Arab youth. On all these occasions, the use of fire inscriptions is clearly metaphorical, and builds on the cultural definitions generally given to fire ceremonials. Paradigmatic fire ceremonials are occasions that are public rather than private or familial; they involve voluntary commitment rather than required participation; they involve messages that are consensually oriented and self-addressed rather than provocative and addressed to outsiders, and they are broadly associated with the Zionist ethos. This use of fire inscriptions on other occasions is designed to sanctify the messages conveyed, endowing them with the legitimization of an authoritative communal voice.

There has, however, been a gradual movement of de-semanticization of fire inscriptions. The fire inscriptions of yesteryear would carry little validity in contemporary youth movement ceremonials, which tend to replace even worn-down slogans by explicitly indexical signs. Whereas the lure and effectiveness of the fire displays is widely recognized, the problematic standing of the kind of authoritative discourse they embody is not. As A. Goldschlager (1985) argues, such discourse is marked by a particularly shaky relationship to reality. This is brought out by the little attention generally paid by the participants in these ceremonials to what the inscriptions say, as well as by the

humorous attitude often disclosed toward those inscriptions they manage to recall. Participation in such events seems to involve a specialized interpretive norm that allows participants to discount the contents of the inscriptions. In the usual course of events, this norm allows participants to be duly impressed by the fire display without being disturbed by the remoteness of the quasi-canonical messages conveyed.

At times, however, this gap becomes disturbingly conspicuous, as for example, in the use of the slogan "It is good to die for our country," which was reportedly uttered by the early defender Yosef Trumpeldor on his deathbed (1920) and has since become part of Israeli official heroic lore. Although by now it has become the butt of many jokes (Zerubavel 1980), it appeared as a fire inscription during a youth movement ceremonial held in commemoration of Trumpeldor in the middle of the Lebanon War (1983), when the whole country was torn with disputes over both its justifiability and its cost in human lives. The insensitive use of such an inscription at this particular moment in history points to the degree of its semantic vacuity (unless we assume that it was deliberately chosen to invoke a heroic spirit, which contradicts both ethnographic observations of how the inscriptions are selected, and the overall political orientation of that particular youth group).⁷

Another example, from a different angle, demonstrates the voiding impact the fire inscriptions themselves can have. Following a decree by the Ministry of Education, which stipulated that during the 1985–86 school year, the educational system should make the concept of "Democracy" its focal educational theme, "democracy" appeared in one of the slogans inscribed in fire in a Socialist youth movement ceremonial in late 1985. The word replaced the third member of the tripartite formula "Zionism, Socialism and the Brotherhood of Nations." This substitution of "democracy" for "the brotherhood of nations" passed largely unnoticed by the participants in this ceremonial, who were highly appreciative of the impressive fire display. To the critical observer, however, there was something eerie about the use of "democracy" in this context. The image of "democracy" exorcised into a verbal flame has little in common with the idea of democracy as grounded in a laborious, uncertain quest for reasoned discourse and considered assent. Fire inscriptions, indeed, invite participants to succumb to the all-too-human desire "to shortcircuit the process of rational apprenticeship" (Goldschlager 1985:175), letting the hidden flames in their hearts light up with an uplifting promise of unity and bonding. Having once gone up in flames, "democracy" can now be safely deposited into the communal bag of truths, to be periodically resurrected in an image of wire and jute cloth by some teenage "master of fire" for whom "democracy" will have become another one of "those fire inscription words."

In contemporary contexts, then, fire inscriptions constitute an authoritative utterance largely deprived of its living authority, a hard-edged discourse marked

by inertia, by semantic finiteness and calcification, a discourse which, in Bakhtin's words (1981:344), has become "an object, a relic, a thing." As such, however, it functions as the center pole of one of the most effective *gibush* rituals routinely practiced in Israel today, dramatizing in its form of enactment the spirit of group solidarity so central to the Israeli ethos. Indeed, the collective experience of a shared orientation to a ceremonial center of authority is very much alive in the personal memory of many Israelis. It is through the emotionally charged, participatory nature of the occasion that the cultural message of self-effacing group solidarity is experienced and conveyed, even if it is not supported by participants' actual assent to the contents expressed by the fire inscriptions themselves. Thus, fire rituals are not only shaped by the sociocultural context in which they take place; in turn, they become a shaping force in them, both embodying and dramatizing the gap between youth movement ideological discourse and the ideational and social worlds in which it is currently deployed. In a way, perhaps, they help to bridge this gap by partially transforming this authoritative discourse into a playful curiosity, and by eroding its ideational content.⁸

In tracing the "semiotic career" of fire inscriptions as a cultural form in Israeli youth movement ceremonials, I have emphasized their essential context-embeddedness in both cultural-historical and situational terms. Because I have regarded the use of fire inscriptions as a rhetorical act, which is part of a particular idiom of public expression, the kinds of issues I have addressed are, naturally, very different from those raised in the psychoanalytically or ethnologically oriented discussions of fire symbolism mentioned in the introduction. Whether we regard fire as a universal symbol of transformative energy, or as a universal symbol of the crowd, the fact still remains that in different cultural contexts, it is symbolically shaped in different ways, and is used in various forms and degrees on different occasions. Even the use of fire inscriptions as a celebratory idiom in other cultural contexts would require a detailed analysis of their deployment as situated cultural forms so as to be fully appreciated and meaningfully compared with the discussion presented here.

A cultural-semiotic reading of the use of fire as an ephemeral art form thus requires that we go beyond noting the fact of its use, and pay attention to the shape it is given and the manner in which it is deployed on given occasions. Such inquiry would address both the indexical and the symbolic dimensions of the flaming signs involved. The changes that have been noted in the enactment of fire ceremonials in Israeli youth movement contexts, with respect to the type and number of inscriptions used, the nature and structure of participation, the shift in the function of fire from a primarily sanctifying force to one that has a semantically voiding impact, all further reinforce the need for a context-sensitive approach in the study of symbols, whether they appear to be culture-specific or traceable to universal aspects of human

experience. This extended case study hopefully has demonstrated the fruitfulness of such an approach for the understanding of rhetorical forms in their cultural contexts, and for assessing their critical implications.

Chapter 4: Rhetoric in Flames:

1. The role of fire symbolism in various cultures is discussed in a great many scholarly and more popular sources. A selected list of sources consulted in the course of this study are : J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); A. de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*. (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1974); G. A. Gaskell, *Dictionary of All Scriptures and Myths*. (New York: Avenel Books, 1981); R. Cavendish, ed. *Man, Myth & Magic, Vol. 7* (New York: Marshal Cavendish Corp. 1970); M. H. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism*. (New York: Ktav Publishing House 1970); M. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*. (New York: Harper & Row 1956); George Plimpton, *Fireworks: A History and Celebration*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984).

2. C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956) 165. Jung makes the following comment in this connection: "It is probably no accident that the two most important discoveries which distinguish man from all other living beings, namely speech and use of fire, should have a common psychic background. Both are products of psychic energy, of libido or mana." He goes on to cite a Sanskrit term (*tejas*) whose meanings include (1) fire, (2) energy, vital force, (3) passion, (4) sharpness, cutting edge, (5) spiritual power, and others. Thus, it is probably no etymological accident that the Hebrew word for flame (*lehava*), for enthusiasm (*hitlahavut*) and for the cutting edge of a knife (*lahav*) come from the same root stem. Whether the link Jung points out is universal or not, it certainly has been amply elaborated and amplified in Judaism. As Jung points out (1956:162), the language of the Old Testament repeatedly associates the mouth, fire, and (divine) speech: for example, Ps. 29:7 says: "The voice of the Lord scattereth flames of fire," and Jer. 23:29 asks: "Is not my word like a fire?" The link between fire and passion appears in youth movement parlance in the expression *lihjot saruf al hatnu'a* (literally, to be "burned on the movement," to be utterly committed to it).

3. According to S. B. Sutton, "The Fine Art of Fire," *Harvard Magazine* (July-Aug., 1977), in sixteenth century Italy, there evolved a tradition of pyrotechnic theatrics that did not involve the presence of actors on stage. When this tradition moved up north, Teutonic productions came to reflect "the architectural preferences of northern Europe and were often skillfully deployed

against dramatic backdrops, thus utilizing the entire landscape as a stage set for pyrotechnics” (Sutton 1977:25). A somewhat similar spatial predilection can be seen in Israeli pyrotechnic art, which, again, traces its roots to the German youth culture. Thus, G. L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: . . .* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 40. Mosse points out the centrality of “fire and flame” to the “new politics” associated with German nationalism: “The sacred flame was of the greatest importance as a symbol of Germanism. Such a flame was intended to crown the Bismarck towers, but its symbolic use in nationalism goes back to the very beginning of the nineteenth century. When it came to celebrating the first anniversary in 1815 of the Battle of the Peoples, the German victory over Napoleon, most of the ceremonies throughout German towns and villages centered upon a ‘pillar of flame’ which illuminated the hill or mountain on which it was built.”

4. The size of the letters varies with the number of participants and the layout of the inscriptions, which generally determine the distance from which they are to be viewed.

5. The call-response pattern does not always involve fixed pair-parts. For example, a highly flexible call-response pattern is reported for Black American communication in J. Daniel and G. Smitherman, “How I got Over: . . .” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* (1976) 62:26–39. A partly improvisational call-response pattern was found in the Boy Scout Campfire Program described by J. Mechling in “The Magic of the Boy Scout Campfire,” *Journal of American Folklore* (1980) 93:35–56. The ideological and collectivist orientation of Israeli youth movement fire ceremonials stands out even more sharply when juxtaposed to Mechling’s account. That this account is relevant to the larger American scene is brought out by a reading of official Boy Scouts of America literature published at Irving, Texas. For example, *The Official Scoutmaster Handbook* (7th edition), 1985; *The Official Patrol Leader Handbook* (3rd edition), 1980; *Fieldbook* (3rd edition), 1984. In addition to these differences in ceremonial idiom, it should be noted that, in American Boy Scout lore, the dangerous aspects of fire as a destructive force tend to be stressed (cf. *Firemanship* 1968. Irving, Texas: Boy Scouts of America), whereas in the Israeli context fire is generally presented more in its benign aspects as the Helper of Humankind (cf. Naor, 1949).

6. Cf. A. Speer, *Spanau: The Secret Diaries* (New York: MacMillan, 1976) and S. Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism*: (Jerusalem: Keter Publications, 1985). These authors discuss the fascination with and manipulation of fire as part of the official aesthetics of the Third Reich. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Olympic torch was first introduced into the symbolism

of the Olympic Games in modern times in the 1936 games held in Nazi Berlin (Durantez 1985).

7. As the example of fire inscriptions used in the context of a demonstration indicates, they can be used in protest as well, in which case they retain their full semantic load. An example of this, also associated with the Lebanon war, was the use of the archaic phrase *halanetsah tohal herev?* (Shall the sword forever devour?) in a kibbutz Independence Day ceremonial where public sentiment, which amounted to a rejection of official policies, was expressed in a fire inscription. Whereas this inscription was surely a direct statement about the war, I do not think the same could be convincingly said about the Trumpeldor phrase.

8. According to one of my youth movement sources, a further step towards the semantic voiding of fire inscriptions, and the carnivalization of fire displays, was taken in the late 1980s in the name of efficiency: he reported that the fire inscriptions for the 1989 Holiday of Ascendance were being prefabricated in a regional youth movement center and sent to all the different troops. All they had to do was wrap the inscriptions with jute cloth, which turned many days of work into just a few hours of play. My young informant promised me that there would be lots of inscriptions; he seemed to consider my questions about what they would say quite secondary.

5

Picnics in a Military Zone: Rituals of Parenting and the Politics of Consensus

INTRODUCTION

Every Saturday morning, hundreds of family cars make their way toward various remote spots around the country, both within and across the “green line” marking the pre-1967 borders of Israel. Their separate destinations are conjoined in terms of one and the same familial mission - to visit a soldier son or daughter in their military camp. Usually, these visits are eagerly awaited by the soldiers, are devotedly prepared for and undertaken by their parents, and are openly encouraged by the military authorities, who set aside times and places for these familial encounters. Occasionally, the authorities even provide semiofficial help in organizing escorts by military vehicles for those risk-filled stretches of the road that take the visitors through the Israeli-held territories.

However routinized they have become, for both parents and soldiers these familial get-togethers stand out as significant and memorable occasions that punctuate the youngsters’ military service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).¹ The basic pattern for this form of intense parental involvement is set during the early period of basic training (whose length varies greatly between units). It is generally felt that this time of initial encounter with military life and its strains is the most difficult for young soldiers, and family support in the form of warm welcome on weekends, parental visits on Saturdays when the soldier stays in camp, as well as packages filled with special snacks sent to the camp by mail on weekdays, are most crucial components in the building of soldiers’ morale. For many families, however, this weekend parental visitation pattern continues well into the service, sometimes to its end, depending mainly on the youngster’s service conditions.

Notably, most of the parents who find themselves in the late eighties willingly providing this weekend support for their offspring did not enjoy a similar degree of parental involvement in their military experience when it was their time to serve in the Israeli army (usually twenty five to thirty years earlier). Some of my informants were obviously puzzled by this new familial pattern, and were as attuned as I was to the sense of poignancy that attends the emergence of the ritualized visitations I am considering in this chapter.

Indeed, a number of friends who are familiar with my work, have called my attention to this phenomenon, insisting that this is something “for you to study.” Over the past few years, I have heard many comments related to these Saturday trips from friends and acquaintances, and have also been interested in the rhetoric of military recruitment,² but it was only when I found myself in one of those cars on a Saturday morning, heading toward the West Bank military camp where my newly recruited son was serving, that the scattered bits and pieces of information and self-reflective comments I had gathered began to fall into place. Clearly, the weekend picnics, which provide the focus for my discussion, are but one manifestation of a much larger sociocultural orientation, but I believe they provide a fruitful ethnographic site from which to consider the broader issues involved.

One of the most remarkable features about this pattern of visitations is that it marks a shift from a sentimental focus on the close-knit peer group, of which small-scale, cohesive military units have long been a prime example, to the parental home as the source of emotional sustenance and sense of personal well-being. The language of *gibush* as a peer group centered “social feeling” has been gradually replaced by a language of familial nurturance and dependence, which is natively articulated as the need to “support” (*litmoh*) a son or daughter in particularly rough times. It is the general recognition of this emotional dependence and the understandable parental urge to respond to it that gives these weekend excursions their distinctive emotional force and somewhat frenzied flavor.

Clearly, given the ethos of camaraderie that is associated with military experience in Israeli popular imagination (Aran 1974; Gal 1986; Greenbaum 1979; Lieblich 1987; Ben-Ari 1989) it is, indeed, quite surprising to hear parents’ “I hate to think of him spending the whole Saturday there on his own,” when they speak of a son who has been required to spend a weekend in the camp in the company of all of his peers. The relationship between the quality of social life within the camp and the felt need for Saturday visits is brought out by the fact that the situation is generally felt to be different for choice units, which are said to enjoy a great deal of *gibush*, and for which the role of parental support is less accentuated. Thus, the written invitation sent by the camp authorities to parents of new recruits to visit their children in camp on Saturdays suggests a tacit recognition of the failure of this ethos, sometimes explicitly expressed as problems with *gibush*, particularly in the initial phases of training.³ In undertaking these trips to the camps, parents implicitly indicate a similar assessment of their children’s social situation, while, at the same time, helping to reproduce it as the visits actually undermine the development of the kind of interdependence and camaraderie associated with the ethos of *gibush*. Thus, these weekend visitation patterns do not only reflect but also reinforce a newly emergent familism as a focal strand in contemporary Israel.⁴

Thus, familial Saturday visits to one's offspring's military camp have become a socially sanctioned, semi-institutionalized form, implicating the army, the parents and their nearly-grown children in an intricate web of material and emotional interdependence, officially spoken of as a "partnership" between the parents and the army in enhancing the "welfare" of the soldiers. In this relationship, various "needs" are met by the "care" of those who can and should cater to them, with a fluctuating division of labor between the army and the parents. This arrangement is spoken in a language of familial affect and a concern for individual soldiers' physical and psychological "needs." It partially replaces the peer group centered idiom of *gibush* that marks a disjunction with the family unit rather than a dependence on it. Notably, both the accent on *gibush* and on familial devotion foreground the experience of emotionally charged affiliation, serving to blur the fact that the army, like any large-scale organization, is ultimately governed by an unfeeling, bureaucratic rationality.

In what follows, I attempt to account for the form and functions of these picnics in military zones as socially constituted communicative occasions, and consider their symbolic significance as rituals of parenting, which are part of the wider sociocultural scene of contemporary Israel. In so doing, I draw upon my own observations as participant observer, on insights I have gained from interviews and casual conversations with parents and soldiers as well as on relevant materials, which have come my way, such as military correspondence sent out to recruits' homes. One of the most common clichés repeatedly heard from soldiers discussing their military experience, usually spoken in a tone of light-hearted resignation, is that "the army is not a picnic." The familial encounters described here serve to modify some of this feeling, both literally and metaphorically. By exploring the sociocultural meanings and implications of these semi-institutionalized gatherings, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of attending to newly emergent speech situations as a complement to the more prevalent focus on the crystallization of speech forms in ethnographic accounts of ways of speaking (Hymes 1974b).

PICNICKING IN A MILITARY ZONE

Saturday excursions to military camps are part of a larger web of both material and emotional support woven around young soldiers from middle-class homes as they join the service. While formerly the departure into the service tended to be conceptualized as a rite-of-separation, a much awaited first step toward independence on the part of the young, currently a son or daughter's departure into the service tends to work in the other direction: A rather independent teenager, who would not be very likely to seek out his or her parents' company very much, becomes once again dependent on parents and family for company and support to a degree they are no longer accustomed to. The departure into

the military, while taking the son or daughter out of parental jurisdiction, in a sense becomes a rite of familial re-integration rather than a step toward separation. Saturday visits, and the sense of anticipation surrounding them, have come both to articulate and to symbolize these newfound familial bonds.

It is difficult to say when this form of intense parental preoccupation with young soldiers' material and emotional "upkeep" started, but most of the people I have talked to explicitly mentioned the relative novelty of this visitation pattern. Parents I have interviewed about this often made spontaneous reference to this change, saying that in their own time parents would "at the most" be invited to ceremonial occasions, such as oath-taking ceremonies or military course graduations in selected locations out-of-camp (occasions which are often punctuated by fire inscriptions of the kind discussed in the previous chapter). The more diffuse, frequent, voluntary visits by parents were expressly discouraged, and stories about embarrassing parents, who would hang around outside the camp boundaries in an attempt to get in touch with their newly drafted offspring, abounded. Several of my informants recalled cases when parents were persuaded to leave only after being told that their child would be strictly punished for not keeping his or her parents out of bounds. In other words, at least for some parents, the urge to make such visits has been there for a long time, but it has been held in check via institutional arrangements as well as normative expectations. This same urge is currently cultivated and channeled in terms of a different set of normative and institutional arrangements, which define these Saturday familial encounters as culturally valued communicative occasions on the Israeli scene.

This change has been gradual. The first step toward greater parental involvement in the youngsters' military experience seems to have taken the form of official "parent days." Gal (1986), in his extensive treatment of the "portrait of the Israeli soldier" says:

In most of the basic training bases, it has become the custom for the base commander to send a letter to each new trainee's parents in which he explains to them what their child will experience, encourages them not to worry, and compliments them for bringing up their child to become a loyal soldier in the IDF. At least once during the basic training period, the parents are invited to visit the base. The scene on a day like this is in sharp contrast to the normal all-military character of the bases. On such a parents' day the base is transformed from "all green" into a big family picnic, with scattered groups of soldiers and their parents fussing over them. The poor trainee, who is in the midst of the transformation from childhood to being a soldier, totally succumbs to the warmth and love of his mom and dad. The strong bond between the people and the military is demonstrated here in its most primary unit - the family (Gal 1986:110).

Parents' day, a one time affair in the trainee's calendar has been gradually transformed into the current pattern of systematic, ongoing, but only semi-

official visitations. Some of my informants attested to a transitional period when visits to one's child's camp were not yet taken for granted but were already accepted. Parents, who testified as to their urge to visit their offspring's camp ten or fifteen years ago, spoke with a trace of uneasiness and amusement at their own devotion, like the father who said to me, "We were crazy parents," recalling how he and his wife would "run after the boys to their camps" even when they were in temporary encampments, and how they would meet a few other parents there, "who were crazy like us."

Nowadays, most of the parents I have spoken to express an overwhelming, irresistible sense of obligation: "I feel I have to go every Saturday he does not come home," the mother of a long-time soldier said to me, "He needs it. I can't bear the thought that he'll spend all day Saturday there with nothing to do while we could have visited him. I can hear from his voice on the phone how happy he is when we tell him we'll be there on Saturday."

The story of these visits, in fact, begins long before the encounter itself. Indeed, once a son or daughter joins the army the family's calendar often changes, and enters a new rhythm punctuated by the offspring's arrivals or nonarrivals for a weekend vacation. As the long lines of cars headed towards military camps indicate, many parents take it upon themselves to "compensate" a son or daughter, who were not allowed to come home for the weekend, by visiting them at camp. When military plans change, family plans often follow suit, and some parents, indeed, feel the support they can give to their offspring, especially in his or her first period in the army, takes precedence over all other commitments or plans. Many parents, however, continue the pattern for the full length of military service: "I don't need to drive anymore," a seasoned parent said to me in an amused, self-congratulatory tone, "by now the car can do the way on its own."

The visit clearly serves to counteract the sense of anonymity and self-effacement that often attend the army experience, as it suggests, in the words of a young soldier, that "there is someone in the world for whom it's important enough to come visit you. You feel you are real important to somebody." Although everybody recognizes the force of circumstances that could prevent parents from visiting, particularly when distances are relatively great, a failure to do so is often experienced as a disappointment by all the parties involved. The parents I interviewed, even when they conceded they could take more than a week's separation from their offspring, all felt that these visits have become a general norm and said they did not want to put their offspring in the unhappy position of being "one of the few ones whose parents didn't come," as a father said in explaining why he was prepared to drive for three hours each way to visit a son who had been drafted only a few days earlier. Another parent, a single mother, recalled the tremendous efforts she had made several years earlier to get to her elder son's remote camp in the southern

part of the country every weekend despite the fact that she was having severe health problems at the time. She decided to make the effort and undertake the trips after she had heard another soldier remark that he did not know how he could live through the week without the knowledge that his parents would be coming on Saturday. Although her son did not make such an explicit demand on her, knowing her condition, she felt compelled to visit him for fear that he might feel lonely and neglected should she not arrive.

When the drive takes parents through the Israeli-held territories (much of the data I have gathered relates to the West Bank), much more than time and effort are involved. Many parents I have talked to openly expressed their concern at being attacked or stoned on the way. Indeed, people tend to avoid traveling there alone, and through a semi-official organization of these visits meeting places are established from which the parents' cars depart and are sometimes joined by a military vehicle on the way. Some parents speak in tones of moral self-approbation, underscoring the sacrificial aspects of their parental efforts: "We went to visit him every week he did not come home," a mother told me in relating her experience of the period of her son's basic training session, which took place at the beginning of the Palestinian uprising, stressing that they were not even deterred by the risk involved in driving through the West Bank.

Thus, although they are encouraged by the military, these visits—unlike the parents' participation in official oath-taking and other ceremonies—are not officially organized. As a result of this makeshift arrangement, the visits retain a sense of willing spontaneity, but may also be pervaded by a sense of anxiety, which is aggravated by the fact that it is not quite clear who takes responsibility for security matters when this is relevant. This ambiguous allocation of responsibilities concerning the encounter itself, reflects a deeper ambiguity as far as responsibility for the soldiers' well-being goes, with the army shifting more and more of it onto the parents while retaining both legal and actual control over the soldiers' lives. "If we stopped doing the laundry, the IDF would fall apart," an amused parent told me, summing up the vital though secondary role parents were allocated in this emerging system euphemistically referred to as a "partnership."⁵

Indeed, our first Saturday excursion to our son's basic training camp had the flavor of a semi-military operation. A midnight telephone call woke us the night before to tell us where parents' cars would meet to form a convoy through the stretch of the journey that would take us through the West Bank. Upon arrival at the meeting place the next morning, no time was spent on introductions, but one could feel the shared spirit induced by common purpose. The cars moved in a loosely coordinated, tense line, with each family enclosed in its own vehicle. It seemed that, given the all-important destination, even the clumsy, en bloc violation of traffic rules in the dormant city road was a priori

condoned. The main point was that we were all there to bring to our soldier son "a taste of home."

As is to be expected, this taste of home is primarily carried in the form of the foodstuffs that provide the picnic's material substance. As they got out of the cars, family members could be seen carrying iceboxes and baskets filled with food, heading with them to the visitors' area, a partially shaded space at the entrance to the camp compound itself. The elaborateness of these picnics is quite impressive, and many informants mentioned their initial surprise at the gastronomic turn these visits had taken. One mother, for example, recounted her sheer embarrassment on the first visit to her son's camp, as she realized that the cake and small basket of fruit she had brought with her paled in comparison with the elaborate picnics held by many of the families grouped around her. She quickly learned what was expected, she said, and proceeded to prepare her son's favorite foods in abundance for the next visits. When it was her second son's turn to join the army, she added smilingly, she was already on top of it all, and would come armed with an icebox filled with choice foods, a clean change of underwear, and whatever else he'd request on the phone, if he was able to call.

Interestingly, the well-demarcated visitors' area that I have observed is located inside the military zone but outside the camp itself so that it is the only place where both soldiers and parents are allowed: The soldiers cannot move beyond the military zone and the parents are usually kept strictly out of the camp proper. The commanders, the human embodiments of the military order, are nowhere in sight. This area is thus a liminal (Turner 1969), "betwixt and between" zone, neither military nor civilian, or, rather, a place where the military and the civilian worlds come together in a ritually controlled way for the duration of the visit, which normally lasts some two to three hours.

During most of the visit each family group sits together, self-absorbed, attentive to "their own soldier," who is the unmistakable center of attention. What I have seen and heard from interviewees suggests that there is relatively little interaction between the family circles, even on occasions when people had met earlier to form a convoy. This degree of relative familial self-absorption stands out within the larger context of Israeli easy-going sociability. Soldiers I have asked about this pattern considered it obvious. As one of them succinctly put it: "You don't look right or left. You don't care what goes on around you. There's not much time." As a matter of fact, however, the three or so hours spent together are more time than most teenagers spend with their parents at one sitting under any other circumstances. The subjective construction of a sense of time pressure, however, enhances the "preciousness" of the occasion as it is constructed by all the parties involved.

These enclosed family gatherings visibly dramatize the fact that while the son's or daughter's departure into the military in one sense draws family

members apart, it is currently also used to reintegrate the nuclear family unit along culturally well-established child-centered patterns. Hence, the reorientation to basic physical and emotional needs, and the absorbed attention to the focal "child" (the term used by most parents in referring to their military-age offspring). Interestingly, parents I have talked to offered markedly different accounts of the kinds of topics that tended to dominate these familial gatherings beyond the discussion of military experiences, mainly initiated by the trainees. These differences, however, converged on a shared perspective whereby these picnics should serve as a link of support between the soldier and his or her former life. Some parents said they discussed all the details of family life at great length so as to convey the message that "you are still one of us," and to remind the trainee that "there is life outside this camp, and he'll get back to it." Others, on the contrary, explicitly said they avoided all mention of home life so as not to provoke home sickness as well as to allow the soldier to maintain his or her position at center stage. Both these parental strategies, which were readily verbalized by some parents, suggest the extent to which these family gatherings are experienced as potentially problematic occasions that require quite unaccustomed pre-meditation and more than usual attentiveness in parent-child interactions.

Thus, both the project-like nature of those visits, the weekend agenda they set for immediate family members, and the participation structures they involve strongly suggest that one of their main functions is to reaffirm the viability and continued vitality of the nuclear family unit precisely at the time in the life cycle when its integrity is threatened by the actual departure of one of its members into a world whose rules and modes stand drastically apart. On one level, the separation involved in the youngster's departure into the army is quite extreme—parents have no knowledge of and no control over his or her doings at all, although in initial stages of the service they are now given the camp's phone number and formally encouraged to contact commanders should any problems arise. While some parents choose to use this official channel, most do not, and a number of parents I have talked to have stressed the strange feeling attending the son's or daughter's move "out of my jurisdiction." The visits themselves, of course, bring parents closer to their children's military world, potentially opening up various aspects of it for critical scrutiny. One consequence of this has been greater parental involvement and concern regarding the details of their offspring's military experience. This is reflected in more public criticism of army procedures and measures aired in the media, open discussion of previously confidentially held topics such as suicides among soldiers, the great publicity given to the trials of soldiers and officers accused of illegal actions in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as an increase in appeals to the military Ombudsman concerning harassment of soldiers. Thus, the large-lettered heading of an article by D. Sadeh, which appeared in the evening paper

Yedi'oth Aḥaronoth on June 28, 1990 (following the submission of the Ombudsman's annual report) read, "Let them not tell us that there is no soldier harassment (*tirturim*) in the IDF." The article detailed the recent statistics of appeals to the Ombudsman, noting that 45.87% of them were found to be justified.

Thus, the picnics held in military zones provide arenas in which the actual fact of separation is simultaneously acknowledged and denied by the soldiers and their parents. They epitomize the general social arrangement whereby the youngsters are given the solace of material and emotional support as "fringe benefits," so to speak, in a situation that prevents them from exercising anything like the degree of autonomy and independence they had already reached as young adults in civilian life. For the parents, these visits help to bridge and smoothe over the abrupt, radical change in the family's life, facilitating their accommodation to this new life cycle condition. The traditional role of the family is thereby reinforced, in its cultural interpretation as the seat of emotional as well as material support. The centrality of this role was pointed out in chapter 2, which traced the working of the *gibush* metaphor, and considered its exclusion from the discourse of family on the one hand and from the discourse of emotions on the other.

Within the family itself, moreover, a subtle process of realignment can sometimes be observed.⁶ It has been mentioned to me by some reflective mothers of male soldiers, who commented on the fact that they noticed a newfound closeness between fathers and sons who were spending much time together during their weekend encounters, whether at home or in the camp, discussing and comparing their experiences in the military. Some women explicitly said they sometimes felt "left out" during these male conversations. Whether this newly accentuated gender role differentiation has any long-term effects I cannot say, but I felt that at least some of the middle-class, relatively independent women I spoke to interpreted the situation as intensifying their traditional, feminine care-taking roles. Most, however, accepted their responsibility for supplying this material, yet emotionally charged comfort zone with a sense of devotion, which was only rarely sprinkled with humor. One highly accomplished career woman, however, jokingly said to me upon relating her culinary preparations for the weekend trip to her son's camp: "Well, at least I rediscovered my place in the kitchen again," commenting that her virtuosity around the preparation of food had recently become more important than it had been for a long time.

The male bonding within the family over the son's military experience is noticeable in discussions that trace similarities as well as differences between the way things are now and the way they were "in our days," as fathers often put it. This obviously provides an occasion for reminiscences, which are as different or as common as are individuals' experiences and memories. Another

aspect of these inevitable comparisons, one that remains submerged in father-son conversations, but came to the fore in many of the discussions with men, was the keen anxiety attending the intimate knowledge of what the sons were going through, and especially the risks involved in both training and actual service. In fact, this diffuse sense of anxiety accompanies many parents for years before their sons' actual draft, long before the solace of shared experiences can soften some of its edge. For instance, a man in his mid-thirties, a paratrooper, said in casual conversation that he could not imagine doing now the kinds of risky things he did as a young soldier, and that he got the creeps thinking of the possibility that his son, when he became a soldier, should find himself in some of the situations in which he had found himself during his own days as a young soldier. He added that the thought of his son's military service sometimes kept him awake at night. When I asked when his son was going into the service, he said the boy was only eight (!) years old. Sighing, he continued, "But I guess we all must go through this."

Obviously, not all men feel that way, and the picture is more complicated and varied. Indeed, several fathers phoned into the "Toward the Draft" question and answer radio program to inquire what they could do to have their sons follow in their footsteps into choice military units such as the paratroopers, which are highly demanding and selective. The main point, however, is that in contemporary Israel the military service provides an arena for an inter-generational familial dialogue of a distinctive kind. It is a dialogue critically shaped by the fact that most parents of today, including many women (unlike their own parents of a generation ago), have first hand knowledge of military life. In fact, most of the fathers of young soldiers today are still active in the reserves and, whatever they do for a living, have never actually left their military experience behind. Most members of this parent generation (including many of the women) have had more than a taste of the military, even if their experience of it was different and varied. Indeed, as many of them openly attest, they had hoped in their heart of hearts that their own children would be spared the experience of military engagement and war. I can't tell how many times I have heard self-mocking, resigned assertions like, "I thought my son would not have to go into the army." These speakers were well aware of the naivete and hyperbolic nature of their statement, but nevertheless, they indicated that the widespread sense of acceptance vis-a-vis the current situation is mingled, for many Israelis, with a deep sense of frustration.

In this context, it was, therefore, quite surprising to find that the official welcome note from our son's base commander contained the following statement: "... With his recruitment to the Israeli Defense Forces your son enters a new framework, which *for you* [my emphasis] as for him constitutes a new, unknown conceptual world, imbued with fears and anxieties..." Given my earlier discussion, this well-meaning statement is puzzling indeed. It is

followed, as expected, by the more familiar, formulaic assertion that the army and the parents are partners to a shared goal—the son's successful service.

Since this is the first communication we received from the army directed to us "personally," it is clearly designed to set the initial tone for the potentially problematic relationship between the army and the parents in terms of the division of labor as far as both caretaking duties and responsibilities go. One therefore wonders what is being accomplished by typecasting parents—most of whom, as noted, have been (or still are) soldiers in the same army—as strangers to the world of the military.

Indeed, the "psychological" language used in the above letter (as one of my informants called it, pointing out the central role psychologists have come to play in the military), which relates to the fear of transitions into a new "conceptual world," is less benign than it appears, whether applied to the soldiers' predicament or to that of their parents. It seems that by extending the language of transition from the new recruits to their parents, one also equates the position of soldiers and their parents as powerless, bewildered strangers to a new, scary world. While it is recognized that soldiers entering the disciplined world of the military renounce their personal freedom and autonomy, this is not normally considered to be the case for their parents. Moreover, this suggests that the only problem lies in the newness of the situation, not in its overall nature or any of its details. The military world in its present shape and form is a given, and it is everyone's task to help youngsters adjust to it as smoothly as possible. The implied mini-narrative about the shock of newness suggested in this letter, if accepted, will be particularly effective in neutralizing alternative opinions and formulations. Parental involvement—while welcome—may have its cost in parental opinion. Parental opinion and public exposure, as was discussed earlier, may go different ways. Neutralizing parents' potential critique while mobilizing their good will thus becomes an intricate persuasive task. Telling people they are strangers to an arena of action in which they are potential participants is a subtle way of delegitimizing them as full-fledged actors. It is a silencing move accomplished in terms of a larger, apparently well-intentioned rhetoric of institutional concern and support.

While this transitional juncture from a civilian to a military framework, in which Israeli youths and their parents find themselves entangled, would be inherently problematic under any circumstances as a critical point in the life cycle, and as a meeting place for radically different sociocultural frameworks, the political situation in contemporary Israel has, of course, affected it in far-reaching ways. Although there is very little open draft resistance in Israel (Linn 1989), and a rhetoric of separation between the spheres of the military and the political permeates Israeli public discourse and institutional arrangements, the adverse impact of the political situation is recognized by all (Ben Ari, 1989; Liebes & Blum-Kulka 1989). Specifically, people repeatedly mention that

following the 1967 war the Israeli army has been forced to orient itself to the role of an occupation army in addition to its defense duties, which represent the original mandate that has won it widespread consensus and, as it is often expressed, the "love" of the nation (cf. Schild 1973 and Ben-Eliezer 1988 for sociohistorical discussions of military service in Israel).

It is with reference to this all-encompassing political predicament that the emergence of picnics in military zones, and the redefinition of parental roles and familial images they imply, must be ultimately considered. The next section will attempt such a broader contextualization of the emergence of these picnics as ritualized cultural performances and the patterns of sentiments they embody. Clearly, the institutional support given to these practices is telling, as well as the fact that they remain institutionally undefined, and are experienced as the heartfelt expression of parental concern (though sprinkled with a recognition of powerful social expectations concerning the ingredients of "good parenthood"). In other words, as I will try to argue in the next section, when they are cordially invited to visit their offspring in their military camp ("allowed to visit" is the more commonly spoken expression), parents become implicated in the politics of consensus that is an important feature of Israeli communal life.⁷

THE POLITICS OF CONSENSUS

Quite understandably, both scholarly and popular discussions of the contemporary Israeli political scene focus on manifestations of acute strife and ideological struggle. As is suggested throughout this book, however, an exploration of processes of regularization, particularly as they can be gleaned from attention to the ritualized dimensions of members' communicative practices, can provide another angle from which to view the Israeli sociocultural scene. The centrality of the rhetoric of consensus in Israeli culture was pointed out, in particular, in the discussion of the Israeli ethos of *gibush*.

As was illustrated in discussing the rhetoric of *gibush*, or cohesion, however, its most powerful manifestations are implicit in cultural practices and arrangements rather than explicit in members' verbal rhetoric. Given the background of ideological struggles that shape the life of the country, these implicit "rhetorics of consensus" must be seen as part of a hotly contested reality, as potential rebuttals rather than mere ritualized assertions. That is, I would like to argue that the rhetoric of participation, which casts young soldiers as dependent and "needy," authoritatively inviting parents to see themselves as partners in their offspring's military experience, is a move in a larger hegemonic conversation in which both youngsters and parents find themselves implicated.

The "language of needs," which pervades parental as well as institutional discourse about young soldiers, is more generally typical of the political discourse of the contemporary welfare state (cf. Fraser 1988). As M. Foucault

(1979:26) has eloquently pointed out, "need is also a political instrument, meticulously prepared, calculated and used." So that however well-intentioned this idiom may appear, the sociocultural conditions that make it so prominent and effective call for explication and critical assessment in given cases.

Clearly, the prominence of "needs-talk," as it relates to young soldiers, is but one manifestation of its proliferation in Israeli public discourse. Indeed, it is a language that mediates the domain of political life and of familial domesticity in an idiom that is at once public and privatized (or "psychologized"). For our purposes, it is important to note that the image of personhood implied in this discourse is that of an objectified "patient" rather than that of a reflective, purposeful, action-generating agent. Indeed, we do not dwell on the "needs" of the powerful and the free, but rather on their intentions and desires. The language of "needs" is, thus, a benevolent language of disempowerment with reference to those whose needs are attended to. It goes well with the language of training, a language that should (but often is not) sharply distinguished from the language of education, for, in the words of radical education theorists S. Aronowitz and H. Giroux, "... education, as opposed to training, is the process by which we assimilate our environment in relation to our desires. We are not only needy organisms, but desiring ones as well. And desire cannot be limited to goal-oriented behavior directed at achieving ends that are dictated by our social/biological 'needs'" (1985, p. 18).

The rhetorical emphasis on the role of "motivation" and "voluntarism" in the army indeed has the effect of blurring the centrality of this mechanistic view of persons in the discourse of the military, smoothing the inevitable tension between human agency and the military framework, which shares many characteristics with other total institutions (Goffman 1961). On closer scrutiny, however, the language of "needs" imperceptibly undermines this activist rhetoric, benignly legitimating the devoicing of the young, entangling them in a web of care and support that both eases and mystifies the social arrangement of which they are the focal, unreflective center pole.⁸

It is ironic that this devoicing of the young takes place just at the time when they are in fact burdened with great responsibilities at the "operational" level, and are institutionally and technically empowered to an incredible extent. Military training cultivates their ability to become full-fledged, skills-oriented "doers," but not reflective agents (Hasdai 1982; Ben-Eliezer 1988). This orientation finds its sociolinguistic expression in the relative prevalence of the direct, "dugri" speech style, which I have studied elsewhere (Katriel 1986a), and whose mode was claimed by some of my informants to epitomize the Israeli military ethos. The larger meanings of this "hidden curriculum" of military socialization becomes particularly blurred when youngsters' military experience is cast in the idiom of personal growth, and is presented as one more phase in character development.

Some of the soldiers and parents I have talked to commented on the gap they sensed between the youngsters' mature functioning in their military role as compared to their position of dependence within the home, but the implications of this gap remain submerged as the clearcut separation generally made between the domain of the military and that of home life facilitates youngsters' experience of them as separate, mutually reinforcing worlds. In earlier times, as noted, this separation was achieved by keeping parents largely out of sight. Currently, it is achieved by ritually constraining and demarcating the manner and degree of their involvement. Changes in such parental participation patterns in institutionalized or semi-institutionalized communicative occasions are significant for understanding cultural dynamics. A similar claim was made in the study of "fire rituals" in the previous chapter. Indeed, similar questions should be asked about changes in parental involvement in Israeli schools, whether in actual participation in school-based occasions or as providers of help with schoolwork at home (either directly or through the financing of private instruction, as discussed in the next chapter).

In all these cases, it makes sense to ask what cultural model of parenting is implied by the set of expectations currently enacted in these various junctures between the life of the home and that of the other societal institutions in which youngsters participate. As these worlds come together—whether in the form of fire rituals, the negotiation of schoolwork or weekly picnics in military zones—we might explore how their communicative construction serves the interests of the various relevant social institutions—the school, the youth movement, the military, the family. We might ask how their voices are harmonized and where they may come into conflict in processes of cultural construction and reconstruction, and in their shared task of socializing the young within a culturally intelligible interpersonal framework, which mediates the pulls toward independence on the one hand and toward interdependence on the other.⁹

Indeed, discussions with newly drafted soldiers (as well as other cultural members) have clearly indicated the artifice involved in the attempt to separate out the political situation from the life cycle positioning of the new draftee. Although joining the army is unquestionably accompanied by a sense of anticipation for many youngsters and their parents, and official military discourse about the draft (as in the "Toward the Draft" program) is permeated with a rhetoric of "new beginnings," it is very common to hear parents' worried exchanges about the predicament of military service "nowadays," with both explicit and implicit comparisons to their own days in the military, when things were at least clear-cut from a moral standpoint, and there was general consensus on IDF's defense goals.

It is no secret that many Israelis, including many of those who participate in those weekend picnics in military zones (at least some of them in the Israeli-

held territories), do not support the government's policies in those areas, and are troubled by the role the military is forced to play in them. While parents' responses range between acceptance, exasperation, and outright rage, not all the rage is directed towards the official "enemy." Thus, an angry mother of a young soldier told me of her son's stories about clashes with the civilian population in the West Bank, particularly the haunting contact with the women's plight. She said he felt these sights and voices would stay with him all his life. She asked me the question so many loyal Israelis have been asking: "Who has the right to demand this of us?" These words succinctly encapsulated the sentiment that was echoed and re-echoed in many other conversations. Her account was followed, quite tellingly (from my point of view), by a rather detailed and animated description of the devoted parental support the son was given, stressing the fact that they never failed to visit him in camp when he did not come home. There was more than a tinge of guilt in her voice, a "collective feeling" I learned to recognize in the talk of some of my parent-informants. Some explicitly verbalized a vague sense of "generational" guilt at having failed their children, who are now carrying the main burden of the country's intractable political situation.

A poignant statement of this parental predicament appeared in a newspaper article in a popular daily that addressed these issues (Yosi Kraim, *Hadashot*, 25 Aug. 1989). This article gives voice to many of the tormented comments I have heard from thoughtful parents who felt torn between their commitment to the country and the feeling that things were very wrong indeed. The article opens with a citation from a suicide note left by a twenty four year old university student and reserve soldier, Yariv Ben-Yosef, who took his life because he felt he could not face another military interrogation concerning his involvement in the death (two years earlier) of Hani a-Hashami, a Jebaliya Palestinian refugee, with whom he came into contact after a-Hashami had been tortured by four Giv'ati Brigade soldiers. The trial of these soldiers became for many a symbol of the potentially corrupting impact of the occupation on young soldiers, and the generally impossible situation of the Israeli army vis-a-vis the Palestinian Uprising. Following the Giv'ati soldiers' acquittal of the death charge (but not of torture), other soldiers were interrogated, among them Yariv Ben-Yosef, who had served as a reserve soldier at the time of the incident (and who, as the military authorities attested after his death, had not been involved in the torture).

Not even questioning the larger political context, his farewell words to his young brother highlight the hopelessness of the situation from an Israeli soldier's standpoint, and express his utter disillusionment with the political and military systems: "Therefore, when you find yourself in extreme situations where you need to exercise force, stop yourself and remember the blows in Jebaliya. Remember that you will not be given any backing, as a simple soldier,

from those sitting high up in the political and military establishment, because everyone covers their own ass, and it is the simple person who is mainly hurt, the one who is led by the system to do what he is doing.”

With these words ringing in his ear, the author of the article turns to the decision makers, complaining, as many have done before, that well-meaning soldiers are faced with impossible tasks. He describes the soldier's situation thus: “There, in the army, he is given unclear and inaccurate instructions and orders, he has to struggle with ambiguities, imprecisions, and misunderstandings. I, for example, do not know what it means to apply “reasonable force.” I really don't know, so how should my son know? Who will teach him?”

The soldiers' predicament becomes that of their parents, a contemporary replay of the ancient story of Isaac's sacrifice: “As Jews we have been through many trials, but we have not been asked to repeat daily the act of sacrifice—it was a one-time event. In the present situation, we are asked to undergo this trial each day anew. Would a parents' revolt succeed? Are the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense aware of what is happening to the hundreds of thousands of parents who raise their children here and want them to stay here? Mr. Prime Minister, I have no way of forcing you to explain to Gal Ben-Yosef, who got a suicide note from his brother, the late Yariv, what our political goals are, what our sons are required to do when they come to serve their country as soldiers. Think about them, sir, as if they were your grandsons, your offspring, the flesh of your flesh, who are led to the slaughter every morning.”

Obviously, not all parents feel so strongly, and few are as articulate in expressing their feelings. My discussion is, moreover, irrelevant to the case of those parents and soldiers who wholeheartedly support the government's policies, and who truly believe that the present political impasse is inevitable, that, “there is no choice” and “there's nobody to speak to” on the Arab side. What I am trying to understand, however, is the duality implicit in the position of those youngsters and parents (myself included), who feel that “something must be done,” that “it just cannot go on like this.” I have heard so many people say this, and they still find themselves politically immobilized, enmeshed in an inescapable web of commitments, anxieties, and moral torments.

In fact, as I have tried to argue, the particular definition of the parenting role, as it emerges from the weekend visitation rituals and other forms of parental participation in the youngsters' military experience, functions in such a way as to keep the larger political situation at bay. This helps both soldiers and their parents to maintain a separation between the military service itself and the politics that “surround” it. Maintaining such a separation, however, has become increasingly problematic for many Israelis in recent years, who find themselves entangled in the impossible role of the “victimized victimizer.”

In brief, what I am trying to suggest in this chapter is that the familial picnics in military zones as a salient form of ritualized support given to young soldiers, whatever else they are, are also a form of political co-optation. They provide a concrete context in which material and emotional care are extended to one's offspring. Parents who dread the thought of the kinds of military involvements their children may be engaged in (and are often spared the worst stories, as some soldiers explicitly told me), are relieved of their moral dilemma by a definition of the situation that subordinates all considerations to kin affiliation and the expression of affectivity.

This became clearly apparent during the much publicized trial of the aforementioned four Giv'ati Brigade soldiers who were accused of the brutal torture and eventual killing of Hani a-Hashami. Throughout the trial the parents stood behind their sons in rather dramatic gestures of unquestioning support. Even if one accepted their claim that the sons had been placed in an impossible position, and given unclear orders, one could have expected some expression of moral disapproval on the parents' part, or some questioning of their show of wholehearted support on the part of others. But moral disapproval (or approval, for that matter) is just what gets ruled out given current definitions of the parental role whereby what parents are expected to do is to support their children in times of stress. This is a far cry from the traditional Jewish educational role of parents, which places moral teachings at the center of parental concern (to the point of "spare the rod and spoil the child"). As we have seen with reference to the ethos of *gibush*, questions of affiliation and loyalty to the group all-too-easily come to supercede questions of moral conduct. In this case, the social unit thus affirmed is the family rather than the peer group (be it the school class or the army unit). The basic mechanism of neutralizing moral issues remains the same.¹⁰

Given the central place of the family in Jewish tradition, as contrasted with the Socialist Zionist accent on the peer group, the reaffirmation of the family in these picnics (as in many other life contexts in contemporary Israel) suggests a return to more traditional cultural patterns as compared to the ethos of pre-State Zionist groups, whose dominance was felt well into statehood. This re-affirmation of primordial familial bonds, as I have argued, is constructed in particular ways, formulated in the idiom of "needs" and their fulfilment. The traditional Jewish accent on cultivating a moral sensibility finds no expression in this support-centered familial orientation, nor does the Western model of the person grounded in intentionality and agency.

The semi-institutional arrangement and cultural form provided by these weekend picnics, and the rhetoric of parental participation and support attending them, thus help to sustain the double-voiced hegemonic mode to which most Israelis have been co-opted in one way or another. They are part of a larger discourse, which is grounded in culturally sanctioned cognitive distinctions

between arenas of action (the military vs the political), as well as modes of participation that allow one to be committed in feeling and action while remain disapproving in moral and political terms.

Indeed, by participating in these weekend performances of devoted parenthood, parents find themselves unwittingly and, at times, unwillingly adding their voices to a hegemonic communal conversation. The devoted, almost devotional focus on one's son's or daughter's material and emotional well-being helps to obscure the larger context of one's social participation, at least for a while.

Just as callers to the "Songs and Homework" program discussed in the next chapter, who learned to function within the program's implicitly defined parameters of educational exchange, helped to uphold the program's unspoken educational ideology, so parents who play the "proper" parental role vis-a-vis their military age children at the same time help to uphold larger political hegemonic forces, which seek to mobilize citizens' emotional commitment at the expense of the open exchange of reasoned discourse.

Participating in a hegemonic discourse, however, is not a simple matter of choice. I hope my analysis has shown the many levels of meaning and commitment involved, and the sense of entanglement that pervades the situation as a whole. It is, indeed, in contexts where matters are both troubling and ambiguous, where simple assertions do not work, whether on a political, a moral, or an emotional plane, that cultural forms emerge that can help us both sustain our communal dialogue, rechart it and at times envelope it in a veil of mystification. Whether in the form of griping parties, fire rituals, or ritualized picnics, contemporary Israelis have created communally negotiated occasions for the articulation of a shared sense of problematicity with regard to the basic value of group cohesion, or *gibush*, grounded in the peer group or in the family, as the case may be. Whether it is upheld or subtly renegotiated, the *gibush* experiential idiom still serves as a consequential undercurrent in Israeli cultural life.¹¹

Chapter 5: Picnics in a Military Zone:

1. Military service in Israel is compulsory and lasts three years for boys and two for girls, usually beginning around age eighteen. Unlike the case with many armies around the world, Israeli soldiers get quite frequent weekend leaves, and are rarely away from home for more than a few weeks at a time. The familial picnics described here take place on those weekends during which the soldier boy or girl is not granted a weekend leave. Although the camps tend to be located in out-of-the-way sites, requiring some driving, they are usually reachable within a few hours by car given the smallness of the country.

2. The rhetoric of military recruitment has become more and more prominent in recent years, as is attested by the "Towards the Draft" radio program aired annually for ten consecutive days in early summer, books with advice to young recruits published in recent years, as well as materials sent home to prospective recruits such as special issues of the military journal *Bamahane* (In the Camp) which are devoted to recruits and their problems. As of this school year (1989/90) all (Jewish) high schools will offer a special week of intensive preparation for the army to graduating seniors. Lieblich's (1987) book of interviews with soldiers, which became very popular reading, also offers many insights on the rhetoric of military recruitment and participation.

3. A standard letter from the base commander where our son was stationed reached our home in the second week of basic training, specifying the visiting hours to the camp on Saturday. In addition to daytime hours, visiting hours on Saturday night were specified as well, ostensibly for religious people who do not drive on the Sabbath. This, of course, blatantly ignored the fact that no person in his or her right mind would volunteer to drive to the camp, which was located in the West Bank (sometimes nicknamed 'Intifada land') after dark. There was not even a hint of military escort in that letter, and, indeed, it was only haphazardly arranged, if at all.

4. Eyal Ben-Ari (personal communication) has suggested to me that the new focus on familism may be associated at the macro-level with the cultural influence of the recent social and political rise of the family-centered Sephardic, 'ethnic' groups in Israel. Notably, for many secular, middle-class Israelis, Saturday trips, organized either privately or through the Society for the Protection of Nature (Ben-David 1988) are a familiar form of familial engagement (families of lower socioeconomic strata will not usually have a car and public transportation is not available on the Sabbath in most parts of the country). These trips are a matter of recreational, family "fun," often combined with a love of "nature" and an ideological commitment to the land of Israel and its historical sites. For many of these families, therefore, the recruitment of a son or daughter into the military involves a redirection and reframing of a familiar, perhaps intensified pattern of family recreation on the weekend rather than the assumption of a completely new form of familial activity.

5. Thus, for example, we were told (in writing) that the army would take care of all our soldier's needs right after we had spent considerable amounts of money for initial extra equipment purchased in special stores, which our son's friends convinced him he absolutely needed to take along. The

commercialization of the whole thing is attested to by the considerable number of such stores scattered around the country. One such chain, appropriately called "Arsenal" has issued a smartly illustrated, khaki-colored brochure, which reads: "Dear recruit! In this brochure we have put together for your benefit complementary equipment that will help you during your service. A great deal of experience has gone into the selection and adaptation of the items. . . You can get detailed information about the equipment required during various phases in the service when you visit one of our stores."

6. I realize that some of what I say here is biased towards a male-soldier's experience. A good part of my material relates to soldier boys and their parents, although the visitation patterns that form the focus of this chapter are not subject to gender differentiation, as far as my conversations with soldier girls and their parents could reveal. The differential attitude towards boys' and girls' military service in the culture at large is undeniable, and doubtlessly deserves special treatment.

7. A TV program entitled "Mobilized Mothers," which gave voice to the lived experiences of mothers of soldiers in combat units, was aired on Israeli national television as part of the highly visible investigative program *Mabat Sheni* (Second Look) on March 6, 1990 (several months after this chapter was completed). The several women interviewed, some of whom are active in the parents' organization "Parents against Burnout," described in vivid terms their anxieties and their frantic nurturing activities. Some expressed their moral outrage at the policing tasks their sons were assigned in the territories yet all reaffirmed Israel's need to maintain an army and their sons' duty to join in the collective effort.

8. M. Fine's 1988 analysis of the idiom of female protection in the sex education of American adolescents and its role in exacerbating the vulnerability of young females is another example of a benevolent idiom of disempowerment.

9. As Doi (1977) shows in his analysis of the 'anatomy of dependence' in Japanese culture based on an exploration of the cultural meanings and discursive uses of the concept of *amae*, which he contrasts with the American accent on independence, such patterns of feeling and forms of cultural conduct are central to sociocultural organization.

10. A recent Israeli movie (1989 release), entitled "One of Us," which was scripted and directed by the brothers Barabash, is a poignant exploration of the nature and limits of the *gibush* ethos in the military in the context of acute moral deliberations. One of the protagonists is faced with the dilemma

of whether to remain loyal to his friends, or whether to conduct an objective and thorough investigation of their suspected killing of a terrorist under captivity, in his role as official military investigator.

11. Two years after the writing of this chapter was completed, as the book was going into press, the issue of parents' involvement in their children's military experience was for a while openly debated in the press. The impetus for this public attention was a decision by the commander of a paratroopers' battalion, a colonel by rank, to limit and constrain parental weekend visits. The October 24, 1990 issue of the military weekly *Bamaḥane* addressed this debate rather extensively, interviewing commanders, soldiers and parents on this issue. Opinions were divided as to the pros and cons of Saturday visits, and parental involvement generally. Most of the people interviewed by the journalists in one way or another supported the position of a commander who said that "Parents can both contribute and be a nuisance." Thus, one young commander said that "the parents know their limits," whereas another expressed the view that "parents interfere too much, as a result of the army's policy in the past year or two. Today they feel freer to intrude upon the military system, so they do - that's the nature of parents." Parents interviewed expressed a desire to maintain contact with and be informed of their children's situation. Their responses to the proposed limitations on parental visits were highly variable. One mother said: "If the commanders decide to limit the visits - it will be all right. When it's allowed - we go gladly, when it's not allowed - it's not allowed," whereas another said: "Nobody will stop me from visiting him when he stays in camp on Saturday. I'll wait near the camp gate until they let me in."

6

“For Our Young Listeners”: Rhetorics of Participation on Israeli Radio

INTRODUCTION

Radio days are not all gone. Although, clearly, television holds prime of place among electronic media in most countries in the world today, one of the distinctive features of radio broadcasting is that it allows for a considerable degree of spontaneous, long-distance and anonymous audience participation. This feature of radio communication has been widely utilized in call-in (phone-in) programs of all kinds. As A. Crisell (1986:65) argues, even though call-in programs may not be distinctive to the radio as electronic medium, they were originated by it and are of “unique significance therein.” He further argues, employing R. Jakobson’s (1960) well-known functional model of the communication process, that the purpose of the call-in program is “to attempt the ultimately impossible feat of providing feedback for the listener and that the dominant function of the program is therefore phatic and metalingual” (ibid., p.65). Summing up the special interest of call-in programs for the student of mass communication, Crisell (1986:190) says that (1) It represents a synthesis of private and public media, since it is “an individual ‘point to point’ mode of communication which is overheard by a mass audience of indeterminate size;” (2) It represents an inversion of the radio medium. The program is *about* its audience, which “gains a sense of itself as a varied yet corporate entity;” and (3) The call-in program shows that the radio audience can use the medium in a variety of ways, some passive, some active, forming a complex set of relationships between callers, listeners, and presenters.

The case study of a call-in program designed for young audiences that is presented in this chapter illustrates these several points of interest. It combines a private channel of expression and a public forum, and dramatizes a sense of the audience, differentiating it along lines of participation. More importantly, however, it allows us to explore in detail the rhetorical uses made of a particular call-in program in a particular sociocultural context. The broader significance of such programs has been pointed out by Higgins and Moss (1982:1), who say that they involve a “counter-hegemonic discourse phenomenon—as it is one of the few ways people can find to give public expression to private and perhaps dissonant viewpoints in a culture otherwise saturated with approved meanings” (cited in Crisell:184). The analysis provided in this chapter takes us one step further, showing how a call-in program’s

communicative unfolding can subtly but effectively subvert its potential counter-hegemonic import.

In Israel, there has been quite a long-standing tradition of call-in programs directed at adult audiences—programs dealing with interpersonal relationships, parenting, dream interpretations, or programs designed as an information source on particular issues—medical problems, legal affairs, or government services, to name but a few. In recent years, several call-in radio programs directed to young audiences have become quite visible on the Israeli communications scene. They tend to be pedagogical and service oriented; they may be limited to a predefined period, like the nine session early summer program designed to respond to callers' queries regarding military service called "Towards the Draft" (*Likrat Gijus*), which was mentioned in the previous chapter; or they may become a regular feature of radio broadcasting such as the highly visible program called "Songs and Homework" (*Shirim Veshiurim*), which is designed to help junior as well as senior high school students with their school work, and has been running for several years now. Inviting dialogue, these programs are infused with a rhetoric of participation. Yet, at the same time, they implicitly shape and constrain participation in particular ways. The "Songs and Homework" program, for example, is dominated by what I will call "the voice of schooling," a discursive idiom anchored in the normative domain of formal education.

Following E. Mishler's (1984) analysis of the tension between the "voice of medicine" and the "voice of the life world" as characteristic of the discourse of medical interviews, I posit a similar tension between the "voice of schooling" and the "voice of the life world" in pedagogical discourses (broadly defined). Thus, I would say that the "Songs and Homework" program is dominated by the voice of schooling, and only rarely is the voice of children's lifeworld allowed to penetrate. An example of such an occurrence that has remained vivid in my mind was when a young boy asked the teachers in the studio to explain the difference between the ink of a regular pen and the ink of a felt pen. He sounded as if he was looking at two blots of ink, keenly curious about them. The anchor person's response was quick to come: "What [school] subject is this in?"

Youngsters' participation in an adult-child dialogue on radio, however, can be invited—as well as manipulated—in even subtler ways. Whereas the aforementioned call-in programs actually enact a participatory stance in the very form of its communicative construction, other programs can invite children into the adult world through their contents and ostensive goal. An example would be the news-for-kids program discussed in this chapter, which claims to invite children into a world of adult concerns and public events. As will be shown, however, this invitation is halfhearted at best. The program's discourse—by adults and for children—will be shown to encapsulate a set of

assumptions about the world of childhood, which are conveyed to listeners of all ages as they listen to both “the said and the unsaid” of this “kiddified” version of the news. In this case, it is the overly enthusiastic embracement of the voice of the children’s lifeworld rather than its exclusion that serves to nullify their participation in the discourse of news as culturally defined within the adult world, so that the program’s promise of participation turns into a gesture of exclusion and silencing as well.

In concluding her paper on forms of silencing in American public schools, M. Fine says that “a self-critical analysis of the fundamental ways in which we teach children to betray their own voices is crucial” (1987:172). The following analysis of radio discourses addressed to the young suggests that youngsters can also be effectively silenced by social organs other than the school, as they are subtly and cordially invited to betray their own voices by the enticing promise of the electronic media. Taken as cultural texts, the radio discourses considered in this chapter serve as convenient junctures for the exploration of the cultural dimension of pedagogical practices, expanding our glance to include some of the media-dominated discourses that make up contemporary children’s educational as well as communicative environment.

J.Meyrowitz (1984) has argued that children’s massive exposure to various electronic media, particularly television, has had far-reaching social consequences, particularly in serving to blur the clear-cut boundaries between the worlds of adults and of children, which are associated with the working of a literate, print-oriented society.

Even if one accepts the general thrust of his argument, the fact remains that the radio programs discussed in this chapter are prime examples of programming that seeks to retain the separateness of children’s world by controlling their information environment. Meyrowitz’s argument relates primarily to changes in the degree of control of backstage, expressive social information with the advent of electronic media. My analysis focuses on practices of information control in particular socializing media contexts, which, by defining localized norms of appropriateness for the process of information transmission through their implicit rhetoric, both reflect and affect the social construction of the categories of age and learning. Indeed, if Meyrowitz is right, then the fact that the programs discussed in this chapter are both persistently and successfully broadcast as part of the larger communicational scene of children’s exposure to electronic media makes them all the more interesting as they seem to counteract the prevailing trend toward the obliteration of age-related separateness in systems of information. As I will argue in the conclusion, following my critical reading of these two programs, the intersection of the study of media effects, information control, and socialization practices is more complicated than sweeping generalizations about “the loss of childhood” in the Western world would suggest. Detailed analyses of the implicit structuring

of particular media forms in particular cultural contexts, such as the ones offered here, are required as a complement, and perhaps a corrective, to the theorizing offered by media analysts.

“SONGS AND HOMEWORK”: THE VOICE OF SCHOOLING

In December 1985, the second channel of *Kol Israel* (the Voice of Israel), the Israeli National Radio Broadcasting Service, began to broadcast a program called “Songs and Homework” (*Shirim Veshiurim*). Students were invited to call in and ask any questions they had concerning their homework; five teachers, specializing in different school subjects, and an anchor person were ready at the studio to respond to the youngsters’ questions every day. Popular songs and commercials were interspersed in the instructional talk. Although it was specifically designed for junior high school students, adults were explicitly invited to listen, and questions were taken from both younger and older students, as well as from incidental adult callers. Toward the end of the school year a special section of the program was allocated to cater to the needs of high school seniors preparing for the national matriculation examinations, and this section was labeled “*sherut labagrut*” (Matriculation Service). The program was discontinued during the summer holidays and was resumed at the outset of the following (1986–87) academic year. The program was soon integrated into the cultural scene, and the voices of schooling in all their immediacy became regular fare in many Israeli homes. Students’ calls flowed into the studio in Jerusalem from all over the country. According to the program’s producer, only about one-third of them could be taken, and many questions were attended to after the program, off the air. The teachers, all on the faculty of different high schools, were usually recommended by their students and were replaced from time to time. (Until the time of this writing, the program is broadcast five days a week for one hour—between four and five in the afternoon—and questions can be phoned in an hour earlier).

Through this public performance of instructional discourse, school-lore has thus seeped into the larger cultural scene, providing the cultural analyst a particularly interesting angle from which to contemplate the discourse of schooling.¹ On the one hand, the very existence of the program as a supplement to classroom teaching can be—and, indeed, often is—interpreted as a critique of prevalent educational practices and accomplishments. Homework as it is conceptualized in Israeli school-pedagogy should, in principle, be done by the children on their own. Classroom instruction should provide them with the needed resources for completing their homework independently. As will be shown later, this attitude is supported on the program, too. At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that many children need extra non-school based help with their school work. In addition to parental assistance, when it is available, and institutionalized help for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there

has grown over the years an elaborate, semi-institutionalized and costly tutorial system natively referred to as “private lessons” (*shiurim prati'im*), which is utilized by many middle-class public school students. Private teachers may be practicing school teachers, university students, or other self-appointed individuals, both qualified and unqualified, who put themselves out on the educational marketplace in what can surely be considered a secondary educational industry. Failing students are routinely advised by the school teacher to seek private instruction, which, although costly, promises attention to the student’s individual needs in one whole uninterrupted hour, and in a way that frontal teaching in classes of forty can never do. As is indicated by one of the slogans that heralded the “Songs and Homework” program—“Your private teacher on Kol Israel”—the program defines itself with reference to private instruction, although it clearly cannot fulfill the promise of unconstrained personal attention that this implies.

The unprecedented exposure the program has given to the discourse of schooling makes it a particularly good starting point for a critical analysis of educational discourse. An astute commentator has pointed out this potential in a letter to the editor as the program was beginning to make its imprint on the educational scene, saying: “Perhaps unwittingly, the program as a whole reveals several interesting and important points in the eternal triangle based on teacher-student-curriculum, and every part of the triangle becomes open to criticism—favorable and unfavorable—thanks to the radio program” (Tamar Cohen, *Davar* 24 Feb., 1986). The fact that it has indeed become a natural part of the Israeli radio as well as educational scene, and that its critical potential has never been seriously taken up, is itself instructive. That the program has not rocked the educational boat to any appreciable extent can be attributed, I believe, not only to its amiable interpersonal rhetoric, but, more crucially, to the fact that it replicates the basic patterns and assumptions about teaching and learning found in regular classrooms, with proper adaptations to the radio situation. So that despite its well-intentioned aspirations to provide a model for an improved version of educational exchange, the program essentially presents a magnified version of classroom discourse. This discourse, unreflective of its own assumptions and machinations, thus remains also uncritical of the conduct of schooling.

Taking the program’s overt discursive practices as a point of departure, I will examine them in an attempt to offer the beginnings of a more radical critique of mainstream Israeli schooling. I will attend to the luring rhetoric of the “Songs and Homework” program, which is animated by a metaphor of service and the spirit of “fun,” and—in line with progressive, child-centered educational philosophies—as geared toward the production of “personalness.” Before proceeding to clarify the nature of this program and its implications for the understanding of Israeli culture of schooling, however, let me invite the reader into the program’s world by presenting a randomly chosen excerpt

from the program broadcast on March 18, 1986 so as to illustrate the flow of instructional talk typical of "Songs and Homework" (*A* stands for anchor person, *C* for caller, *T* for teacher; this notation will be maintained throughout):

- A: "Another call. Shalom."
 C: "Shalom."
 A: "Who's talking?"
 C: "Bini."
 A: "Bini from where?"
 C: "From Ashdod."
 A: "Bini from Ashdod, what are you asking?"
 C: "In literature."
 A: "Please."
 C: "I wanted to know a few details about the character of Zirl in "Simple Story" by Agnon."
 A: "Are you studying it now?"
 C: "Yes."
 A: "What grade are you in?"
 C: "Eleventh."
 A: "Agnon's Zirl from 'Simple Story'. Batya Gur, please."
 T: "Bini"
 C: "Yes."
 T: "Have you read other works by Agnon or is it the only one you have read?"
 C: "I have read..."
 T: "And 'Simple Story' have you read through?"
 C: "Yes"
 T: "And you liked it?"
 C: "Pardon?"
 T: "You liked it?"
 C: "Yes, sometimes I liked it because I was made to."
 T: "Yes, a very important love out of compulsion. Look, the truth is that we can actually begin it with a fundamental question. How do we discuss the image of a character in a work of prose? How does one characterize a fictional character? How can we speak about it? Do you have any ideas?"
 C: "One can talk about characteristic features all along the story."
 T: "Great, what type, for example?"
 C: "Taking account of all kinds of repetitive things."
 T: "Right, taking account of all types of repetitive things, manners of speaking, attitudes toward others, the loves and hates of the person. If the character is in a novel, and the novel is well-designed then actually every detail pertaining to the character is characteristic of it. Now I am asking you as someone who has read the novel, what do you think is the thing that is most typical of Zirl and that, as I said, is repeated several times?"
 C: "She's like, she's awfully clever. Also she is someone who always worries a lot about money, and about her family."
 T: "Yes, but what does she like to do most?"

C: “To be in the store.”

T: “Yes, also to be in the store and count the money, but even in relation to the store you know that Zirl loves most—and whole pages probably bore you on first reading perhaps since you said that you loved it out of compulsion—whole pages bore you with the descriptions of the food that Zirl loves, how much and how she loves to eat. Do you remember?”

This excerpt is drawn from a data base that comprised transcripts made of eighteen “Songs and Homework” programs aired between December 1985 and June 1986. In addition, other materials were consulted such as notes taken while listening to additional programs, as well as occasional conversations with teachers, students, and parents. Based on these, I offer an interpretation of the “Songs and Homework” program as a cultural enactment, as a newly contrived media form designed for the public consumption of school-based discourse. Consider, for example, the anchor person’s opening remarks to the “Songs and Homework” program of January 23, 1986:

“Shalom to you, Thursday, again we round up the week, the end of a week of studies, we are here with your homework. This time the subjects are literature, Bible, civic studies, geography and history. If you have a question in one of these subjects, please dial the following numbers...Jerusalem area code, and you will find the solution at the other end of the line. So simple.”

Jovial and cordial in tone, the program plays itself between the metaphor of “service” and the spirit of “fun.” Like many other talk- shows in the media, it is constructed upon an obvious contradiction in terms—talk on national radio posing as uniquely addressed, a promise of individual attention and faithful service extended against the strongly felt pressures of publicness and precious radio time. This contradiction is punctuated by the program’s production frame (Goffman 1981): the instructional exchange is couched within the more encompassing encounter the anchor person is maintaining with the audience, acting as buffer, mediator, and role model of sorts. The oft-repeated self-promoting slogan of ‘Songs and Homework’, which defines it as a ‘private teacher on Kol Israel’, translates this rather odd communicative situation into educational terms, placing the discourse at an imaginary juncture, where the public discourse of the school and the discourse of individually addressed, home-based private instruction become momentarily coalesced.

The discourse of the “Songs and Homework” program invokes two other types of radio discourses that color the way it is heard, thereby marking its distinctiveness from regular classroom discourse. The first one frames it as “fun,” and the second establishes it as a discourse of “service,” and both seek to promote a sense of “participation” or “dialogue.”

The Spirit of "Fun"

The name of the program, *Shirim Veshiurim* ("Songs and Homework") is clearly meant to invoke the title *Shirim Ushearim* ("Songs and [Soccer] Goals"), which is the name of a highly popular radio sports program broadcast on Saturday afternoons on the same channel, same time. This invocation infuses the program with the spirit of fun associated with voluntary sports engagements, so that the task of doing homework is recast in a much more favorable light than usual; it is no longer something one has to do, but something one is interested in pursuing (to the point of consulting the radio). It is something whose challenge one can even enjoy. Also, given the distinction found in Israeli school culture between privatized, "academic" and group-oriented, "social" pursuits, it is notable that the act of doing homework, which is ordinarily defined as the independent act of the lone industrious student, is turned on the radio into an interactive, even collective endeavor. This makes it sound all the more like fun.

The Spirit of Service

In its overall organization and tenor, the "Songs and Homework" program is modeled upon consultative, psychologically oriented phone-in radio programs that host a variety of experts. Cast in this framework, school learning, like counseling of various sorts, is presented as something to be actively and voluntarily sought by its beneficiary, and the radio teachers are presented as both experts in their area of specialization and as benevolent advisors. The program's rhetoric of service is explicitly articulated in advertising jingles used before the program comes on, and at various junctures in it. The most common ones are the elliptical: "Everything you wanted to ask in class and ran out of time" or simply "The radio helps you do your homework," or, in allusion to the well-known traditional book of guidance by Maimonides: "A teacher of the perplexed on Kol Israel" or, based on the Talmudic dictum: "It is neither the shy person who learns nor the strict one who teaches," the phrase "Also the shy one learns" is used, suggesting, again, that the radio program can solve everybody's problem, tackling even difficult cases or evading them by appeal to such external constraints as lack of time. In this, the "Songs and Homework" program seems to differ from therapeutically oriented, psychological programs. In the latter, one would hardly expect to hear "Our time is short, so let me just touch upon the main points" and the like. Their rhetoric of evasion, when employed, involves a reference to the complexity of the problem, its unsuitability for a public medium, and so on.

The spirit of service is most clearly brought out by the aforementioned reference to the widespread, semi-official institution of private instruction, as in the promotion jingle "Your private teacher on Kol Israel." In some respects, the radio teachers' discourse directly reflects the private teacher's role and

educational dilemmas: to get the student shaped up for class (which minimally means getting his or her homework straight), and to do so without performing (or at least without appearing to perform) the student's task for him or her. On the radio, however, the spirit of public service is such as to encourage responding to the largest number of students possible, turning it into a “quick service” affair. In the absence of the rather generous time frame of the private lesson, its potential for non-mediated teacher-student engagement and flexible procedure, no meaningful dialogue can develop. The suggestion that it can is one of those distinctive contributions of media-thinking to the field of education.

Indeed, much interactional work in the form of extensive “facework” goes into blurring the paradox encapsulated in the self-contradictory phrase “Your private teacher on *Kol Israel*.” Comments made by both teachers and students in open discussions of the program suggest that listeners are indeed lured by the promise of “personalness” intimated by the program's style. One student went so far as to say: “I wish our teachers at school spoke to us this way.” A similar recognition of the program's distinctive flavor is indicated in a radio critic's comments on the program in an article entitled “Teachers with Patience,” who says: “The radiophonic teachers show a great deal of patience, relaxation and logic—they are so different from the teachers one usually meets in the world. . .” (A. Katzman, *Ha'aretz*, 22 Sept., 1989). One of my teacher-informants, attuned to the potential criticism of school teachers' style that the radio teachers' heightened sense of decorum brings out, scoffed: “Of course they can be nice, they don't have a million discipline problems to deal with.”

How is the radio teachers' “niceness” communicated? As C. Cazden (1979) has pointed out the “teacher-talk” register is characterized by considerable attention to “facework.” This is a result of the fact that teachers' position of authority requires that they routinely perform communicative acts that pose potential threat to the students' “face.” The radio interactional context, however, differs from that of the classroom in the kinds of face-threatening acts that prevail in it. Applying the distinction drawn by P. Brown and S. Levinson (1978) between positive and negative face, one notes that disciplinary acts, ones that impinge on the students' autonomy, posing a threat to their “negative” face, are naturally much less frequent on the radio program than they are in the conduct of regular lessons, where the imposition of classroom discipline is a central issue. However, while their role as disciplinarians is diminished, the radio teachers' role as evaluators becomes accentuated, and they have many opportunities to perform evaluative-corrective acts, acts that pose a potential threat to students' “positive face.” On the program, much care is taken to protect the students' positive face, without, however, changing the basic impersonalness of the exchange. This protectiveness often takes the form of a strategy of omission whereby the radio teacher refrains from

explicitly correcting or embarrassing the child, yet provides him or her with the "correct answer."

This attitude of protectiveness, however, goes beyond the immediate interaction and extends to the classroom teachers as well. Indeed, the radio teachers take utmost care to refrain from any critical comments on the slice of classroom instruction that the program reveals to them and to the public at large. So much so, that when it is a question of either protecting the face of the student caller or that of the classroom teacher, it is the latter that usually gets protection. For example, in one program, (20 Jan., 1987), a girl asked a question that made no sense to the radio teacher, and he responded: "It's good that you asked, it's not the shy one who learns, it's very important to correct mistakes. If that's the question the teacher gave you, then surely you didn't understand the teacher. . ." This example clearly indicates that the general cultural arrangement is maintained whereby a child's "face" counts for less than that of an adult (Goffman 1959), so that when a homework question does not seem right, the anchor person's immediate tendency is to attribute it to the child's lack of understanding rather than to the teacher's faulty formulation. The youngsters learn this quite quickly: On 19 Sept., 1989, a girl called in with a question in history. The anchor person responded: "Your teacher didn't explain it well to you? Let's see if we can do any better. . ." to which the caller responded with noticeable embarrassment: "No, it was me, I didn't understand it." After the answer was given by the appropriate teacher, the anchor person apparently caught himself short and said "I didn't mean to suggest that the teacher didn't do a good job explaining. . ." The redressive action thus restored the normative order of things.

The Spirit of Dialogue

Various communicative strategies employed on the "Songs and Homework" program are designed to encourage student participation and create a sense of dialogue, leaving the issues of authority and voice unproblematic. First of all, students initiate the interaction, thereby reversing the more customary structure of participant roles ordinarily found in traditional classrooms. Second, the radio teachers make a concerted effort to draw students into the exchange in a variety of more overt and more covert ways: one example would be the repeated mentions of the student's name, which give the talk the flavor of personal address. Another example involves attempts to draw the student caller into the exchange through a particular form of discursive strategy known in Israeli folk-pedagogy as "leading the student to the answer" (*lehovil et hatalmid latshuva*) rather than simply spoon-feeding answers to students. This requires, first of all, finding out "where the student is coming from" as well as constructing a context for the student's question so that it can properly make "school-sense." Consider the following exchange from the program of 23, Jan., 1986:

- A: “Shalom.”
C: “Yes.”
A: “Who am I talking with?”
C: “With Keren.”
A: “Keren, from where?”
C: “From Bat-Yam.”
A: “Keren, what are you asking?”
C: “I wanted to know what a diagram is.”
A: “What a diagram is, what grade are you in, Keren?”
C: “Seventh.”
A: “Seventh, and you were told to draw a diagram or what?”
C: “No, we were told, we have a question that says, look at the diagram, so I wanted to know what that is.”
A: “Yes, good, eh, Avi Lubeski, the Geography teacher.”
T: “Yes, Keren, in what context were you asked about the diagram, about what?”
A: “Eh, the percentage of workers employed in industry in Haifa and Tel-Aviv.”
T: “Yes, and what do you see in this diagram?”
C: “What?”
T: “What do you see in this diagram?”
C: “I don’t have it. They just told us to look at it.”
T: “Aha, well, a diagram is a graphic drawing, a kind of table.”

This exchange manifests the typical format of caller identification as “Keren from Bat-Yam” followed by the posing of the question, its transfer to the appropriate teacher, and the teacher’s painstaking attempt to make sense of the question in terms of where the student is coming from, schoolwise. Note that only in the last line of the above excerpt did the teacher even begin to respond to the question, almost as an afterthought. Note also that the student’s question in this case was a genuine one, not a verbatim rendition of the teacher’s homework assignment as they all-too-often tend to be: she needed to find out what a diagram was in order to tackle that assignment. This is a particularly clear example of the interactional work that has to go into contextualizing the highly fragmented version of pedagogical discourse that characterizes the program, and it seems to me that both the teacher’s subsequent explication, and the anchor person’s amplifications, actually failed to explain to the student what a diagram is. The interaction, however, was not allowed to close on a dissatisfied note; the anchor person finally smoothed over the situation with a combined gesture of gratitude and goodwill: “Thanks a lot for calling, and we were pleased to help you.”

This closing strategy is common, although ideally the caller will express gratitude for the help he or she has received, thereby affirming the value of the program as a public service. When such expression of gratitude is not

forthcoming, it may be actively elicited (almost extorted) as has occurred in closing a discussion of a poem by H.N. Bialik (2 Jan., 1986), when the anchor person prodded the caller: "How does the poem appear to you now? Has it unpacked for you in a different, more profound manner?" At which the caller was appropriately cued: "Much deeper, and I understand it awfully well, and thank you." The anchor person, however, persisted: "You can, pardon a minute, you can see with it that Bialik, and he is our national poet, and we studied him at school and all that, can you see in it the pain of the little child?" The caller responded: "The truth is he doesn't bring it out much." To this the anchor person: "But now can you understand it better!" Upon which the caller once again reassured him: "Better, sure, thanks a lot."

Notably, the callers' thanks are expected to be oriented to substance, to the helpfulness of the particular response they have received, whereas when callers are thanked it is for their participation and not for the quality of their contribution. It is their role in allowing the show to go on that is most appreciated. Ultimately, it remains the role of audience rather than of full-fledged participants.

In sum, I would like to suggest that implicit in the program's rhetoric of service, and in its jovial deployment, are several messages about schooling, which have very little to do with youngsters' workaday experience of participating in their school lives: school learning is presented as a voluntary activity that "can be fun;" teachers are presented as knowledgeable, responsive, and imbued with a sense of rightful authority; students are presented as motivated and anxious to learn at least to the point of trying to "get the homework right." This idealized image counteracts the much less favorable portraits of schooling found in frequent criticisms of the system by various participants on the educational scene. Although the very airing of the program invites criticisms of educational praxis, its rhetoric serves to mute its implicit critique of classroom practices and accomplishments. The irony of the matter, however, is that in its basic format and unfolding the program actually replicates the same deep-seated cultural assumptions about schooling that give rise to prevalent dissatisfactions with education in public schools in the first place. It is to this structural aspect of the program and its larger educational implications that the remainder of the discussion is devoted.

THE VOICE OF SCHOOLING AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION

The continued popularity of the program, as well as the comments I have collected, suggest that it was taken to be continuous with classroom educational practices rather than representing a radical departure from them. A few teachers expressed concern that the model of teaching enacted on the radio would belittle their own efforts in the classroom. Thus, one teacher said with visible irritation: "Well, they have now taught this poem. What am I supposed to do in the

class tomorrow?” Another critical response concerned the pretentiousness of the program, whose self-imposed mission is to provide free-for-all assistance to the student population. Critics of it have argued that it engages only the better and more motivated students (the ones the classroom teacher can reach just as easily), whereas the unmotivated students would not even try to avail themselves of the service.

On the positive side, teachers were reported to have recommended that their students listen to the program regularly; one teacher said in conversation that she was annoyed at her own children who refused to listen to it. Several times teachers were reported to have referred to specific points raised in the program, which suggests that they assumed general listenership, and, on one occasion, a teacher explicitly emulated its interactional style, and was cited as saying to his class: “Let me respond to it the way they do it in ‘Songs and Homework.’ ”

Notably, too, by virtue of the organization of the program as a media form, the communications in it flow in a very particular way: all questions are directed to one spot, the studio in Jerusalem, which temporarily becomes the source of educational authority on the homework of all the nation’s children. This highly centralized orientation is predicated on the assumption, true for mainstream Israeli public schools, that there is little variability in the curricula followed in different parts of the country. Indeed, the repetitiveness of questions relating, say, to a particular literary work in a given week—to the point that the anchor person may find it necessary to declare this work “covered”—both reflects and reinforces the existence of a shared “body of knowledge” among all same-age students of the nation. The invitations the anchor person from time to time light-heartedly extends to adults to join in (so that they may “refresh their memory” about the things they learned in school) suggests that school-lore is shared not only across the nation, but also across generations. The unspoken classroom assumption that learning a particular, privileged, body of knowledge at a particular time and in one particular way is equally profitable for all forty students, is simply extended to include a whole cohort. The program’s “personalizing” thrust falls far short of questioning this basic assumption, and whatever its criticism of classroom teaching, it does not go so far as to even suggest an alternative model of curricular engagement.

In fact, the program makes sense as a mass media form only given the assumption of a widely shared curriculum and of a universally valid language of instruction for all the nation’s children. The existence of such a shared body of school-lore is not only implied, but is also celebrated and further legitimated by the “Songs and Homework” program. By moving “teacher-talk” out of its confinement within the classroom walls, thereby lending it both increased scope and greater resonance, the program works to establish the dominant voices of schooling at the symbolic core of the culture.²

The way callers are habitually identified—by first name and hometown—is also worthy of notice. Not only are they asked to supply this identifying information before stating their question, but they are also repeatedly addressed in these terms by the teachers and anchor person: “Uri from Haifa,” “Tali from Jerusalem,” “Gali from Beer-Sheva,” and so on. As name-places around the country time and again punctuate the flow of talk, one gets the cumulative sense that all eyes, from near and from afar, and from all strata of the population as is indicated by the geography of the calls, are held up in expectation for the words of wisdom coming out of the studio in Jerusalem.³

This spatial arrangement, of course, echoes deeper forces of centralized authority. The centralized pattern of the Israeli school system as a whole, and the teacher-centered nature of much classroom discourse, are reproduced here on a much larger scale. It is assumed that any school-related question a youngster may have anywhere around the country can be readily and satisfactorily responded to by any teacher of “the subject” who happens to be in the studio. As a matter of fact, although the radio teachers are given some time to prepare their answers, this is deliberately blurred by the format of the program. What one hears is the student asking a question and the teacher promptly responding to it as if he or she heard it for the first time. The processes of selection and preparation that go into this performance conveniently remain in the program’s “backstage” regions (Goffman 1959).

Given the assumption of a generally shared curriculum, and basically similar expectations and ways of engaging it, it is felt that homework can appropriately be handled outside the context of the particular school lesson, and teacher-student dialogue that has preceded or followed it. Whereas, as we have seen, an instructional context often has to be actively re-created for each call, the basic organization of knowledge into neatly divided, non-overlapping school subjects taught by different teachers is directly modeled upon the classroom setting. Callers often preface their questions with “I have a question in Bible, or in history, or in mathematics,” and so on. When they don’t, the anchor person transmits the question to the appropriate teacher by labeling it as a question in Bible, history, mathematics, and so on.

The view of instruction and learning enacted on the program accords with the wider cultural conception of learning as the transmission of information, which is encapsulated in the folk definition of the teacher’s task as that of “passing on the material” (*leha’avir et ha’homer*). What is conspicuously absent, despite teachers’ efforts here and there, is a notion of learning as a tentative process leading to the growth of understanding, perhaps to more interesting questions rather than to “the right answer.” The radio teachers, much like their classroom counterparts, act as transmitters of impersonal knowledge. Homework thus becomes commodified, suitable for mass-processing. Personal evaluations and opinions, as well as potentially

controversial topics, are systematically avoided. Hedges, or mitigated assertions are not only rare but out of tune with the confident voices of the teachers pouring forth their knowledge, usually in more words than most listeners can profitably take in.

Thus, as so often in the classroom of forty, so in this nationwide, fluid classroom of many more, the student-teacher dialogue is less an occasion for mutual probing than an occasion for the stylized display and celebration of school knowledge. As so often in the school, too, on the rare occasions that students raise potentially controversial issues, or display resistance to the arrangements they find themselves in, they are quickly reminded of the appropriate school attitude. For instance, a senior's question as to whether the right wing sections of the pre-State Jewish underground in Israel were fascist in orientation triggered a lengthy, noncommittal and evasive response from the teacher, which was hastily seconded by the anchor man who in this case, as in many others, spoke in the first person plural, endowing his voice with the ring of institutional authority. On another occasion, a student read out a homework question about the stylistic features of the prophet Amos; following the teacher's lengthy response the anchor person personalized the exchange by asking the student how she liked the style of Amos (implying a degree of interest that would engender judgments of that sort). When the student answered truthfully that she didn't think it was anything special—thereby undercutting the show of involvement that was being imposed upon her—she was gently reminded of the proper “school attitude.” There are people, she was told, who do like that style.

If nothing else, then the constant sense of time pressure that is built into the program would in itself be sufficient to thwart any attempt at developing the semblance of a dialogue. In this, again, the program replicates the race through curricular material that is so characteristic of the ordinary Israeli classroom. The media-related pressure to respond to as many callers as possible rarely allows for a relaxed dialogue to develop, and for a more profound treatment of subject matter to be displayed and modeled. And, as in the classroom, the time constraint is appealed to and manipulated at the teacher's discretion. The school-based questions brought to the radio teachers' attention, on the other hand, are not overtly evaluated as to their suitability, their interest, or complexity. In the context of the program, all bits of knowledge are re-created equal; what makes them worthy of attention and elaboration is that they are part of the curriculum-based discourse of the school, which, according to this program, consists of facts heaped on facts, arranged in a rather haphazard way yet distributed along proper curricular lines.

That dialogue is in fact incidental to the program's task of passing on information is indicated by the fact that technical difficulties with the telephone line that prevent the caller from taking an active part in the exchange are not

considered an obstacle; the caller is advised to leave the phone and to listen to the answer given on the radio. Even the query of a caller who did not take the trouble to stay home from an extracurricular engagement, transmitting the question through a sibling, was cordially answered.

Although, as we have seen, "Songs and Homework" dramatizes the roles of model teacher and model student, no suggestion is made that these roles are always successfully acted out on the program. Indeed, the complex role shifting of the anchor person, who sometimes plays the role of ideal teacher by offering amplifications of the teacher's own answer, and sometimes plays the role of the ideal student, who probes the teacher for further related information, suggests that this is not the case. Even when not directly contributing questions or answers, the anchor person is a central figure in the program. In his or her regulatory capacity—receiving the questions, often interpreting them before they are channeled to the appropriate teacher, or helping the teacher cut his or her answer short—the anchor person requires a great deal of school knowledge, as well as a serviceable verbal dexterity in matters of schooling.

In a sense, the anchor person both enacts and personifies the ideal human "product" of proper schooling: A well-rounded person who, though not an expert in any of the school subjects, has a general grasp of them, and is, moreover, still prepared to take renewed interest in them. Clearly, however, the anchor person also personifies the very limitations of the teacher and the student modeled in the program, further accentuating the highly controlled form of educational exchange that even the radio teachers themselves sometimes manage to efface.

What remains unaddressed in all this is the question of what the role of homework is or should be, and what place it should occupy in the educative process. In the "Songs and Homework" program, homework is the unquestioned "given." In Israeli folk-pedagogy, it is generally accepted that in doing their homework children take responsibility for their learning. That the conception of "doing homework" as a measure of responsibility and independence is indeed part of the program's philosophy was clearly revealed in an exchange with the mother of a fifth grader, who called in with a homework question her child had received, and with which she had been unable to help him. After the teacher responded to it, the anchorperson intervened (23 Jan., 1986): "Do you usually help the boy do his homework?" Although there was nothing overtly critical about the question, the caller, who was clearly quite involved in her son's learning, became defensive and said: "Ehm, no, usually he does his homework by himself, but here he did not know how to begin . . ." I believe the mother's reading of the question as implicit criticism of her over-involvement in the child's homework was correct. The curious point, of course, is that this self-righteous caution against impeding students' independent

learning was voiced on a program that has institutionalized a massive spoonfeeding of the correct answers to students across the nation. For our purposes, it is important to stress that homework as an educational issue, and other key educational questions such as the meaningfulness of the tasks, the responsibility for learning and for teaching, are submerged and left to rest by the amicable radio exchange. I believe that it is precisely this reluctance to address such issues that is responsible for the rise of the unofficial system of costly tutoring as a supplement to the system of public education. Ultimately, like his or her classroom counterpart, who sends failing students to private instructors as a matter of routine, the radio teacher controls the exchange without taking actual responsibility for the students' learning.

The effort to reinvent the voice of the teacher in such a highly centralized and authoritative pattern of exchange—however artfully masked—does not seem to be incidental, although clearly none of the points this analysis has brought to light was consciously entertained by the well-intentioned individuals responsible for the program. Encouraging the young to ask questions is, potentially, an invitation to independent and critical thinking, a gesture of respect, not only of good will. On the face of it the “Songs and Homework” program extends just such an invitation. However, by implicitly restricting its scope to information questions directed to experts operating in a highly constrained time framework, and by its framing of the exchange as a matter of “fun” and “service,” the program actually provides a lesson in “safe” and even “pseudo” question-asking. Given the program's protectiveness of the educational system, its potential to provide a radical critique has remained unfulfilled.

I would argue, therefore, that the “Songs and Homework” program amounts to no more than an instructional patchup operation that ultimately reaffirms the educational *status quo*. The discourse of the program upholds an official, centralized educational system whose effectiveness the program itself has questioned. In the language of personalized address, it voices a highly definitive, subject matter oriented position about learning, constraining youngsters' participation in the shaping of their own learning in many unacknowledged and dubious ways. From the point of view of the educational system, the mild critique of education the program indeed invites cannot but pale in comparison with its highly affirmative, hegemonic statement.

“NEWS FOR KIDS”: THE VOICE OF CHILDREN'S LIFEWORLD

A similarly well-intentioned yet hegemonic gesture can be found in a “news for kids” program aired daily on the Israeli military radio station “*Galei Zahal*” as part of the “morning hour” with Alex Anski, one of Israel's most popular broadcasters. Since the program is broadcast immediately following the official news of seven o'clock, which is transmitted from the National Radio

Broadcasting Service, *Kol Israel*, it offers an opportunity to compare a “news for kids” broadcast with a regular program presented at the same time. The following analysis is based on the transcripts of the 7:00 A.M. morning news and the 7:15 A.M. kids’ news during twenty-one days in July and August of 1986.

Initially, the assumption was that there would be considerable overlap in content between these two versions of the news, which would allow for a study of a spontaneously occurring instance of language simplification in news-talk addressed to children along the lines of analysis set out by an earlier study by B. Lutz and R. Wodak (1987) whose procedure was experimental.

Although similarly concerned with what Lutz and Wodak have called “language barriers in radio broadcasting,” and the wider social implications of the question of the inaccessibility of the news in democratic societies, the study of Anski’s “News for Kids” turned out different not only in procedure but also in analytic focus. The data, indeed, belied the initial expectations for a comparative base. There was surprisingly little overlap in content between the adults’ and the children’s versions of the news—of the 256 news items in the adult broadcast and the 84 items in the children’s broadcasts (for the twenty-one days), there was only one case of overlap, that is one case in which the information conveyed to the children as “news” coincided with a news item that appeared on the adult program.⁴ This finding had the effect of steering the investigation away from a focus on the language of “News for Kids” to a concern with the rhetorical construction of the explicit as well as the implicit messages conveyed by this news program.

The naive view of news programs as objective reports of reality has been persuasively argued against by students of the media (e.g. Schiller 1981; Manoff and Schudson 1986; Roeh 1982). News programs are selective and elaborate discursive constructions of reality presented to particular audiences. If the “News for Kids” program does not provide children with a more accessible version of what adult news programs define as “newsworthy” current events, then it cannot be said to serve as a tool for linking them to the public sphere. Rather, by presenting children with information that would not ordinarily be considered newsworthy under the label of “news,” the “News for Kids” program rhetorically constructs a world-of-childhood fundamentally set apart and distinguished from the adult world. The verbal re-creation of children’s lifeworld (in the image envisaged by adults) as a world apart is a major implicit message conveyed by the program both to the nation’s children, who are its “target audience,” but no less importantly, to the many adults who listen to the popular “*Galei Zahal*” morning hour.⁵

Thus, the “News For Kids” program might have more to say about its makers’ idea of childhood than about the world of public events. The idea of childhood as a sociohistorical construction is well-established in child-culture

research (Aries, 1962; Kessel and Siegel, 1981; Meyrowitz, 1984). One important aspect of the cultural construction of childhood concerns the long-standing question of the continuity and discontinuity between childhood and adulthood in various cultures (Benedict 1938). Instances of public expression in which the world of children is rhetorically set apart indicate a cultural emphasis on discontinuity between childhood and adulthood as developmentally defined experiential realms. The example of the “News for Kids” program is particularly striking in this regard, as it is a discursive context in which the two realms, even if largely separated, might be expected to come into considerable contact. What do we make of this?

Let me begin to respond to this question by describing the nature of the “New for Kids” program—its language, tenor, and contents. Stylistically, the language of the children’s news broadcasts fits in well with the casual, personalized stance employed throughout Alex Anski’s morning program, whose sounds accompany many Israelis as they start their day. Its language clearly departs from the “rhetoric of objectivity” that dominates the official news at 7:00 A.M. as studied by I. Roeh (1982). Thus, an article, which appeared in *Yedioth Ahronoth* (20.2.87), captures some of the flavor of the program, describing Alex Anski at the microphone, as he reads newspaper headlines and comments on the prospects of the day ahead in a mellow, personalized tone of voice, interspersing his talk with snatches of light, popular music:

. . . Alex Anski awakens your kids. A quiet, calm sound. Let the day start pleasantly. Alex slides on butter. Nothing discordant. Yes, reading the newspaper headlines. The way Alex reads it, the news page sounds like a fantastic message from another world. If the story is especially frightening or tension-producing, then O.K., there are also the Brothers Grimm and Boris Karlof. . . . And also the child hears something as he gets ready to leave. Three minutes of news. President Herzog was in Tonga. Alex tells you what it is. Did you know that skates with a motor have been invented? How do they do a liver transplant?”

With the exception of infrequent, light-toned human interest stories, which appear as final items in adult programming, what passes as news for children would not qualify as adult news. The overall format of the children’s news, however, partly resembles the format of adult news: a brief preview, surveying the main points to be “covered” is followed by the elaboration of each of these points. The coherence established by the sequential ordering principle of regular news from the more to the less important is only rarely applied to the children’s news. Usually, children’s news stories are strung together in such a way as to produce a series of lively, equally weighty—or weightless—unconnected anecdotes. By examining the kinds of stories told to Israeli children

as “news” one can get some idea of the way children and childhood are addressed in the cultural conversation of which the program forms a part.

The “News for Kids” Program

Consider the following opening of a News for Kids program:

The time is a quarter past seven. Children who are awake will now get a news broadcast after the . . . hm . . . awakening signal, and then we'll continue with our own stuff, with the reading of the newspapers. . . . Please, the Kids' News. Good morning, June 23rd is the date, *tet zain* in the Hebrew calendar, and in the children's news this morning Israel's Prime Minister is a guest in an Arab land, in Morocco; there are eight thousand gifted students in the land of Israel; a very interesting exhibition in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem; a thirteen-year old boy was elected mayor in America; and a small bird, called “Alvit Afora,” yes, “Alvit Afora,” travelled four thousand three hundred kilometers in two weeks, some three hundred kilometers per day hm. . . . As for the Prime Minister's visit, it is a big secret. . .

This excerpt exemplifies the way in which the news broadcast for children is introduced and framed. Although the introductory delineation of the items to be covered follows the format of the adult news programs, anybody listening to it would immediately know that this news broadcast is designed for children. At times, as on 31, July 1986, the “storifying” of information signaled by the casual, even “chatty” style that is so typical of the children's news program is overtly acknowledged, as when the broadcaster uses the verb *lesaper* “tell” in the sense of “narrate” to describe his activity.

The stories themselves obviously have little to do with the public domain of political action and economic activity that is typically covered by adult news. They are “human-interest” stories, catering to what the adults responsible for the program believe to be the particular interests of the young. What kinds of contents, then, are the children presented with under the heading of “news?” To get a general sense of this, I have examined the eighty-four children's news items found in the material, abstracting from them broad topical categories, but keeping in mind that the overall import of children's news derives from the interplay of what they contain and what they exclude *vis-à-vis* the adult news. The kinds of topics covered by the children's news suggest that the world opened up for the young is rather well circumscribed. It is a world populated by other children and their affairs, by animal matters bespeaking natural, non-cultured rhythms, benignly removed from the domains of civic and public life and strife. The eighty-four news items found in this sample of children's news thus fell into four larger and a number of smaller categories:

Items Related to Children's World (thirty-one items)

For example, children who start to play a musical instrument often discontinue their musical education; the British Parliament ruled against corporeal

punishment of school pupils; two million children in Indonesia work in agriculture, street cleaning and garbage collecting; the topic of “aging” has been introduced into the school curriculum, and so forth.

Items Specifying Technological Inventions and Progress (ten items)

For example, a new pocket computer that can translate from one language to another; attempts in Holland to produce cloth out of cow’s milk; making the desert flourish in Saudi Arabia through agricultural development; the expected cost of the American “Star Wars” program, and so forth.

Items Involving “Animal News” (eight items)

For example, the turtle’s way of life; a special hotel for house cats was established in *Gan Haim*; the Lubavitscher Rabbi told his followers in Israel that it is forbidden to hang up pictures and drawings of dogs and cats in children’s rooms, and so forth.

Calendrical Items (ten items) For example, two weeks until the beginning of the new school year; fifty-two years since the death of H.N. Bialik, Israel’s National Poet; the fifteenth of the Hebrew month *Av*, the Holiday of Love in Jewish tradition, and so forth.

Other categories, more sparsely represented, involve items related to health and body maintenance (e.g. the epidemic of lice and what to do about it), sports and other competitive events and achievements (e.g. chess champion of the Israeli army) unusual, odd, unexpected occurrences or practices (e.g., a ninety year old American woman who climbs a 4,390 m. high mountain every year); references to cultural and ceremonial events (e.g. new children’s books just published, details about the “facelift” given to the American Statue of Liberty).

This sketch of news contents brings up several issues. Many of the items do not report facts that are considered interesting, curious, or relevant to young listeners in general, and do not refer to occurrences that are temporally marked at all. This implies a basic difference between the positioning envisioned for young as compared to adult audiences. In the case of adult news, the temporal anchoring is in the moment of utterance, a moment shared by broadcaster and listener. The rhetoric is such as to give the impression that the news, assembled from close and from afar, is “brought in” to the studio to be shared with the audience at home.

In the case of the children’s program, the inclusion of news items is not warranted by the pressing immediacy of events in the world; rather, the selection of items responds to atemporal criteria of interest or relevance and is more straightforwardly exercised. Thus, the broadcaster often speaks of “the news for you, children,” a phrase that retains the sense of news being thoughtfully made rather than simply relayed. The stress on the unusual and the enticing gives the feeling that children are invited to partake of the world in the mode of the journeying tourist rather than have the world, in all its current vicissitudes, brought in to them.

Perhaps because the children's news items are not temporally anchored in relation to the present moment the way adults' news items are, the "News for Kids" program contains numerous calendrical references. Often, the date is given, both the date according to the general calendar and the date according to the Hebraic one. The use of the Hebraic calendar must inevitably conjure up school images for the children, as it is rarely used out of school (or other similarly official contexts).

In addition, as was indicated earlier, there is a class of children's news items that actually thematize calendrical information of one sort or another—be it the national calendar (a national figure), the Jewish calendar (a traditional day of fast), or the civic calendar (the Parliament goes on its annual vacation; the school year cycle). Indeed, in one case, the calendar itself became the topic of a news item, when, on 31 July, 1986 there appeared an item dealing with the question of how one can determine when a month has thirty or thirty-one days. This calendrical preoccupation is, again, reminiscent of temporal orientations the child encounters in school. School readers in Hebrew studies throughout elementary school, in particular, tend to be similarly structured along tradition-laden calendrical cycles. This organization generates an alternative temporal anchoring of the children's news *vis-à-vis* its audience, emphasizing a sense of predictable and repetitive rhythms, of ahistorical, ritual time.

The emphasis on the cyclical is counteracted by a complementary emphasis on technological innovation and progress, which implies a linear progression, an unpredictable opening up of individual potentialities rather than an indexical gesture toward various orders of communal calendars. In both cases, however, the world of childhood becomes associated with nonhistorical time—be it the timeless world of natural rhythms, or the mythic world of communal traditions, or the infinite world of potential progress—each a perfect refuge from the grinding reality of social and historical events.

Thus, in different ways, both the items concerned with "children's affairs" and animal news, and the items concerned with calendrical news and inventions serve to demarcate a distinctively flavored "child" world. The information that passes for children's news on the "News for Kids" program, though it carries the aura of facticity attending adults' news reports, does not usually involve the compelling, attention-commanding immediacy of "recent events," or a sense of an ongoing story of unfolding historical events. Rather than the authoritative assertion of "this is the way it is," which attends adult news, we get a playful suggestion, articulated in the subjunctive mood of an open-ended world of imaginative possibilities, in which the arousal value of "the curious / interesting / surprising things to be found in the big world out there" determines the flavor of the talk.

In addition to these topical peculiarities of the children's news items, there are two other children's news items that differentiate it from adult news, and

which invoke the same atemporal organization: items containing overt and elaborate pieces of advice as part of the newstelling activity, and items labeled “a riddle and its solution” (*hida upitrona*).

Advice giving is overtly audience-oriented and participatory, especially when, as in the case of advice about ways of dealing with lice (4 Aug., 1986), listeners’ responses are solicited and cited. Riddling, often presented as the final item on the news program, at the tail end of trivialities, indeed appears highly peculiar as a news item. Both advice giving and riddling are temporally unmarked activities for-all-seasons, activities associated with folk-wisdom and common sense knowledge or wit. In that respect, they fit in well with the atemporal world of children’s news.

At times, however, history makes its presence too compelling to be studiously ignored even by the children’s news program, and, here and there, public events reported on the adult news program do penetrate the children’s news. Since only one such example appeared in the data, as well as one borderline case, it is impossible to even begin to sketch the kinds of news items, or historical moments that would warrant such an inclusion. Considering the two news items in which there was some topical overlap between the adults’ and the children’s news broadcasts can, however, throw some light on this issue. The next section offers such a comparative sketch, and then considers what seem to be some obvious instances of the exclusion of items from the children’s news *vis-à-vis* their adult counterparts of the same day.

Adult and Kid News: A Comparative Glimpse

Consider the one case of considerable topical overlap in the sample, the report on Israel’s Prime Minister’s visit to Morocco (23 July, 1986). The adult news broadcast runs as follows:

... Preliminary news that reached Washington indicates that King Hasan is trying to persuade Mr. Peres to agree to an international convention in Morocco with the participation of the PLO. American sources in Rabat, Morocco’s capital, passed on the news to the State Department. Our correspondent in the USA, Shimon Shifer, says that in the view of the American Foreign Service, there will be no breakthrough in this meeting. Nevertheless, experts consider it an important event in Israel-Arab relations. Our political correspondent and special envoy to Morocco, Oded Ben-Ami, says that after two conversations yesterday, King Hasan and Peres met for another talk. The contents were not disclosed. Of the Arab states only Egypt expressed support for the Peres-Hasan meeting. The PLO demands that an urgent pan-Arab meeting be convened so as to discuss Peres’ visit in Morocco.

This factual, event-centered account can be compared with the one presented to children in “their” news broadcast several minutes later:

As for the Prime Minister's visit to Morocco: It's a great secret. With great secrecy. When everybody thinks he is going to the Aircraft Industry to make a speech, hm, in the ceremony, eh, the Lavie, the airplane, the Prime Minister flew in an airforce plane and landed in Morocco.

This is very, very unusual. The newspapers all over the world write about this. In our television and radio this is the most important bit of news. Shimon Peres is the guest of an Arab leader, King Hasan the Second, in King Hasan's land, talking to him, once and once again. And we in Israel are waiting to hear what they talked about and if they made any decision, what it was. Everything in the meantime, as we said, is the utmost secrecy. Because such meetings, probably, can't be conducted in the open. And without secrecy they would not have worked out. Secrets are necessary in relations between nations.

The focus in this news item is clearly not an update on an important political event. What is stressed is, rather, the element of secrecy and suspense. It almost feels as if the broadcaster needs to emphasize the importance placed on the visit by the media by way of legitimating the "intrusion" of serious political matters into the children's program. Notably, this elevation of importance stands out in particular since in comments just preceding the "News for Kids" corner, the newscaster belittled the whole affair: "The main news item in all the papers we have received, the main item deals with the Prime Minister's visit in Morocco. But there's no meat, just a wrapping. Please, the children's news."

Another example, which illustrates the particular process of storification that news items relating to the same events may undergo as they make their way into the children's news concerns the conclusion of the visit of George Bush in Israel (30 July, 1986). The adult news broadcast carried the following item:

American Vice-President George Bush is completing his visit in Israel this afternoon and will meet with the Prime Minister and his Deputy for another talk, and will sign an agreement related to Tourism. Then he will visit the Knesset and will speak before it. From Israel the Vice-President will go to Jordan.

The "News for Kids" program mentions George Bush's departure from Israel, but gives it a distinctive focus and a folkloristic twist:

The American Vice-President, whose name is George Bush, is a visitor in Israel. You have heard of that, of course. He is leaving Israel today, in the afternoon, and in the Farewell Ceremony they will shoot cannon balls from nineteen cannons in his honor. How come? Where does this custom come from? And why nineteen and not twenty, for example? This is a tradition that began about three hundred years ago in Europe. The cannons they had then, less sophisticated ones, they filled with cannon powder and it was a long process, and it took a long time for them to fill up with cannon powder

after the shot. Therefore, when an important visitor approached the state they used the cannons so as to show him that the cannon powder had been used up, and he can feel safe when he comes ashore. The cannons used were the ones on the city walls, or the cannons of a warship if the visitor arrived by sea. A King, a Prince and a Head of State receive 21 cannon shots according to the rules of ceremony. A Vice-President, important Ambassadors, or high officers get 19 shots, a little less noise, and less honor. Less important people receive 17 booms, and less important people get 10, no 15 booms, never an even number. Why not an even number? Because the seamen believed for many generations that even numbers bring disaster.

This manner of expanding on news items, which involves contextualization through background information, is typical of the kind of elaboration that news items are given in the children's news. The pedagogic tone here is apparent, as it is in news stories about the life habits of animals, or about the human geography of a distant place. The broadcaster's voice lies somewhere between that of the teacher and that of the storyteller.

We see, then, that even in the rare cases in which the same event is addressed in both the adult and children's news broadcasts, the form of treatment is very different and cannot be reduced to a question of language simplification. Even in those rather rare cases in which it addresses public affairs and politics, the children's news program concerns itself with the margins of political events, with the form rather than the substance of things. The program thereby serves to remove children from the affairs of the adult world even while inviting them to partake in it.

Finally, the kinds of omissions one can trace in the children's news as compared to the adult news of the same morning are also suggestive. Thus, it was strange to realize that the news story about the death in a car crash of three girls from the same family, as well as their mother and relative, which appeared on the seven o'clock adult news of 7 Aug. 1986, was ignored in the 7:15 children's news of the same day. It seems, therefore, that while adult news tends to become a chronicle of disaster and violence, the children's news seek to keep these same aspects of life out of the youngsters' sight as much as possible. It is not that children are shielded from violence per se: after all, so much of children's TV programing is utterly filled with it. It is, indeed, *reality* that needs to be kept out.

This idealizing tendency is, of course, more a reflection of adults' constructions about the world of childhood than of "the world out there." It is an adult-induced attempt to reinforce a sense of discontinuity between children's and adults' social experience as it is related to the basic sociocultural dimensions of responsible vs. nonresponsible status role, and dominance vs. submission (Benedict 1938:23). The question is, what can this persistent casting of childhood as a Golden Age of innocence in a program run and listened to

by many adults tell us about the deeper impulses underlying contemporary Israeli social attitudes? The concluding section will address itself to this question.

Childhood as Rhetoric: The Golden Age of Innocence

The image of childhood conjured by the "News for Kids" program accords with the one that, according to Meyrowitz (1984:19), prevailed in the first half of our century, when "childhood was considered a time of innocence and isolation, a time for children to be sheltered from the nasty realities of adult life." In his book on the great English children's writers of about 1860 to 1930, H. Carpenter (1985) similarly argues that they portray an image of childhood as filled with fantasy and innocence, childhood as Arcadia, as the Secret Garden. This particular depiction of childhood at the time of the Industrial Revolution, Carpenter argues, is a literary response to the felt oppressiveness of the adult world. As long as they perceived the world as hopeful and inviting, men and women of literary genius did not reject it in favor of the Secret Garden of childhood innocence. It is in a world perceived as hostile and treacherous that such gardens are made to bloom.

I would like to suggest that the "News for Kids" program is a powerful, nonliterary expression of the quest for Arcadia in contemporary Israeli society, and, alongside a variety of other nostalgic strands, it is a response to widespread feelings of insecurity and disaffection comparable to the ones described by Carpenter in relation to industrial Britain. Like children's literature in industrial societies, "News for Kids" is a culturally reflexive statement about the world which the program, its makers and listeners, inhabit. Indeed, this gesture of protectiveness toward children cannot be taken as a serious attempt to shield them from the realities of life in a society so utterly obsessed with news and current events, so deeply imbued with the precariousness of its political situation. Ultimately, it constitutes a message adults convey to themselves about a Secret Garden, where they can imaginatively and vicariously experience some respite.

It seems to me that the overall message children receive through this program with respect to their participation in the discourses of public life is highly ambiguous. The program does not bring current events to the children in such a way as to help them become participants in the public sphere. They are invited to go through the motions of participation while at the same time being excluded from the major concerns of public life as defined within the framework of adult news. The "News for Kids" program is, in a sense, like a toddler's make-believe watch, which can be proudly worn and displayed, but cannot tell the time. It becomes, I believe, ultimately a message about the value of communal participation rather than about informed citizenship.

The "News for Kids" program is thus highly problematic. Youngsters, as is well known, are not insulated from adult news and conversation, and

clearly sense the anxieties their elders experience in their dealings with the “real world,” particularly in a society so beset by political violence and war, and whose children share from a very young age the knowledge that, as they turn eighteen and are drafted into the army, much of the society’s existential burden will be their immediate and personal concern. Children are thus left with the burden of making sense of the information transmitted in adult news broadcasts on their own, as well as with the burden of making emotional sense of their elders’ conflicted attitudes toward the world of public affairs. One cannot but wonder if it is not precisely the knowledge of the heavy weight placed on young shoulders in Israeli society that makes the adult quest for a childhood Arcadia in contemporary Israel so desperately poignant. However understandable this quest may be, I submit that denying youngsters open and fully ratified participation in Israeli communal conversation through this subtly contrived rhetoric of exclusion is but another way of silencing them.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Meyrowitz’s (1984) contention that in our electronic media dominated times, the cultural ideology whereby childhood as a protected and sheltered period of life has all but disappeared is not supported by the analysis of these two Israeli radio programs. As I have shown, these programs in fact attempt to restrict children’s access to full-fledged social participation, and are underscored by messages of childhood separateness and vulnerability. The issue seems to be more complex, and more amenable to cultural variation even within Western nations (broadly defined), than the fashionable dictum about the “loss of childhood” in the electronic age might lead us to believe. As the “News for Kids” program indicates, in the context of Israeli society, electronic media, in this case the radio, can perform the same cultural “work” that children’s literature performed in England of the Industrial Revolution, promoting the social exclusion and control of children on the one hand, and the romanticization of childhood on the other.

Both programs, each in its own way, emphasize strategies of exclusion, whose controlling message cannot be muted, however benign they may appear. Thus, in my reading of them, these programs present and ratify models of knowledge, information, and learning commensurate with the centralistic orientation typical of Israeli public schools. Indeed, underlying the informative, fact-oriented discourse of these radio programs, one can detect a rhetoric of authoritative display, an image of pedagogy that contradicts the overt message of learner participation, public access, and respect for questioning minds or citizenship that constitute the programs’ central pedagogical claims. In none of them can we see a fruitful inter-penetration of the voice of schooling and the voice of children’s lifeworld; both programs manifest the exclusionary overpowering of the one or the other.

A similar orientation can be traced in other Israeli educational contexts as well. It is implicit in the rhetoric of cohesion that permeates Israeli school culture, as shown in the discussion of the widely employed and deeply compelling *gibush* (crystallization) metaphor. It is also implicit in the social organization of fire rituals in Israeli youth movement ceremonials, where a rhetoric of flames provides a context for participants' shared appreciation of a focal source of excitement and authority. In all these mediated and unmediated contexts, participants, whether young or old, are unreflectively lured into the communal conversation by the rhetoric of the occasion. These various languages of education, in their very loosely orchestrated manner all contribute to the vitality of the compelling cultural imperative to let oneself become uncritically incorporated into an ongoing cultural discourse, to let its terms and accents become one's own.

At the same time, as emerges in the following chapters, which deal with the distinctive tonalities of Israeli culture of childhood, a sense of childhood separateness in an age-graded cultural arrangement is proclaimed and cherished by Israeli adults and children alike. It finds its expression in child-marked communication rituals involving conflict resolution (*brogez*), sharing of treats (*behibudim*) and secrets (*sodot*), and in swapping exchanges (*hahlafor*). These and other semi-folkloric patterns of child discourse combine to demarcate a domain of childhood experiences, which is perceived as largely autonomous vis-à-vis the adult world as seen by children and their elders. As we shall see, however, the picture is more complex in this case as well. Just as invitations to participate in the adult lifeworld can turn out to be gestures of exclusion, so the peer group dominated lifeworld of children is, in fact, heavily colored by adult values and norms.

As all these examples suggest, a proper understanding of the socializing agendas implicit in the actual social and educational practices children partake in must be teased out of their intricate organization and texture. Conflicting educational philosophies, the rhetorics of fashionable trends and postures, the exotic or nostalgic flavor of childhood activities, all these contribute to the further blurring of the impact of pedagogical and normative arrangements in contemporary culture. Students of the cultural scene must, therefore, undertake the interpretive, at times perhaps "subversive" task of critical analysis in an attempt to uncover and demystify the implicit voices that dominate social and educational discourses of various types, whether spoken in the voices of children or of adults. It is to this larger task that my interpretive and critical efforts have been directed as I attended to the specific discourses of these two radio programs.

Turning to the voices of children's lifeworld, as they are spoken and interpreted in the chapters that follow, we gain a richer picture of Israeli children's socialization processes. What emerges is a vibrant peer-group

culture, which is informed but not dominated by the discourses and practices of the adult world. As I will try to show, it is by establishing, sustaining and negotiating rules and norms for child-child interaction that Israeli children constitute a distinctive social world in which their sense of sociality and personal worth are played out, re-interpreting adult-sponsored ideologies in their own terms. The establishment of at least some discontinuity between adults' and children's world is thus not only part of adults' socializing agenda, but is also reinforced by children's celebration of their peer-group culture.

Paradoxically, Israeli children actually fulfill some of their parents' cultural expectations by cultivating a childhood world that is set apart from the world of adults. Initially, this cultural focus on the peer-group as a social and symbolic resource has, I believe, emerged as a response of first-generation Sabras (native-borns) to their particular socio-historical positioning. The sabras, as bearers-indeed, as emblems of the Zionist revolution (cf. Rubinstein 1977; Oring 1981; Katriel 1986a; Doleve-Gandelman 1987), were explicitly socialized to construct their world in dialectical opposition to the cultural world of Diaspora Jews, the world their parents had left behind when they came to the land of Israel “to build and be re-built,” as the Zionist saying goes. The centrality of the peer-group in Israeli youngsters' social experience is thus shaped by a localized sense of cultural continuity and discontinuity between the world of adults and the world of children, combining intricate webs of childhood images and socialization practices. In this chapter I have considered some ways in which adults contribute to this many-layered intergenerational dialogue. In the ones that follow I turn to some of the ways in which it is shaped and animated by children's own voices.

Chapter 6: “For Our Young Listeners”:

1. The public role of the “Songs and Homework” program can be fruitfully compared to the privatized Dial-A-Teacher service operated by the American Federation of Teachers in some thirty American cities in which “real live teachers answer the phones from 4:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., Monday through Thursday, ready to assist students with their homework problems. Students of all ages, as well as their parents, are encouraged to call. The AFT stresses that the service is not meant to be a Dial-An-Answer, but is set up to give advice on how to *find* an answer.” (reported in *Careers: The Magazine for Today's Teens*, Winter 1987, p. 6).

2. The attempt to reestablish the centrality of the teacher's voice in modern times goes beyond the Israeli context. The unfortunately aborted American plan to have the teacher who joined the Challenger expedition recite a lesson from space is a vivid illustration of this.

3. There is also an interesting pattern of non-reciprocal use of forms of address on the program: callers are consistently and repeatedly addressed by their first name whereas the teachers and anchor person are typically referred to and addressed by their full name. This pattern is found in a variety of other phone-in radio programs as well and may attest to a broader structure of power relations on these media occasions.

4. The news programs last about the same time, 7–8 minutes each. The difference in the number of items for the two versions of news broadcasts reflects the fact that a greater amount of time is given to each item in the children's news.

5. According to a listenership survey reported in *Yediot Aḥaronot*, 20 Feb. 1987, 661,000 people over eighteen years of age listen to this program, which has been cited as the most popular of the five morning radio programs available to the Israeli public (there are no TV broadcasts in the morning). Interestingly, the survey did not include children.

Brogez: Ritual and Strategy In Israeli Children's Conflicts

BROGEZ EPISODES

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of conflict-related, ritualized *brogez* sequences as communicative forms in Israeli childhood culture. The study of *brogez* relates to two strands of research into children's communicative competence: the study of children's conflict behavior and the study of ritualized communicative activities through which children construct, maintain, and strategically negotiate their social world (e.g. Brenneis and Lein 1977; Lein and Brenneis 1978; Boggs 1978; Corsaro 1979; Morgan, O'Neill, and Harre 1979; Goodwin, 1980). A number of ethnographic studies have been specifically concerned with the analysis of culturally situated, ritualized, agonistic events. Notably, the series of studies concerned with the language form known as "sounding" or "playing the dozens" among black American youth in the United States (e.g., Abrahams 1972; Kochman 1972, 1981; Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972), the study of verbal dueling among Turkish boys (Dundes, Leach, and Ozkok 1972), or the study of ritualized fighting among the Irish men of Tory Island (Fox 1977).

The interactional state referred to by speakers of Hebrew as *brogez* (a phonological reduction of *be rogez*, which means "in anger," probably a borrowing from Yiddish *broigetz*) is here considered as a further example of the ritual regulation of conflict. The specific *brogez*-related forms and strategies identified in Israeli childhood culture will be discussed in detail with an emphasis on the growth of relevant aspects of children's communicative competence.

Brogez is an extremely common metacommunicative term in the cultural lexicon of Israeli children.¹ As a metacommunicative term, it is used in either a descriptive or a performative capacity:

1. In its use as a descriptive term, it refers to an agonistic state characterized by the suspension of ordinary interactional practices; it is a state of deliberate noncommunication involving two or more children. Thus, children can be heard saying things like "I am *brogez* with M. I'll never speak to her." Functioning descriptively, it can also be used to denote the act of establishing a state of

brogez, as in “M. and N. had a big fight and then they made *brogez*.”

2. In its use as a performative (Austin 1962), the term ‘*brogez*’ can be employed in constituting a state of *brogez* as when a child cuts off communication with another by explicitly stating “I’m *brogez* with you. Don’t speak to me.”

The study of *brogez* provides an ethnographic example that differs from the above-mentioned studies of ritual conflicts in two major ways: (1) The ritualization associated with *brogez* involves the resolution rather than the dispute phase of the conflict; (2) The term *brogez* denotes an interactionally defined social state that is interwoven in an ongoing conflict situation rather than a playlike speech activity that is interactionally set apart. We might formulate this difference by saying that while “sounding” and verbal dueling represent agonistic rituals, *brogez* is an example of a ritualized agonistic state.

Despite its association with the notions of violence and disruption in social relations, the social construction of a state of *brogez* is an organized, predictable, and stylized interactional activity among Israeli children. It is an important element of their peer-group culture, reflecting a culturally distinctive shaping of a communicative function that is fundamental to childhood universally—the expression and regulation of interpersonal aggression. Children’s ability to participate in *brogez* sequences is predicated on their mastery of a set of communicative rules and strategies that establish it as a well-defined, bounded social state, and that specify the behavioral displays and occasion-specific identities associated with it (Goodwin 1980:685). Knowledge of these rules, thus, forms part of children’s communicative competence, that part of it that is sustained and transmitted with minimal interference on the part of adults.²

As we shall see, the particular conflict resolution strategy utilized in *brogez*—the strategy of withdrawing from interaction “in a visible huff” (Goffman 1967:22) rests upon the fundamental distinction between physical and social availability in an interaction (Schegloff 1972:368). Children’s grasp of the idea of social availability as an interactional state and the devices used to signal its presence or absence is the product of a gradual, often painstaking, process of social learning.³

This basic element of the “grammar” of social interaction, which usually remains “submerged,” comes to the fore in the particular context of *brogez*, as it involves the suspension of ordinary interactional practices. It is basic to other aspects of children’s communicative competence as well, for example, the accomplishment of entries (Corsaro 1979:1985). Thus, the study of *brogez* will take us from a localized interest in Israeli culture of childhood to a consideration of the growth of some fundamental aspects of communication competence.

Although the study was triggered by repeated, *in situ* observations of *brogez* events and children's spontaneous discussion of them, my particular interest in the cultural knowledge required for the enactment of a *brogez* script⁴ recommended the use of interviewing procedures designed to elicit children's own self-reflective accounts of *brogez*.⁵ These accounts were particularly revealing given the fact that a state of *brogez* is defined in terms of behavioral avoidances: not playing together, not speaking to each other, not mentioning each other's name, as so on, so that the limitations of an outsider's behaviorally based approach in this case are especially pronounced.⁶

Let us begin by locating *brogez* within the flow of events in which it tends to occur. The following account, taken from a taped interview with two twelve-year-old girls, will serve as an illustration of a *brogez* story typical for this age-set. It was told in response to the question: "Have you recently been involved in a *brogez*?" and referred to events that had occurred a few weeks earlier:⁷

H.: "It was at G's party. M. and I were planning something about a class party . . ."

J.: "No."

H.: "About spending the night at M.'s place, and A. was with L. at the same time."

J.: "They were talking."

H.: (demonstrating with her hand) "I and M. here and A. and L. are near the cupboard. This way. That was the distance between us. And they thought that we were gossiping about them because A. had all kinds of affairs with K. (a boy). So they . . ."

J.: "No. It's just that the class invented that A. and K."

H.: "Yes."

J.: "And also K. is kind of tall and thin, so, so they say, so R. comes to me: "What is S's boyfriend called?" I told her: "Well, how?" "Gavoha veraze / debil shekaze" (tall and thin and such an idiot)."

H.: "How?"

J.: "Gavoha veraze, debil shekaze." (Both laugh.)

H.: "So she thought we were gossiping about her but we weren't talking about them at all. So L. said: "Ken, be'emet" (yes, really—a formulaic expression often used as a retort in a dispute when nothing better can be found). So I told her: "Tell me, what are you pushing your nose? Is it your business?" So she said: "Yes, what are you pushing your nose?" "What am I pushing my nose? I was talking to M., not to you." And so it started.

What followed was an acrimonious exchange of insults between H. and L. (who are generally recognized as good friends), who accused each other of interference. It was terminated by L's angry retreat, which led to what H. described as a rather big *brogez*.

In characterizing *brogez* as a social state, I will consider *brogez* events both as they are located within the context of ongoing interactions and as they realize a distinct interactional frame.⁸ As the above account illustrates, *brogez* forms part of an agonistic interactional sequence. The particular place it occupies in the sequential unfolding of fights and verbal disputes points to the role it plays in such contexts. Specifically, the declaration of a state of *brogez* usually follows a spell of open, animated verbal conflict triggered by an act of affront (either actual or imputed) by one of the parties involved. In facework terms, we can say that a dispute leading to *brogez* is typically triggered by a Face-Threatening-Act (FTA) that is performed by one child against another.⁹ It may be a threat to the other's negative face, as in the above example in which both "gossiping about" and "pushing one's nose" were interpreted as the violation of personal space or autonomy. Or, it may be a threat to the other's positive face, as in the following story told by a five-year-old boy in response to a request to tell about a *brogez* incident he could remember. This account is typical of the accounts given by the younger children in that it is much less elaborated in the description of the interactional moves leading to *brogez* or in the specification of *brogez* associated behaviors (see the following section). This particular *brogez* incident involved the boy himself and a girlfriend of the same age. It was triggered not by an imposition of any kind but by the girl's refusal to support the boy's views:

"Yes. I and *T.* were *brogez*. She said there is no such thing called 'cream of lime' and I said that there is. So we became *brogez*. In the end she agreed. First I said I didn't want to make peace (*lo rotze lehashlim*), to teach her a lesson. Then we made peace (*sholem*)."

It is worth noting that the term "*sholem*" means peace in Yiddish and occurs in colloquial Hebrew only in this child-marked context. In contrast to the Hebrew term *shalom*, its use also introduces a rhyming effect between the *brogez* / *sholem* pair of antonyms.

The performance of a face threatening act (FTA) by one child against another redefines the social situation in such a way as to suspend casual relations between participants, establishing an agonistic frame. Usually, the FTAs which trigger a *brogez* frame are uncontested acts of affront, either physical ("He hit me") or verbal ("He called me names"). In some cases, however, as in the two examples cited here, a process of imputation is involved. Neither whispering in the corner nor questioning the existence of "cream of lime" can be considered as intrinsically involving threat to face, but can be interpreted as affronts in given contexts. At such points the particular sensitivities, vulnerabilities, as well as strategic intentions of the participants come into play.

Although exchanges of accusations as to "who started it" may be heard as part of the dispute, and often come up as part of the clarification elicited

in the mediating process leading to *sholem* (peace), this did not seem to be a crucial matter. The language used by the children indicates this: They tended to talk of *brogez* as something that happened inadvertently, using such locutions as “*kara brogez*” “*brogez* occurred” or “*jatsa brogez*” “*brogez* came out,” or as a joint social undertaking, in plural terms (“We made *brogez*”). Indeed, for an *FTA* to lead to *brogez*, it must not only be identified as such but also be responded to in kind. Most frequently, it is followed by an exchange of insults. The phase of the conflict some children referred to as “the fight leading to *brogez*” is perceived as internally structured in terms of the kinds of insults exchanged and the level of affect involved.

Children tended to draw a distinction between *klalot kashot* “hard curses” and *klalot kalot* “light / easy curses.” The latter include most formulaic curses—such as *idjot* “idiot,” *hamor* “ass,” *debil* “deranged,” *mefager* “retarded,” *mag'ila* “disgusting,” *masriha* “stinking”—except for sex-related ones, mainly *ben /bat zona* “son / daughter of a bitch,” which is considered a hard curse. Hard curses include, in addition, cursing that is personally directed at one's opponent, utilizing knowledge of particular vulnerabilities of the other child, including information previously divulged in the intimate context of secret-sharing. Disputes tend to begin with an exchange of light curses and escalate to a stage of hard curses. This escalation is accompanied by a subjective sense of mounting anger.¹⁰

A structural distinction between the first and the second phases of cursing relates to the likelihood of the occurrence of retreats in each phase. The term “retreat” refers to an explicit attempt by a party to the dispute to play down the conflict and terminate it before it escalates further. This can be done by interjecting comments such as: “*oof, hakol shtujot. Lo shave lariv biglal ze*” “Oof, it's all nonsense. Not worth fighting because of this.” These retreats, when they occur, are much more likely to occur at the phase of “light curses.” Notably, even in the most heated disputes, such as the one reported by H., according to her own testimony, some sense of constraint with respect to swearing seems to be maintained. Thus, H. testified that she refrained from calling L. *shmena* “fatsy” because the latter was very sensitive to this label “and this would have finished everything.” It also appears that, in contradistinction to the case of “sounding” (Labov 1972), parents and homelife tend to be kept out of the discourse. Any deprecatory mention of them constitutes a very hard curse.

Usually, when the level of mutual irritation reaches a peak, one of the disputants cuts off communications either by physically removing himself / herself from the scene, “withdrawing with a huff,” as E. Goffman calls it, or by only socially withdrawing, that is, explicitly declaring a state of *brogez*. Whether it has been verbally declared or implicitly signaled through nonresponsiveness (turning a cold shoulder) or physical withdrawal or all of the above, this phase of the conflict is described as being *brogez*.

The state of *brogez* gives participants a period of “time out” in which hostilities are kept up but not as intensively as during the dispute phase. Children explicitly said that it gives them an opportunity to calm down, which they considered to be a prerequisite for terminating the conflict. Thus, they claimed that mediation efforts rejected out of hand during the heat of the quarrel are more likely to be recognized and utilized by the antagonists during the *brogez* phase. These, among other moves, could lead to *sholem*—an interactional phase of accentuated “peacefulness” and intensive mutual engagement by the *brogez* partners, which sequentially follows and is contrastively defined with reference to the *brogez* phase. Structurally, it should be still considered part of the agonistic cycle surrounding *brogez*, until it recedes into the flow of casual, expressively unmarked relations.

The following schema presents the flow of events in which *brogez* is embedded in terms of the kinds of acts comprising it and in terms of what R. Harre and P. Secord (1972:150) called the “arousal structure” of the episode, that is, “the flux of emotions treated as the meanings assigned to states of arousal”:

casual relations - [FTA(s) - *brogez* - *sholem*] - casual relations

FTA (s) = Initial FTA + insults + (retreats)

Insults = light curses + (hard curses)

The place occupied by *brogez* episodes in the sequential unfolding of agonistic interactions points to its role in the regulation of conflicts among Israeli children. Children often indicated their intuitive awareness of this when they said things like “*brogez* always ends up in *sholem*,” or advised that adults should not interfere in *brogez* among children because they are sure to make *sholem* eventually.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BROGEZ

As already suggested, a useful way of characterizing a state of *brogez* is in terms of the tension maintained between the physical availability and the social unavailability of the *brogez* partners relative to each other. Thus, *brogez* is not a spatiotemporally bounded speech event in the same way as “sounding” is. Rather, it is a socially bounded interactional state, punctuated by ritualized bracketing devices that serve to either institute or dissolve a state of *brogez*. Let us refer to them as “openings.” They constrain all subsequent conduct by the *brogez* partners in that any act that follows them is interpreted relative to the *brogez* frame, that is, as either sustaining or revoking it. Openings of *brogez* are described by the older children as a two-step sequence combining verbal and nonverbal elements: The verbal ones are preopenings and the nonverbal ones are openings.

The verbal element involves an exchange of near-formulaic retorts, which are not insults directed at the person of the opponent (like the insults mentioned earlier), but rather expressions of disdain with the interaction as such. They are viewed as signaling a further escalation of the conflict; so that while retreats are not likely to be attempted during the exchange of "hard curses" either, at this stage they are completely ruled out. One informant put it this way: "After you say this you must make *brogez* to complete the fight. This is the only way." Examples of such retorts are:

1. A: "*lehi leaza / la'azazel*" "Go to hell!"
B: "*telhi at*" "You go!"
2. A: "*lo medaberet itha*" "not speaking with you."
B: "*lo tzariḥ tovot*" "don't need your favors."
3. A: "*Al tedaber iti*" "don't speak to me."
B: "*ani gam be'emet lo rotze*" "I also really don't want..."
4. A: "*ani od ar'e leḥa*" "I'll show you yet!"
B: "*lo mefaḥed mimḥa*" "not afraid of you."
5. A: "*stom tape*" "shut your mouth."
B: "*al tagid li / lo sho'el otha ma la'asot*" "don't tell me / not asking you what to do."

B's counter retorts are stock phrases whose use does not involve any verbal agility so that failure to produce one promptly entails severe loss of face. The chaining of pairs of retorts is more problematic, and the child who can do it scores an interactional point. Although this kind of interaction-related insult is recognized as taking disputants closer to the termination of the exchange, the general difficulty of resolving endings (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) is compounded here by an interactional norm that specifies that "having the last word is the most important thing," to cite a twelve-year-old informant. Remaining speechless is highly demeaning. An eleven-year-old girl described her frustration as she told me of a case in which she had said to another girl: "Go to hell" and received a reply she was unable to respond to: "Who you? I know." She explicated: "What could I say? Explain to her that I meant her, not me? It's dumb." The ingenuity of this counter retort is that it put the opponent in a state of double bind: offering a correction so as to clarify the insult intended felt dumb, as it meant dropping the agonistic stance, but so did the failure to recycle the insult.

How, then, can the altercation that leads to *brogez* be terminated when disputants are equally adept at providing retorts and counter retorts of the kinds illustrated above? The answer lies in the nonverbal component involved in a *brogez* opening. It is simply the act of physical withdrawal or disengagement

that immediately follows a forcefully expressed retort when one of the disputants feels he or she has had enough. Clearing the scene must be done “with pride,” as the above, outmaneuvered informant explained when I asked her what could have been done to rectify the situation she had described to me. Getting away with pride is partly a matter of composure—one must be quick but avoid appearing as if one is running away. At times, one can do even better and, in withdrawing, make the other appear “like a baby who has nothing better to do, only fight over such nonsense.”

The younger children associate the declaration of *brogez* with a ritualized opening, which combines a stylized verbal and nonverbal element. An upturned thumb thrust in one’s disputant’s direction is the most common gesture associated with the declaration of *brogez*. It is often accompanied by the melodic chanting of the rhyme:

*Brogez, brogez le’olam (Brogez, brogez forever) Sholem, sholem af
pa’am (Sholem, sholem never).*

While the chant and the gesture are seen as one complex, each of them can be used in and of itself to “bracket” a *brogez* frame.

The older children were all familiar with this pattern and seemed to enjoy telling about it as something “little children do,” stressing that they would never use it themselves. “What are we, babies?” responded a ten-year-old whom I prodded about it. The same attitude was expressed with regards to the ritualized closings to be described later, whose styling is a reversal of the above opening pattern. The use of ritualized openings and closings seems to be restricted to the younger age group. In fact, several of my younger informants promptly responded to my initial question, if they knew what *brogez* was, by sticking out their thumb or by producing the above chant.

Finally, it is also possible to declare a state of *brogez* by explicitly asserting something like: “You’re a liar! I’m *brogez* with you” (an overheard exchange). Asked about this pattern, children claimed that it is not common and would tend to be used by younger children, usually as a response to an offense performed prior to the particular exchange such as a lie or a piece of gossip (cf. Goodwin 1980). Unwilling or unable to enter into a verbal dispute, they nevertheless formulate an accusation, which they offer as their “reason for *brogez*.”

In sum, three major *brogez* opening patterns have been discerned:

Interaction-related retorts + withdrawal

Formulaic chant + upturned thumb gesture

Accusation + explicit *brogez* declaration

The first pattern characterizes the older children’s conflicts, the second is specifically associated with the youngest age group, and so is the third, though

more loosely so. Regarding these opening patterns as interactional brackets, we note that the first differs from the others in two ways. First, the exchange of *interaction-related retorts* must fit naturally within the interaction's discursive context, marking only a subtle shift in the exchange of insults preceding it. The retorts, and especially each new cycle, require a renewed demonstration of verbal agility. In the other two patterns, the interactional texture of the ongoing exchange is disrupted and no particular verbal capacity is required. Second, the performance of a dignified *withdrawal* requires a proper assessment of one's current interactional position, proper timing, and the display of proper composure. None of these is required in the formulaic chant and accusation patterns.

We are now in a position to say what it is, in rough terms, that the older children can do that the younger children are not as able to do as far as *brogez*-related behaviors are concerned: They are better at weaving together their communicative activities and at strategically withdrawing from interaction in pursuit of social control.

As noted, *brogez* openings are performative: They are used to constitute a conventionally recognized state of affairs. In declaring a state of *brogez*, a child exercises the right to define the social situation. An incident I had occasion to observe indicates the intensity with which the right to institute a state of *brogez* is held and the meaning it has for the children: An eight-year-old girl was utterly outraged at her ten-year-old brother, tearfully and vocally complaining: "I keep telling him I am *brogez* with him and he goes on speaking to me. He thinks only he can make *brogez*." The elder brother severely taunted his sister by denying her the right to institute a state of *brogez* as he purposely failed to observe the proper constraints holding within a *brogez* frame. This display of disrespect in effect cast her in the role of a "nonperson" (Goffman 1959) in the social world they both inhabited. This, it seems to me, was the primary reason for the outrage. Second, he managed to accomplish this humiliation by making friendly overtures so that, on the face of it, he appeared to be the nice guy while she emerged as the uncompromising aggressor.

In sum, for Israeli children, the right to declare a state of *brogez* is an inalienable "civil" right. Children have available to them *brogez* opening routines that allow them to handle conflict situations by declaring a phase of "time out." This form of containing conflict situations is very important, for a child cannot choose to ignore the challenge implicit in an *FTA* directed against him or her, willingly forsaking the "right to have the last word" without entailing considerable loss of face. A child who fails to reassert himself or herself by responding to such a challenge is branded as *halashlush* "a weakling." The enactment of *brogez* makes it possible for children to maintain face while at the same time avoiding physical violence.

Sustaining acts

The social state of *brogez* must be interactionally distinguished not only from a state of mutual engagement but also from a state of expressively neutral casual relations. The latter are typical of many relationships children have with many of their classmates. I have been witness to a protracted (several months' long) instance of *brogez* between a number of twelve-year-old boys that was never "officially" terminated. I had a discussion with some of them, and they said that they had lost interest in it and it was "not a *brogez* anymore." The shift from a state of *brogez* to mere lack of mutual interest involved a suspension of the hostilities that constitute *brogez* sustaining acts.

Brogez sustaining acts can be divided into two general categories: The first category is acts designed to establish one's social nonavailability in the face of the almost continuous physical availability of the *brogez* partners who are usually members of the same social group. The acts involve a suspension of ordinary displays of social availability, both verbal and nonverbal. The older the children, the more elaborate was their portrayal of the kinds of behaviors that are to be avoided in *brogez*. This reflected their growing awareness of (and/or ability to verbalize) the behavioral clues that signal one's social availability and, it seems to me, their growing ability to make social distinctions finer than the one between friend and foe. The youngest children responded to the question "What don't you do when you are *brogez*?" by mentioning acts that are overtly marked for their "friendliness," such as "I won't play with him," "I won't let him ride my bike," "I don't go to his home."

Only a couple of the younger children mentioned "not speaking," none of them mentioned the nonverbal cues specified by the older children (see below). It appears that children of this age group have not yet constructed a full-fledged *brogez* script. They were attuned to its emotional coloring but were unable to demarcate the *brogez* frame. A reiterated remark was "*brogez ze kshekoasim*" "*brogez* is when you are angry." They contrasted *brogez* with being on friendly terms, not with being interactionally available. This categorical difference was brought home to me during a conversation with a five-year-old boy:

Q.: "Can you tell me about a time when you were *brogez* with a friend of yours?"

A.: "No."

Q.: "Why?"

A.: "If it's *brogez* then it's not a friend (*im ze brogez az ze lo haver*)."

I learned my lesson and switched to talking about "*brogez* with a kid" or referring to the specific instances he had mentioned, but whenever I slipped I was promptly corrected.

Older children were able to discuss a much more elaborate and subtle repertoire of behavioral avoidances related to this phase of *brogez*, identifying behaviors associated with the signaling of social availability rather than friendliness. These included:

1. Not speaking.
2. Not sitting / standing close (unless they share a desk in school, which makes *brogez* more problematic as well as more newsworthy).
3. Not looking in each other's direction, avoiding eye contact (a nonverbal cue).
4. Not mentioning the other's name.
5. Refusing to play on the same team.
6. Not helping in time of need. Examples included, "if she needs a pen," "if she trips on the stairs," "if she's sick and needs someone to bring her the homework."

These avoidances cannot always be adhered to for instrumental reasons. This is especially conspicuous with regards to verbal acts, such as addressing or speaking to the other, or mentioning him or her by name. A number of reference avoidance strategies have been generated to get around the problem: One can use the term *chilba* ("a bitch" in Arabic), which denotes "the person one is *brogez* with," in place of the name. Another strategy involves using the third person pronoun to talk about one's *brogez* partner in his or her presence, as if he or she were not there. A strategy that combines avoidance and baiting is the use of the female pronoun and inflections to talk about a *brogez* party who is a male. When there is no choice but to relay a message to one's *brogez* partner, it can be done through an intermediary. In the absence of a third party, the message can be communicated through a pet or an object, (e.g., a girl told me that she used the wall for this purpose, saying, "Wall, tell her that. . ."). Another strategy involves addressing one's *brogez* partner, but prefixing one's utterance with *chilba*, thereby suspending its interactional force, as in: "*Chilba*, you are standing in my way."¹¹

The second category of *brogez* sustaining acts is hostile acts designed to maintain a reasonable level of emotional arousal so as not to let the anger drain. These acts must be performed without violating the constraints against non-engagement, so they tend to be indirect. The most common of these are "revealing secrets" and "gossiping against" one's *brogez* partner. The difference between the two activities is not clear-cut: The most injurious one seems to be the revelation of a secret entrusted to one in happier times. Children were quite explicit about the fact that "in *brogez* the secrets can come out." So much so that a thirteen-year-old boy told me that when he wanted to tell his best friend a "real big secret," he made him swear by God that

he would not reveal it even in case they would become *brogez*, and many children testified that the knowledge that their secret might be revealed during a *brogez* spell made them think twice before they decided to tell it even to a close friend. The tactic of demanding to be told a secret for each one divulged is, partly, designed to arm oneself against the threat of having one's secret revealed during *brogez*.¹² Gossiping about someone is a milder form of hostility, not associated with the violation of trust but with ridicule and the design to incite others against one's *brogez* partner (*lehasit*). The antagonists' efforts to incite others and win their support is the way the *brogez* spreads and becomes a group affair, helping to rechart the social map.

The only direct mutual engagement permitted in *brogez* involves blatantly hostile acts, such as hurling curses of the kind exchanged prior to the *brogez* phase, making faces, or sticking out one's tongue at one's opponent. The obscene gesture locally known as an "oriental gesture" (palm of hand turned up, middle finger sticking out) is considered an extreme act of aggravation. *Brogez* episodes vary in the intensity and kind of hostile flare-ups enacted in their course. They are not part of the definition of a *brogez* state in the same way that the avoidances described earlier are, although they are functional in sustaining a discernible level of hostility. Thus, both types of sustaining acts are required for the *brogez* frame to be properly sustained.

Closings

Terminating a state of *brogez* is by no means less problematic than initiating it. Opening such a closing potentially entails loss of face and is therefore avoided by both parties. Some preliminary interactional work is required for *brogez* to be terminated and *sholem* declared. The three types of closing strategies I have been able to identify all combine preclosing and closing acts. They are: (1) Mediation, (2) Gradual rapprochement, and (3) Ritualized closings.

Mediation. A common way for *brogez* episodes to be terminated is through the intervention of self-selected mediators. Assuming the role of mediator entails considerable social rewards. For one thing, it is status enhancing. Effective mediators are liked and respected for their skill, and the experience seems to be self-enhancing. A thirteen-year-old boy described it, saying: "It's like sort of a public role. It's fun to feel like a politician." Beyond that, however, the very attempt at mediation (whether successful or not) solves an immediate social problem: It signals an attitude of neutrality in relation to the dispute while at the same time maintaining an attitude of involvement with and concern for the disputants. This is important since children are extremely pressured when they find themselves "in the middle of a *brogez*." For some, as they explicitly stated, making a move at mediation is a way of extricating themselves from this predicament.

A distinction is sometimes drawn between "calming down" (*lehargi'a*) and actually "mediating" (*letaveh*). The former involves attempts at mitigation

performed in the heat of the fight, before the actual onset of *brogez*. For example, remarks such as, "What kind of a silly thing are you fighting about?" "Why are you saying all kinds of curses and things like that?" Or, simply, "Stop fighting already" are often heard from the "wings" during an exchange of curses. Children know these attempts are not likely to succeed and explicitly say that serious attempts at mediation should be left for later. "When they have been *brogez* for a while and have already calmed down a little. Then I can show them it's all stupid anyway," in the words of a twelve-year-old girl. Seriously attempting to mediate at the stage when disputants are not ready for it is not only ineffective, but may also be hazardous, as the would-be mediator may be drawn into the fight, often by being accused of pushing her/his nose into others' affairs. As another twelve-year-old girl pointed out: "Sometimes it happens that when a girl tries to mediate, then she gets into the affair and then the three of them begin to fight." So that even these half-hearted mediating moves, which establish one as concerned but unattached, are fraught with social risk.

We see, then, that making a mediating move must be distinguished as a social act from actual mediation. There seems to be a rather standard arbitrating procedure. The first step depends on how well acquainted the would-be mediator is with the details of the case. If he or she is not, then the first step is to ask what happened, or, as some children put it, "to ask why and how." This is done with each disputant separately. Thus, each gets an opportunity to present his or her version and then the mediator engages in a series of moves designed to downplay the conflict and to further calm down the parties involved. A typical response used to downplay the conflict is: "*bishvil siba kazot kedai lariv?*" "for such a reason it is worth to quarrel?"

Two effective strategies for "calming down" and downplaying the conflict were mentioned by many children. One is the use of humor. For example, a ten-year-old boy, identified by his friends as an effective mediator, was reported to have "made everyone laugh" by telling a *brogez* partner, "*teraga, teraga*" "calm down, calm down," using an exaggerated Hungarian accent (heavy stress on the first syllable instead of the usual pronunciation that involves primary stress on the third).

Another example, given in a conversation with two twelve-year-old girls (*H.* and *I.*), involved the mediating methods of one of their classmates, a girl, who was acclaimed by many as a most effective mediator (*N.* in the following segment). Their description ran as follows:

H.: First she calms you down and makes you laugh with all sorts of tricks she plays and then she says: "Tell me, for this reason you're *brogez*?"

I.: Yes, and when I had this *brogez* with *M.*, and I was angry, I was walking home with *N.* and she said: "Look, I'll tell *A.* (the teacher) about it. Say, if you were angry at me, someone clever, but to be angry because

of such a stupid girl. I'll tell about it to *A*. It's not in order (*ze lo beseder*).''
 So, that because of a stupid girl like *M*. I should not be but at her I could
 be angry (both girls laugh).

Another mediating procedure involves a version of shuttle diplomacy: The mediator moves between the *brogez* parties, dropping conciliatory comments in their ears, for example, "He said he really liked playing with you before you were *brogez*." This is a reversal of the gossiping activities that sometimes trigger and often accompany a state of *brogez*. This activity is contrasted by children with that of the "troublemaker" (*sahsehan*), who, in contrast with the mediator, is a negatively evaluated occasion-specific identity. Both the troublemaker and the mediator are known to embellish the facts so as to achieve their strategic ends. The troublemaker is said to "exaggerate in the direction of bad things" while the mediator is said to "exaggerate in the direction of good things." The first is branded for his or her inaccuracies, the second is excused and respected.

Other strategies available to mediators involve initiatives designed to reinstate communication between the *brogez* partners. The mediator may reduce the alienation between them by initiating a game in which both are asked to take part, inviting them both to his or her home, and so on.

Finally, the mediator proposes a "solution" (*pitaron*), which is usually a plea to make peace and forget about the fight that is "not worth it" (*lo shave et ze*). Surprisingly few issue-related solutions were mentioned by the children. I believe this reflects their general sense that what they call "the reason for the *brogez*" is more its trigger than the motivation for it. Thus, children are often able to go into considerable detail about a *brogez* incident, but at the same time cannot recall what it was all about. Also, as one girl put it, "It starts with one reason but then, when they shout, they tell all the other reasons they have. They go: 'You did this to me and you did that to me, and you did this and you did that.'"

The actual closing of a *brogez* sequence is ratified when the antagonists respond positively to the mediator's suggestions and agree to make *sholem*.¹³

Gradual Rapprochement. In the absence of mediators, the antagonists must rely on their own devices to effect a closing. This, again, is problematic as nobody wants to make the first conciliatory move, which is interpreted as a show of weakness: "Why should I be the first one to make *sholem*?" and "What am I, a sucker?" are typical responses, indicating the reluctance to initiate the peace process. The risk involved in making such a move is accentuated by the fact that, potentially, any peace gesture may be disdainfully rejected as the act of a "fawning *chilba*" (*chilba mithanefet*), or simply a "fawn." Thus, the institutionalized possibility of questioning the sincerity of any conciliatory act clearly compounds the difficulty of accomplishing a closing. Even my most eloquent informants could not enlighten me, or formulate for

themselves, how they would determine whether the overtures of a *brogez* partner were sincere attempts at peacemaking or the empty gesture of a "fawn."

This supports my conclusion that, in contradistinction to openings, closings cannot be considered performative acts. For a state of *sholem* to be constituted, it must be ratified by both partners. There is nothing binding, or conventional, in the making of a peace offer, and it can always be rejected as *stam hanfanut* "mere fawning." Note that while the explicit *brogez* opening mentioned earlier is phrased "I am *brogez* with you," the comparable explicit *brogez* closing is phrased as "I want to be *sholem* with you." Thus, while anyone can constitute a state of *brogez*, thereby imposing the interactional frame on another, any of the participants in it can prevent the *brogez* from being brought to a conclusion, thereby imposing its continuation on the *brogez* partner. These formal characteristics of *brogez* are important since they underline its serious, non-playlike properties (despite the nonserious and frivolous characterization it is often accorded by adults). Given these properties, *brogez* does not fulfill two fundamental conditions of play as defined, for example, by R. Caillouis (1961:6): "There is no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity. . . it is necessary that they (the players) be free to leave whenever they please, by saying: 'I am not playing any more.'" For at least one *brogez* partner (the non-initiator), the entry into a state of *brogez* is not strictly voluntary and, as we have seen, neither of them can terminate a state of *brogez* single-handedly by simply stating, "I am not playing any more."

Children accomplish unmediated closings either by using what I have labeled as the gradual rapprochement strategy or by employing ritualized forms. The first strategy, which presupposes a sophisticated understanding of the *brogez* interactional frame, is more common among the older children. Ritualized closings, like ritualized openings, are associated with the younger age-set.

The gradual rapprochement strategy can be described and understood only in relation to the first category of *brogez* sustaining acts discussed in the previous section—acts of avoidance that involve a suspension of ordinary communicative practices. The rapprochement consists of a gradual resumption of these practices until full communication is reinstated. Interestingly, while no sequential order could be discerned in children's suspension of interactional practices, the order in which they are resumed points to their relative interactional weight. Nonverbal signals of interactional involvement are to be resumed: for example, proxemic cues such as standing next to the other in line, postural cues such as facing the other (or not turning away from him or her). These are considered very tentative attempts at feeling out the scene. If they are allowed to pass, that is, neither provoke a disagreeable response nor earn their initiator the label of a "fawn," thus establishing the readiness of both parties for *sholem*, more overt moves can be made. These include being attentive to the other's observed

need (e.g., “If I see she is looking around for a red crayon, I’ll hand her one”), directly addressing one’s *brogez* partner, joining him or her in a game, and so on. This may or may not be accompanied by a request “*rotze lehashlim?*” “Want to make *sholem?*”

Two forms of a rather coercive approach were mentioned that seem to be strategically introduced when the *brogez* child is not confident his or her partner is quite ready to make peace. One was the use of the phone, which was specifically mentioned as a way of inducing the other to engage in talk. Thus, a girl told about the way a *brogez* incident was terminated: “She lives right next to me but she called me up on the phone anyway to ask if I wanted to come play with her. Even if I didn’t want to make *sholem* with her, I was already talking to her anyway. My mom answered the phone and said, ‘It’s for you.’ So we were already talking on the phone. So that was that.” Another strategy mentioned was to go to the home of the *brogez* partner, counting on his or her unwillingness to forego the rules of hospitality. As one girl said: “If I go to her home she has no choice. She has to make *sholem*. What will she do? Throw me out?”

We see that despite the fact that one can delineate the overall pattern of the gradual rapprochement strategy, it requires the ability to make rather subtle strategic choices and to respond appropriately to interactional feedback. Thus, it is interactionally more complex than any of the other strategies both in that it presupposes an elaborated conception of the *brogez* frame and in that it utilizes an elaborate, less standardized, communicative repertoire.

Ritualized Closings. Younger children invariably associate *sholem* with ritualized closing procedures. These typically follow an explicit question such as “*rotze lehashlim?*” “Want to make peace?” or a suggestion “*bo nashlim?*” “let’s make *sholem*.” Older children are familiar with this closing pattern but regard it as “babyish,” as in the case of ritualized openings. Some of these closings are simply the reversal of the acts employed as ritualized opening acts. While the upturned thumb signals *brogez*, the upturned little finger signals *sholem*. This gesture is often accompanied by the chant *sholem, sholem le’olam* (“forever”), *brogez, brogez af pa’am* (“never”)—a reversed version of the chant employed in initiating the state of *brogez*. At times the renewed contact is symbolized by interlocking the little fingers. Such interlocking may be accompanied by joint singing of the following rhymed chant:

zeret, zeret leshalom
 little finger, little finger for peace
kol hariv haja halom
 the whole fight was a dream.

An interesting ritual device reported by some of the children as a closing act involved the cooperative drawing of a Star of David figure in such a manner

that each line is drawn by one of the *brogez* partners alternating in turn (the first line may be drawn by the mediator who helped terminate the *brogez*). Notably, this, as well as the other symbolic acts included in *brogez* closings, must be executed with a maximum of mutual participation and role equality, symbolizing the fact that a social condition of direct reciprocity has been reestablished.

Not all children were familiar with all these ritualized forms, which suggests that the grammar of *brogez* has several dialectal variations, and that there may be other localized ritual forms that have simply not been encountered in the course of this study. The underlying pattern, however, remains the same.

The above findings can be conveniently summarized in Table 7.1.

I have moved from a consideration of the interactional context in which *brogez* episodes are embedded (in the preceding section) to a consideration of their internal structure in this section. I will conclude the discussion by elaborating on the social uses of *brogez* as a speech event.

THE SOCIAL USES OF BROGEZ

Conflict Regulation

The major function of *brogez* is a regulative one, it functions as a standardized interactional mechanism for the regulation of conflicts among Israeli children. As such, it allows for both the expression and the containment of aggression. R. Fox's (1977) discussion of the "inherent rules of violence" is enlightening in this connection. Taking the case of Tory men's fighting patterns as his point of departure, he argues that men "try to ritualize combat between members of the same community, much as animals do" (ibid., p. 145), and that the principle of ritualization is no less primeval than the principle of combat. He notes that Tory fights are never unstructured and that for him, as an anthropologist, they took on "the air of a ritual ballet; it was all choreographed, seemingly rehearsed, stereotyped" (1977:144).

My experience with *brogez*, as both observed and talked about, had a similar flavor, and I believe that the study of *brogez* clearly supports Fox's contention that fighting is ritualized "so that status competition can take place without anyone getting too badly hurt" (1977:145). Let me dwell on this for a moment. That status competition and social control are indeed at issue in the enactment of *brogez* was made particularly clear by children's responses to the question, with what kinds of kids they would not consider making *brogez*. It emerged that a child, who was far beyond one's social sphere, either much more marginal or much more popular (*mekubal*, literally accepted) than oneself was not considered a natural candidate as a *brogez* partner. One reason is simply technical: Reduced contact reduces the occasions for conflict. But it was not only that. Specifically probing children about making *brogez* with a marginal

TABLE 7.1

FEATURES OF *BROGEZ*

<i>Brogez</i> phase	Strategy ^a	Contextual features
Preopenings	-interaction-related retorts -accusation	directly following dispute FTA not part of immediate context
Openings	-ritualized openings: -formulaic chant -upturned thumb -explicit <i>brogez</i> declaration -withdrawal	younger children older children
Sustaining acts	-nonavailability / unfriendliness signals: -not playing -not sharing toys -not talking -avoiding eye contact -not naming -maintaining proxemic distance -hostility displays: -cursing -obscene gestures -gossiping / inciting against	younger children older children older children
Preclosings	-mediation -gradual rapprochement -explicit peace offering	older children older children, third-party initiated preferred self-initiated younger children
Closings	-verbalized or implied consent to make peace -ritualized closings: formulaic chant upturned little finger	older children younger children

Note: ^a. Unless age or other context differentiation is indicated, these strategies may be either jointly or alternatively employed. In such cases, strategic choices seem to be mainly a matter of individual style.

member of the group, I got replies like: "With her? What will I gain from it?" (*ma jetze li mize?*). Similarly, pre-adolescent girls and boys tended to rule

each other out as candidates for *brogez*, as they live in different social worlds, each with its own "pecking order."

The practice of inciting group members into joining one's side in a *brogez* incident, which was mentioned in the previous section, is motivated by a direct association between the size of one's following and one's perceived status within the group. Children both implicitly and explicitly recognize the dynamics involved. Thus, a ten-year-old girl told me she had made *sholem* with another child, remarking: "I saw that all the other girls were going to her side, so what's the point." Similarly, children are aware that *brogez* can take the form of a social contest between two powerful members of the group, especially girls, in their struggle for leadership. These incidents are typically said to be motivated by jealousy: "*hi kinta ba shehi malkat hakita*" ("she was jealous of her for being the class queen."). The important point to note here is that *brogez* does not only reflect status relations, but is also used as an interactional resource to challenge social status on some occasions and to consolidate it on others, to chart and rechart the social map.

Children are, furthermore, aware of the role of *brogez* in containing conflicts. This came out clearly in discussions of gender-related differences associated with *brogez*. Both sexes displayed detailed familiarity with the *brogez* script, but both boys and girls remarked that it was more a girls' affair and that boys often got into physical fights where girls would have declared *brogez*. The many instances of *brogez* involving boys that I have recorded suggest that this should not be taken to mean that boys do not engage in *brogez*, but rather that, like other verbal activities, such as gossip and secret-sharing, *brogez* tends to be associated with female behavior.

The important point for our present discussion is that *brogez* and fighting are conceptualized as alternative strategies for resolving conflicts in the social world of Israeli children. However, while *brogez* is considered as a mechanism that helps contain conflicts, fighting, however ritualized, always threatens to get out of hand.

It should be noted that the kind of interactional disengagement entailed in *brogez* is not universally considered a form of conflict resolution. For example, T. Kochman (1981:58-59) stresses that "blacks consider the danger of violence as greater when people are not communicating with each other than when they are, no matter how loud, angry, or abusive their arguments may become."

The Manipulations of *Brogez* Episodes

Older children are aware of the social implications of *brogez*. Moreover, their *brogez* stories include incidents that clearly manifest manipulative uses of *brogez* as a social form. Most typically, these involve stories of rivalry among two girls (much more so than boys) who compete for a leadership position in class.

The competition involves repeated challenges that take the form of *brogez*. These *brogez* incidents differ subtly in tone from the ones described earlier. They readily become group affairs, are somewhat more impersonal in flavor, and tend to fall into repetitive patterns involving the same groups of children.

Children's overall conception of *brogez* as an interactional episode can perhaps be best captured by exploring the distinctions they draw between *brogez* incidents they refer to with such epithets as "*brogez gadol*" ("big") or "*brogez retsini*" ("serious") on the one hand, and "*brogez katan*" ("small") or "*brogez shtuti*" ("nonsensical") on the other. Children spontaneously used these descriptions in discussing *brogez* episodes in which they had taken part. I therefore tried to probe more systematically into the criteria they used for judging, "Wow, that was a big *brogez*" or for saying, "No, that *brogez* was just nonsense. I'll give you a better example."

The following criteria have emerged as significant in children's characterization of *brogez* incidents. Of course, they are not intended to provide a way to "compute" the seriousness of *brogez* episodes but, rather, to suggest the kinds of considerations that enter children's assessment of them:

1. *Length of time*—*Brogez* incidents may last from several minutes to several months, but typically take a day or two. The longer the period of time, the more serious the *brogez* is perceived to be.
2. *Degree of personalization*—The more personalized the *brogez* is felt to be, the more serious it is. This relates to the kind of cursing that preceded the onset of *brogez*; "hard curses," it will be remembered, tend to be more personal and, thus, more injurious.
3. *Persistence*—When partners of the *brogez* persist in their refusal to respond to their peer's mediating efforts, the *brogez* is felt to be particularly serious. Their friends, who usually have some control over the events in their role as mediators, are here denied this influential role.
4. *Number of children involved*—On the one hand, the involvement of many children in a *brogez* episode tends to make it a serious affair, particularly when it risks adult intervention; on the other hand, it renders it less personal.¹⁴

When episodes are socially manipulated to test one's social standing, or challenge another's, they combine features of "big" and "small" *brogez* incidents: They tend to involve many children and stretch over relatively long periods of time. Mediation efforts, if there are any, tend to be ineffective. These qualities would make a "big" *brogez* by most of the above criteria, and yet the relatively less personal air of these exchanges gives them a game-like quality. I have recorded several comments about *brogez* incidents involving a large portion of the speaker's school class, which included an apparently

contradictory statement such as, "It was a very big *brogez* but it was all nonsense anyway." *Brogez* incidents that involve deep personal feelings are never described as nonsensical.

Finally, let me note that since the manipulation of *brogez* episodes must be predicated on a thorough understanding of the script underlying *brogez*, it is not surprising that this use of *brogez* has not been encountered in either the behavior or the accounts of the younger children.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discussion has sought to delineate the structure and functions of the social-linguistic institution of *brogez* as it figures in the life and talk of Israeli children.

The *brogez* episode has been argued to function as a cultural resource on two levels. On one level, it serves to regulate children's conflicts by giving participants a spell of "time out" in which hostilities and tensions are dealt with through ritually constrained interactional channels. These include a mechanism for achieving reconciliation in the form of consensually produced *brogez* termination acts, which lead to a state of *sholem*. As the structural component of the analysis has suggested, *brogez* episodes follow a well-regulated and well-scripted path. It is the cultural knowledge of the rules that govern these episodes that enables Israeli children to function effectively as social actors in agonistic situations. On another level, though, the *brogez* episode can itself be manipulated, generating conflicts that serve as dynamic testing grounds for the social organization of the group, for assessing individuals' leadership as well as their loyalty potential.

Although the specific communicative mechanisms described in this chapter are clearly sustained within the framework of Israeli children's peer-group culture, the cultural learnings involved both reflect and feed into the normative arrangements of the adult world. In fact, whenever I presented this study to adult audiences in Israel, it triggered not only reminiscences of childhood but also comparative comments to adult conduct in agonistic situations. In assessing the cultural significance of *brogez* episodes as sites for social learning, we note that they reflect basic cultural values, such as a cultural accent on group solidarity and a view of conflict as an effective resource in the construction and negotiation of social life.

As noted in an earlier chapter, the ethos of *gibush* as cultivated in Israeli school culture places a high value on harmonious social relations and the avoidance of conflicts. This accent on group solidarity can indeed account for the relatively high degree of ritualization that *brogez* episodes manifest. The relationship between strong group ties (whether grounded in ideology or social structure) and the ritualization of conflicts has been argued by Fox (1977:146), who suggests that ritualized conflicts tend to occur "in any sort of 'steady

state' situation, in any situation where animals or men have to live together as a group . . ." As the discussion of the *gibush*-ethos has indicated, the social world of Israeli children is generally characterized by a strong emphasis on group cohesion and conformity with peer-group members (natively known as *hishtalvut*, or adjustment). The Israeli school class, an organizational fixture mandating long years of enforced "togetherness" is a good example of a social world oriented toward such a "steady state" situation, where conflict needs to be ritualized so that aggression can be handled without disrupting the social order in irreparable ways. In this context, it is important to stress that *brogez* episodes do not merely mark a suspension of communication, but a *temporary* disengagement. Embedded within the sequence is the knowledge that communication will be resumed, and conflict partners will rejoin in a cooperative spirit. Thus, as the ritualization of *brogez* episodes suggests, the social construction of children's peer group life responds to the general "rhetoric of cohesion" that pervades Israeli culture at large as well as to the "social ecology" of a society in which long-term relations grounded in shared affiliations are cultivated through life. As in the case of the men of Tory Island, whose conflicts have evolved into ritualized occasions (Fox 1977), so in the case of Israeli children and many adults, there is an implicit recognition that social ties are often inescapable. The same social reality is reflected in the often observed Israeli game between newly acquainted persons, who join in a cooperative search of a common denominator in the form of shared affiliation or mutual acquaintances from the past, a game that is frequently concluded with a ritualized "what a small world" (*olam katan*) statement. It is a far cry from the alienated mass society of modern nations, where so much of a person's social experience involves fragmented, transient human relationships grounded in personal choice.

As the analysis of *brogez* has indicated, however, the emphasis on ritualization and cohesion by no means implies that Israeli children mechanically follow preestablished, ritualized routines for conflict management once conflict has erupted. Children clearly use the ritualized form itself as a resource in negotiating social place and group membership. In fact, some of the girls I have talked to explicitly recognized that these conflict episodes were sometimes used to establish or to test social positions, providing an interactional site for participants' power play. As I have argued in relation to the role of the agonistic episodes of "straight talk," which take the form of self-assertive "*dugri* rituals" (Katriel 1986a), the ritualization of conflict involves not only a containment but also a culturally sanctioned utilization of the agonistic exchange as a valuable social and political resource. In the case of the *dugri* ritual, the agonistic exchange serves to reaffirm participants' identities as "proper sabras," whereas in the case of *brogez* what gets affirmed is the viability of the social network and the individual's place in it.

One wonders whether the repeatedly occurring "interpersonal crises" in Israeli domestic politics are not—whatever else they are—a public restatement of this basic interpersonal pattern of acute conflict, often accompanied by a suspension of communication, a mediator's intervention, and culminating in a compromise, which is often associated with some slight power realignments. In fact, these political incidents have been explicitly invoked by Israeli adults in discussing the relevance of children's *brogez* episodes to the understanding of adult conduct. The ritualized flavor of these crises, and the striving to sustain a steady state situation, may account for the fact that, despite the sense of urgency they generate, they do little to change the status quo.

The *brogez* script, like other ritualized episodic sequences in Israeli childhood culture—the sharing of treats in *hibudim*, the swapping of collectibles in *hahlafot*, or the sharing of secrets in *sodot*—includes many "decision points," which require participants to be able to assess the interactional situation in subtle ways as well as to respond creatively to it. The learning of these scripts is part of the growth of Israeli children's social repertoire, and a better understanding of their structure and acquisition can suggest a more dynamic view of children's communicative competence.

Preschool children were found to differ qualitatively from older children in their understanding of the *brogez* episode: (1) They contrast *brogez* with friendliness rather than with the abstract structural notion of social availability. This, as we have seen, has direct implications for the kinds of actions that form part of their *brogez* scripts; (2) They rely on *brogez* bracketing devices that are dropped by older children and replaced by subtler forms of strategic negotiation.

The teenagers interviewed for this study, while generally familiar with the patterns here described, were sometimes reluctant to even use the term *brogez* in describing their own interpersonal conflicts. The strategy of cutting off communications is very common among them, too, but sheer nonresponsiveness and private gossiping have replaced most other sustaining acts, which, like the ritualized bracketing devices employed by the younger children, are labeled as "babyish."

Since the point of departure for this study was the metacommunicative term *brogez* itself, I have focused on what children refer to as the "brogez phase of the fight" and the ritualization attending it, seeking to highlight the web of shared cultural understandings that go into the construction of this phase. Much of what I have documented is, therefore, complementary to rather than directly comparable in its descriptive detail with the studies of verbal disputes, verbal dueling, or "sounding" cited in the introduction. It may very well be that studies of verbal disputes or physical fights among Israeli children will reveal interesting patterns of coordination and ritualization, too.

I would contend, however, that *brogez* provides the central script as well as the most compelling metaphor for conflict-related behavior in Israeli culture

of childhood. Thus, the regulation of conflict in *brogez* as discussed here, as well as the exchange of treats in *hibudim*, the swapping of collectibles in *hahlafot*, and the exchange of social information in *sodot*, all of which form the topic of the following chapters, contribute to the maintenance and demarcation of Israeli children's peer-group culture. Their distinctive tonalities and rules of participation give them their special childlike flavor; the particular forms of communicative exchange they embody, and the cultural themes they invoke, make them part of the Israeli scene. In the case of *brogez*, the transformation of interpersonal conflict into a group affair defined by considerations of affiliation and solidarity, and the social elaboration and uses of agonistic situations, stand out as central cultural themes. Other themes of this kind will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 7: *Brogez*:

1. Although *brogez* is explicitly associated with the world of childhood, the word is sometimes used by adults with reference to their own world, usually with humorous overtones, implying that the conflict is childish and trivial. This implication is retained even in the rarer cases in which *brogez* is used by adults in serious discussion. For example, following the July 1984 elections, a labor party politician publicly justified his party's consent to form a National Unity government by referring to the severe economic crisis the country was in, concluding: "These are no times to play at *brogez*" (*Yediot Ahronot* 28, July 1984). When it occurs in the daily press, the word usually appears in inverted commas, which is the convention used for slang expressions (however, it is not listed in the *World Dictionary of Hebrew Slang* by Ben-Amotz & Ben-Yehuda, 1972). Let me note that children, too, may be heard to apply the label *brogez* to conflicts in the adult world, for example, in talking about war or about divorce.

2. W. Corsaro, "Entering the Child's World: Research Strategies for Field Entry and Data Collection in a Preschool Setting. In J. Green and C. Wallat, eds., *Ethnography and Language in Educational Settings* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981), pp. 117-146. Corsaro discusses methodological issues associated with adults' entry into the world of children.

3. As adults, we may be more attuned to the difficulties children have in recognizing signs of social non-availability (Can't you see I'm busy?).

4. The notion of "script" has been applied in a number of studies concerned with various aspects of children's communication competence, which have followed a variety of research modes, for example, J. Mandler & N.

Johnson's, "Remembrance of Things Parsed: Story Structure and Recall." In *Cognitive Psychology* (1977) 9:111-151; K. Nelson & J. Gruende's, "'At Morning It's Lunchtime': A Scriptal View of Children's Dialogues." In *Discourse Processes* (1979) 2:73-94; and W. Corsaro's, "Script Recognition, Articulation and Expression in Children's Role Play." In *Discourse Processes* (1983) 6:1-19.

5. The use of accounts as a central methodological tool is urged in the writings of some proponents of the "new social psychology" (Harre & Secord 1972; Forgas [1979] contains both a description and a critique of this research). This approach has been applied in a number of studies of children's social world (e.g., Marsh, Rosser, & Harre 1978; Morgan, O'Neill, & Harre 1979). M. Saville-Troike, *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1982) p. 245. In the book, Saville-Troike comments on the paucity of studies utilizing interviewing as a research technique in the area of children's communication competence. I believe the macro unit of analysis considered here—a series of functionally related, often noncontiguous acts, which have received a metacommunicative label within the culture—is relatively amenable to verbalization as the ethnographic interview probes "the limits of awareness."

6. The case seems even more problematic than C. Geertz's famous example of the wink, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) as it is not only a question of how to interpret a sign but also of determining what is to be interpreted.

7. In order not to overburden the text, I have restricted direct citations of Hebrew examples to those cases in which they are phrased in formulaic or near-formulaic form. Other illustrative examples are given in their English translation.

8. Cf. G. Bateson, *Naven* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958) and E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

9. The notion of "face" has been applied to the systematic exploration of the ritual dimensions of face-to-face communication by E. Goffman, who defines this concept as follows: "The term 'face' may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes. . . ." (1967:5). Within this framework, "facework" refers to "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (ibid.:12). Facework is governed by a rule of

self-respect and a rule of considerateness, which means that “the person tends to conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of other participants” (ibid.:11). P. Brown and S. Levinson (1978) have incorporated and elaborated the notion of “facework” into their general theory of politeness phenomena, proposing the notion of Face Threatening Acts, that is, communicative acts that do not comply with either the rule of self-respect or the rule of considerateness, posing a threat to the speaker’s or the addressee’s “face,” respectively. Compare D. Hymes’ “Discourse: Scope Without Depth,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 7:47–89, 1986. Hymes’ integration as well as critique of this framework is formulated in terms of basic, though often conflicting human needs and functions of communication—the cultivation of autonomy and relationship.

10. Although, as its etymology indicates, *brogez* is intrinsically associated with anger, children noted that they would sometimes initiate “a fight that leads to *brogez*” without feeling angry, just to tease, but the cursing exchanges made everyone angry anyway.

11. There are some “dialectal” variations as far as the *brogez* rituals are concerned. Thus, not all children were familiar with the term *chilba*, a few use the word *hanupa* in its place, (same root as the word for “fawn,” *hanfanit*). While the role of the thumb and the little finger seems to be known to all, the Star of David closing ritual described below is not. A couple of rituals, which were neither observed nor mentioned in our data have been brought to my attention by adults.

12. Cf. the study of Israeli children’s secret-sharing practices in chapter 10.

13. Third parties in the case of *brogez* actively interfere in the exchange: At one point they may seek to aggravate the situation by gossiping and inciting against the party they do not support, or they may try to resolve the situation by offering their services as mediators. In “sounding” (Labov 1972), third parties also participate actively but as audiences and “referees” concerned with the disputants’ level of performance.

14. The gravest *brogez*-related situation involves what is known as *herem* “ostracism” or “excommunication,” which takes the form of the whole group turned against one of its members. Several accounts of *herem*, which appear in my data, involve children’s resistance to accept a new child or their decision to penalize a child for violating group norms. A *herem* can be brought off only when it is organized by a child with strong leadership qualities and is very rare compared to *brogez* and infinitely more eventful. The theme in *herem*

shifts from that of dominance relations to the more basic issue of inclusion/exclusion, from a preoccupation with social hierarchy to the securing of social place.



Two Youths Sharing a Popsicle. *Photograph by Hagai Katriel.*

“*Behibudim!*”: Ritualized Sharing Among Israeli Children

Reality may lie in the world of ideas but illusion demands that the body be fed.
(Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private*)

INTRODUCTION

Having identified ritualized sharing of treats (*hibudim*) as a significant social institution in the lives of the children among whom I conducted my study of the communicative patterns of Israeli children, I proceeded to observe interactions involving the exchange of treats in a strategically selected location for over a month on a daily basis. The area surrounding a couple of popular candy stores and *falafel* stands (locally known as ‘*hamerkaz*’ the center), which is the smaller of the two shopping centers in our village, provided a convenient site for my research. My observations were followed by open-ended (audio-taped) interviews with twenty pre-adolescents (aged nine to twelve) and ten younger children (aged five to seven), which specifically focused on ritualized sharing as I had observed and had heard discussed earlier.

In what follows, I will present an analysis of ritualized sharing among Israeli children and the stylized verbal and nonverbal symbolic acts that it constitutes. In addition to its descriptive goal, this study—like the study of *brogez* sequences—stresses the role of normative rules and ritualization as an expressive resource and a regulative force in children’s interactions.

The twin terms *behibudim* / *bli hibudim*, which are associated with ritualized sharing, are part of the childhood register of mainstream Israeli culture.¹ They are derived from the verb *lehabed*, whose literal meaning “to respect” has been extended to refer to the offering of food, especially treats, in colloquial speech. In adult speech, the plural nominal form *kibudim* is used to refer to gestures of respect in public life, and is associated with people’s pursuit of status. When applied to the children’s world it refers specifically to the stylized sharing of treats, and is pronounced with a uvular fricative rather than a velar stop, and with the main stress on the second syllable rather than on the third. This child-marked, irregular phonological pattern sets the term apart from its uses in adult contexts.² A similarly child-like slant is given by the use of the preposition *le* rather than the direct object marker *et* after the verb *lehabed*. Thus, *lehabed le* is child-marked and is associated with ritualized sharing, while *lehabed et* refers to the showing of respect in other contexts and is mainly associated with adult discourse.

Children's sharing of treats in the form of *hibudim* is indeed a highly stylized communicative exchange. Observing repeated instances of it, one gets the sense of a patterned, ritualized, cooperative gesture. The sharing of treats among Israeli children seems to have much in common with the various stylized gift exchanges, many of them involving foodstuffs, which have been studied by anthropologists (e.g., Mauss 1954; Cohen 1961; Firth 1973a; Farb and Armelagos 1980; and references therein). Thus, ritualized sharing among Israeli children can be said to carry "an association of positive moral value" which is "linked to the notion that together with the transfer of the material object or service an element of the self is also offered" (Firth 1973a:374).

As my analysis reveals, the sharing of treats in *hibudim* can be viewed as a ritualized gesture that functions to express and regulate social relationships within the peer group through the particular mode of generalized exchange. A different exchange mode, based on balanced rather than diffused reciprocity, is evidenced in the ritualized swapping of collectible items, which is natively known as *hahlafot* (see next chapter). Both part of peer-group life, these exchange patterns provide contexts for the enactment of symmetrical relations between children. As J. Youniss (1980) has persuasively argued, children's interactional experiences in contexts of relational symmetry offer opportunities for a kind of social learning that simply cannot be found in adult-child interactions, which are necessarily dominated by the hierarchy of age. From an observer's point of view, therefore, the institutionalization of exchange in the semi-ritualized patterns of *hibudim* and *hahlafot* can serve as convenient clues to children's understanding of the fundamental idea of social exchange (Simmel 1971), and the two major complementary modes of exchange involving the modes of "generalized" and "balanced" reciprocity, respectively (cf. Befu 1977:264). In the mode of "generalized reciprocity," which underlies *hibudim* exchanges, giving entails a diffuse obligation to reciprocate at some point, and no attempt is made to maintain a precise balance of giving and receiving. In this mode, giving is not fundamentally a matter of interpersonal relations, even when dyads are involved. It is, rather, a communal affair. In the mode of "balanced reciprocity," which underlies *hahlafot* exchanges, on the other hand, very close track is kept of the traffic in objects or other valued social goods. Most deals are carefully concluded on the spot, and the notion of "debt" is invoked for those that are left hanging. I will return to the comparison between the underlying pattern of *hibudim* and *hahlafot* at the end of the next chapter, after both these ritualized exchange forms have been more fully described.

At least some children are aware of the symbolic dimension of *hibudim* as a generalized exchange form. As an eleven-year-old girl put it, explaining her insistence on getting a bite of her friend's treat: "It's not that I will die if I don't get a bite of the popsicle, that I will die a day earlier or something, but it is simply . . . respect, as the word says." The following account should

elucidate how the underlying notion of respect is interpreted by the children in this study, and how it is played out in the ritual context of *hibudim*.

RITUALIZED SHARING AS COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

My observational notes include many descriptions of the following kind:

1. Three boys are approaching the *kiosk* (kind of candy store). One says: "I'm having a popsicle." He walks up to the counter. The other two tag along. He gets the popsicle, turns to face his friends, tilts it in their direction. The second opens his mouth wide as if to swallow it all, but takes a small bite. The owner acts startled and all three burst out laughing. They walk away, the owner eating his popsicle.
2. Two girls are approaching the *falafel* stand. One takes out money. The other says, "Are you buying?" She replies, "Yes, but it's my lunch and I'm eating it at home." She buys a *falafel* portion and does not offer the other a bite, although she waited for the buyer, and walks on with the *falafel* untouched. The other looks mildly annoyed. In later discussions with children, they said that claiming that the *falafel* is your lunch is a typical "excuse." A child who uses it consistently runs the risk of being branded a miser—*kamtzan* (for male) or *kamtzanit* (for female).
3. A group of five children approaches the *falafel* stand. One exclaims, "I'm buying." Another counters, "*Behibudim! Behibudim!*" in a melodious chant. He gets a *falafel* portion, holds it in his hands, and all take a bite in turn, with a gay clamor. After the third one has eaten, the buyer mutters, "Hey, *berahmanut*" (with pity) and offers it to the last child. He then eats his *falafel*, walking along with his friends.
4. A boy walks along the street, eating an ice cream bar; another boy, about the same age (about twelve or thirteen), approaches him from the opposite direction. They slow down, stop for a moment, and the first boy stretches out his arm, wordlessly offering the ice cream, his eyebrows raised inquisitively. The second boy bends over, bites off a bit, they both smile and walk on in their respective directions. No words have been exchanged.

These examples could be multiplied many times, with endless small variations that manifest the same underlying pattern. The rules and meanings underlying them can be said to form an interactional "script" (Schank and Abelson 1977) and, as such, are to be distinguished from children's strategic uses of sweets in their efforts to gain immediate social advantage, such as

gaining access to a game or attempting to appease a domineering child (Sluckin 1981) or exchanging sweets in “trades” (Mishler 1979).

In the case of ritualized sharing, as in all gift exchanges, the nonverbal act of transferring a material object is the focal element in the interaction rather than the verbal exchange involved. Verbalization does occur, but it plays a meta-communicative role somewhat similar to that played by nonverbal acts in conversation: It mainly prefaces, amplifies, punctuates, and regulates the nonverbal exchange. From a theoretical standpoint, therefore, the study of *hibudim* provides an intriguing example of a role reversal between verbal and nonverbal components of interaction as they are usually studied.

Using D. Hymes’s (1972a) heuristic framework for the study of communicative events, and beginning with the component of Instrumentality, after which the social institution of *hibudim* is named, I will proceed to discuss the components of Setting, Act Sequence, Participants, Key, Norms of Interaction, and Ends as they are relevant to the analysis of *hibudim* exchanges. Thus, I hope to provide the terms for a “cultural grammar” of *hibudim*, which will lead to a more refined understanding of its role in Israeli children’s construction of their social world.

Instrumentality

The symbolic dimension of food transfer as an expression of social meanings of affinity and relatedness is generally recognized in anthropological studies and is subject to local coloration and variation (Cohen 1961). Ritualized sharing among Israeli children falls under this overall pattern. Tracing the particular form of this interactional activity will provide some insight into the distinctive social meanings it is used to convey.

In Israeli children’s lexicon, the term *leḥabed* can be properly applied only to food items falling under the broad category of “snacks” or “treats.” This includes all sweets and other nonsweet specialties such as *falafel* or a roll. Children insisted that the sharing of a bite of your sandwich with a friend would be a matter of mere giving (*latet*), while a bite of your roll would be considered an instance of treating (*leḥabed*).

We see, then, that the particular symbolic material of *hibudim* involves those food items in relation to which the subsistence aspect of food consumption is de-emphasized and instinctual gratification is foregrounded—those little “extras” that make life both symbolically and literally more palatable. Most of them are blatantly non-nutritious, relegated to the domain of fun and triviality. As such, they stand in contrast to ordinary foods that contribute to children’s main job as defined by their elders—growing up—and whose consumption is a matter of filial duty for many of these children.

Setting and Scene

Although any offering of a food item that “qualifies” according to the above criteria will be referred to as *leḥabed* regardless of time and place, ritualized sharing finds its quintessential expression in the social activity that the children in this study referred to as “going to buy” (*laleḥet liknot*). The verb “to buy,” used in an irregular way, without specification of its direct object, is systematically employed to refer to the buying of treats, as in exclamations of, “I’m buying!” (*ani kone*) or in inquiries: “Are you buying?” (*ata kone?*) As a twelve-year-old girl put it: “When we say buy we know just what we mean.”

The time and place of these purchases are significant in socially locating *hibudim*: while the rules of ritualized sharing hold for all encounters, excursions to the *kiosk* or *falafel* stand most typically occur en route from school at the end of the school day or on the way home from some shared extracurricular activity in the afternoon. “The walk home” (*hadereḥ habajta*) has emerged as an important context for sociability among the children observed and interviewed for this project. Both spatially and temporally it is a liminal context (Turner 1969). Sandwiched between school and home, where life is basically dominated by “significant adults,” the walk home serves the purpose of pure socializing among loosely demarcated small groups of children. Pilgrimages to the candy store provide much of the symbolic currency for this “betwixt and between” moment of children’s life. Thus, the spatio-temporal location of the most paradigmatic context in which ritualized sharing is played out has implications with respect to what D. Hymes calls the scene, or the psychological definition of the situation involved. In this context, sharing is not only a culturally appropriate form for the expression of social relations, but it is also a culturally defining activity in that it serves to reaffirm the very reality of the peer-group culture and its moral order.

Act Sequence

The acts of exchange involved in *hibudim* are clearly distinguished by children from such activities as trading or swapping, on the one hand, and the sharing practices involving “best friend” relations on the other. Whereas the former are referred to as *leḥabed* (to treat, a transitive verb form) and involve a token gift (as an index of commitment), the latter are referred to as *lehithalek* (to divide up, a reflexive verb form) and involve an equal distribution of the treat, accompanied by proddings to take more. Dividing is considered a personalized gesture whose rejection is interpreted as an insult. A refusal to take a token bite of someone’s treat is not usually taken to heart, on the other hand; it would be considered odd, but not offensive. Ritualized sharing is a formalized, rather than a personalized activity.³

A ritualized sharing event consists of a number of sequentially ordered, intertwined nonverbal and verbal acts. The observational notes cited earlier exemplify such exchanges. Let us, then, systematically specify the sequential structure of a typical *hibudim* episode as it is played out “on the way home.”

Opening. Announcement of intention to buy. This may simply take the form of an explicit declaration of intentions, either to buy or, somewhat euphemistically, to go through the “center,” that is to pass by a cluster of candy stores on the way home. Alternatively, one may say nothing but display the fact that one is in possession of some money. Choice between these various strategies depends on the extent to which one is prepared to commit oneself to share one’s treat, as it is generally understood that buying implies sharing with those in one’s company. Clearly, an explicit announcement fully commits one to be sharing with the children who will tag along. These various strategies provide different solutions to the interactional problems created by the tension between the desire to focus social attention on oneself, which one accomplishes by declaring an intention to buy, and the desire to keep as much as possible of the treat to oneself, which is defeated by that same declaration. Ritualized sharing in *hibudim* institutionalizes both the buyer’s momentary focal position and the demand placed on him or her for instinctual control with respect to what the children take to be one’s natural greediness. Both are brought to the fore, and into conflict, in the opening move.

Acknowledgment. Display of interest by the others. A child’s declaration of his or her intention to buy is typically countered by near-formulaic inquiries: “What are you buying?” “Really? You got money?” These usually vocal and animated interest displays establish the others as potential recipients in the sharing of whatever is going to be purchased. At the same time, these displays implicitly reaffirm everyone’s commitment to the symbolic role of snacks in demarcating as well as revitalizing children’s peer group relations. Thus, a child who remains obviously indifferent to another’s declaration that he or she is going to buy may be asked: “*ma jesh leha?*” “What’s the matter with you?” In the children’s lore, a normal, spirited child shows a healthy interest in sweets, an interest that is expected to be routinely displayed in ritualized sharing exchanges.

Behibudim! / bli hibudim! At times explicit reference to ritualized sharing is made either by the buyer or by the children who accompany him or her. The prospective buyer may immediately follow his or her declaration of intentions with the exclamation. “(Aval) *bli hibudim!*” “But without sharing,” thereby suspending the rules of ritualized sharing, which would otherwise be expected to hold. Similarly, the others may follow the buyer’s declaration of his or her intention to buy with the exclamation “*Behibudim! Behibudim!*” uttered in a melodious chant, reinforcing the rules of *hibudim* before the buyer has had a chance to suspend them. These exclamations most often take the form of

a teasing, gamelike contest as to who will get his or her word in first, but may, at times, be seriously intended. Consider the following observational note:

Three boys (10–11 years old) are approaching the *falafel* stand. One says, “I am going to buy a *falafel*. *Bli hibudim!*” He buys half a portion. One of the other boys faces him and says, “*ten li bis*,” give me a bite. The boy with the *falafel* says, “I can’t. I just said *bli hibudim*.” The other boy turns away, seeming to accept the claim.

In this case, the built-in option of suspending the norms of *hibudim* is itself interpreted as a binding norm. A similar case was told to me by a twelve-year-old girl, who denigrated a girl who had refused to share a snack using the same argument. She said sneeringly, “So what if she had said *bli hibudim*? She just didn’t want to share her snack.” Whether strategically or playfully employed, the exclamations *behibudim* / *bli hibudim* function as metacomments on the social institution of ritualized sharing in such a way as to bring out the underlying pattern of “reluctant sharing” (Cohen 1961:322) associated with it as well as its negotiable and manipulable features.

Purchase. The child with the money makes the purchase, the others play a subsidiary role as onlookers. At times, suggestions are made as to the selection of the snack to be purchased, but these are not rigorously advanced. Choice of snack is the uncontested right of the child who spends the money. Questions as to whether others had a say in this were routinely answered: “It’s his money, not theirs.”

Offering. Having made the purchase, the child who has bought the snack offers a bite to the children around him or her, one after the other. At times, this is done simply with gestures, by tilting the hand that holds the treat; at other times, the nonverbal gesture is accompanied by a verbal prompt “*rotze?*” “Want some?” or “*kaḥ* (take some), or “*kaḥ bis*” “take a bite” or “*kaḥ lek*” “take a lick,” in the case of ice cream. Each of the children takes a small bite or a lick of the proffered snack and then the owner eats what is left. When there are many children vying for a bite, it is common to hear them prompt the snack owner to give a bite. This interactional moment is described by the children as one in which everybody is jumping all over the child who got the snack (*kulam mitnaplim alav*). It seems rather strange, given the generally upheld rules of ritualized sharing, and seems more a matter of children’s playful dramatization of the event than a real concern as to whether they are, indeed, going to get their share. The stylized clamoring for one’s share as well as the option of calling out “*bli hibudim!*” both serve to prevent children’s ritualized sharing from becoming a routinized, taken for granted interactional pattern. However compelling it is as a social form, part of its vitality lies in the ever-present option of suspending the rules governing its enactment.

Recycling. Sometimes one of the children triggers another round (*od sivuv*) by asking for another bite when everybody has had theirs. This is acceptable when

there are not many children around so that the buyer does not need to fear that he or she will be deprived of his or her fair share (see section on norms). When such a fear exists, the standard response is: “*vema jisha'er li?*” “and what will be left for me”? This response encapsulates the tension between self-gratification and social accommodation that is played out both symbolically and materially in the social institution of *hibudim*.

Participants

Only children are considered potential partners for the exchange of treats in *hibudim*; the suggestion that ritualized sharing may involve adults made many children laugh. It is a standard joke for adults to ask children for a bite in a playful vein. No gender differentiation has been mentioned or observed with respect to children's willingness to participate in *hibudim* exchanges.

Children's initial answer to the question of who would be offered a bite of their treat tended to be an emphatic, “Everybody!” (*kulam*). Further probing, however, revealed that “everybody” denoted a rather well-defined group in each given case. It extended beyond one's clique and included, first of all, all the children in the school class as well as any other casual friends and acquaintances. One child said he would offer a bite to “any child I might stop and talk to for a minute on the street,” identifying the offer of a bite as the functional equivalent of a greeting in an “acquaintanceship relationship,” which, according to Goffman (1963), is an aspect of all social relationships built on mutual personal identification.

Participants in *hibudim* are, therefore, non-intimates as well as non-strangers; they constitute the undifferentiated reference group or “crowd” natively referred to as *hahevve*. Engaging in ritualized sharing is one of the means of reaffirming the relationship among them.

Notably, as in the case of pronominal reference in the verbal domain (e.g. Friedrich 1972), the offering of a treat can both signal the existence of a particular social relationship and serve to establish one. The performative function of *hibudim* is particularly evident in uncertain or marginal cases when acquaintanceship has not been formally established either on an interpersonal or on an institutional basis (e.g., shared membership in a larger group). Thus, a gray area of social relatedness can be clarified by communicative means, such as *hibudim*, just as it can be clarified by pronominal usage in other circumstances.

Key

The interactional tone that accompanies ritualized sharing is that of a smooth, stylized interaction ritual, **much like a casual greeting**. The episode is sometimes punctuated by moments marked by a higher level of excitement or “arousal” (Harre and Secord 1972). These may be playful in nature, as when a child

is “jumped on” by all the others clamoring for a bite, or it may be serious, as when one of the social imperatives associated with *hibudim* is breached in one of the ways to be indicated in the next section.

Norms of Interaction

Like many other token gifts, the sharing of treats in *hibudim* is a matter of social imperatives rather than individual choice for Israeli pre-adolescents and adolescents. Children in this age range spoke of it as something you must do even though you would often prefer to avoid it. Younger children, on the other hand, considered sharing, which they similarly referred to as *lehabed* “to treat,” as a matter of personal choice rather than an impersonal display of social recognition. They said things such as “I offer a bite when I feel like it,” or “I’ll give her some if she gives me some.” The institutionalized nature of ritualized sharing is only gradually learned; the learning seems to go through a stage of overtly negotiated reciprocity to a stage in which reciprocity is symbolically incorporated into the normative, impersonal structure of *hibudim*. From a developmental standpoint, then, these findings seem to corroborate the basic outlines of J. Piaget’s ([1932] 1965) views on children’s moral development. It is my hope that when additional, comparable data related to children’s normative and expressive orders become available, insights derived from children’s communicative behavior can shed further light on this important aspect of human development.⁴

Norms of Obligation. Since I have considered ritualized sharing in a gift-exchange framework, a useful way of formulating the interactional norms governing it would be by reference to the three sets of norms for such exchanges as originally formulated by M. Mauss (1954) and further elaborated by R. Firth (1973a): (a) the obligation to give, (b) the obligation to receive, (c) the obligation to repay. Let us consider them one by one.

The obligation to give has been discussed earlier and was shown to be mainly constrained by the social membership of the participants. Two types of norms emerged from the children’s talk: the obligation to share with “everybody” and the obligation to share equally with them. The obligation to give was sometimes expressed in terms of the formulaic expression “the one who eats alone dies alone” (*mi sheohel levad met levad*).

The obligation to give equally was most often expressed as the injunction against *lekape’ah* “to deprive, or cause disadvantage.” The egalitarian force of the norm mandates that one should equally acknowledge everybody in one’s diffuse social network by including them in the round of *hibudim*. Not including someone in such a round is considered a most severe act of social negation (“cutting” in Goffman’s [1963] terms). This was vividly brought home to me when I had occasion to observe—and later discuss—an instance of a clash between two interactional frames: ritualized sharing in *hibudim* and the

interactional norms of disengagement that regulate conflict relations in the context of a *brogez* agonistic episode as discussed in the previous chapter. In this particular instance, a child included a *brogez* partner in a round of *hibudim* although—in accordance with the rules of *brogez*—he refrained from speaking to him, looking at him, or mentioning his name. In accounting for his act, he said that, since the child he was *brogez* with was “standing with everybody else” he could not just be ignored. He invoked the injunction against *lekap’ah* “causing disadvantage,” which for him, in this case at least, was strong enough to override the normally rigid rules of *brogez*. I would speculate that the fact that the social imperatives of *hibudim* prevailed has to do with the grave cost in reputation that attends the refusal to share. Children whose reluctance to share is so strong that they regularly fail to abide by the norms of *hibudim* are labeled *kamtzan* / *it* “miser” or *hazir* / *a* “pig,” labels whose social consequences in terms of loss of status and prestige most children would rather avoid.

The obligation to receive is not as pronounced as the obligation to give. While a refusal to give is socially sanctioned and labeled, a refusal to receive is not so marked. Someone who consistently refuses to participate in *hibudim*—even on the receiving end of it—is, however, expected to offer some account and, some children maintained, would be marginal in social space (*batsad*, literally, on the side). Children contrasted this with the personal, more acutely felt affront involved in the repeated refusals of a close friend to share in one’s treats.

A major issue that is normatively regulated and both seriously and playfully negotiated in *hibudim* exchanges is the size of the bite appropriate in their context. The general rule I have been able to deduce is as follows: The bite size must be regulated so that everyone can get a share, leaving about half of the treat to its owner. A child who takes too big a bite is accused of being a pig (*hazir*), while a child whose bite is too small can be asked: “What are you, a bird?” (*ma ata, tsipor?*). Usually the child is urged by the owner to take another bite, as the latter is as anxious to avoid appearing a miser as the “birdlike” eater is anxious to avoid appearing a pig.

This concern with bite size has yielded the category of a “normal bite” (*bis normali*). The following description by an eleven-year-old girl brings out the careful computational work involved in the assessment of a normal bite:

“Before I give my snack I plan for myself, in my head, how far he [the receiver] should go, how far it would be normal, and also when I take a bite, I take as much as I expect they would take from me, or less. You can sort of tell how much on the thing you are eating.”

When the group is big, it may be necessary to ask the last kids to “take pity” (*berahmanut*) and take smaller bites. When there are few kids around, the size of the bites tends to remain the same or be a little bigger, but there

may be two or three rounds of sharing. The second round is often instigated by one of the receivers; some kids testified that they are too bashful to ask for the second round, although they may actively instigate the first. Others testified that they sometimes manipulate the situation by taking a less than normal bite, with the expectation that they will be offered another bite (claiming that two small bites make more than one big one).

The obligation to repay in *hibudim* is diffuse and generalized since each child offers a bite to all present every time he or she gets a treat. Thus, reciprocity is built into the very structure of ritualized sharing and serves as one of its major underlying themes. Notably, this reciprocity is not a matter of interpersonally negotiated relations between individuals but is a matter of generalized, diffuse commitment within the group. However, I have found that children keep rather close track of their peers' compliance or noncompliance with the rules of *hibudim*, using this monitoring both to guide their future behavior and to appraise their peers. This interpersonal bookkeeping is explicitly invoked when the generalized rules of sharing are not effectively upheld ("You never give me so why should I give you" or "But I shared with you last week"). Comments about sharing and non-sharing behaviors are also invoked in gossip about others: One of the social facts relevant to the appraisal of character among children relates to conduct in relation to ritualized sharing, especially when it is inappropriate. In such discussions, both matters of deference and matters of demeanor (Goffman 1967) are addressed, and their concrete articulations as well as the subtle interplay between these two fundamental aspects of social life are elaborated upon.

Avoidance strategies. There are, however, widely recognized ways of getting around the norms of *hibudim*: They are particularly effective in the case of more substantive foodstuffs such as a roll, which can be salvaged from one's peers by claiming that "It is my breakfast," or *falafel*, which can be claimed to be one's lunch or supper. This claim in effect removes the item of food from the category of snacks and puts it in the category of meals, so that the rules of *hibudim* cease to be applicable. Another claim frequently mentioned as a way of extricating oneself from the injunction to share is the claim "I have to give half to my brother / sister." Siblings, apparently, have a prerogative on one's snacks, a right that is defined in terms extrinsic to the peer-group culture. Having to share with them is considered a semi-acceptable excuse not to share with others, perhaps because the sacrificial gesture has been reaffirmed. Another claim I heard, one which was severely ridiculed by several of my informants, was that one cannot share one's treat because of the rule of "no eating from mouth to mouth" (*lo ohlim mipe lepe*) for hygienic reasons. This argument invokes the adult value system concerning hygienic behavior, which is blatantly extrinsic to the children's world. This may account for the fact that this "excuse" was considered particularly objectionable by many children.

Another strategy involves the avoidance of a situation that would call for ritualized sharing, such as planning one's trip to the store in such a way as not to be accompanied by the "crowd" (as distinguished from close friends with whom, as noted, the pattern of sharing is different and has a different role), or hiding the treat "under the shirt," as several informants phrased it. Children referred disdainfully to these practices, especially to the "misers" who "run home ahead of everybody else so that they can buy something at the store and keep it all to themselves," as one of them put it. At the same time, most of the informants admitted that they utilized these strategies from time to time, opting to share a treat only with a close friend or to keep it for themselves.

Ends

Ritualized sharing among Israeli children is a multifunctional communicative event that combines several underlying social themes, and provides a ritual context in and through which children's notion of sociality is played out.

A major underlying theme in *hibudim* is the tension between self-gratification and social accommodation. Greediness, as one form of self-interest, is both dramatized and socially "tamed" in ritualized sharing; the self is momentarily subordinated to impersonal forms of conduct. Beyond the elaboration of specific norms related to particular patterns of sharing behavior, the very idea of "objectified" rules of conduct, which are independent of individual wills, is ritually entertained through participation in the social institution of *hibudim*. At this very basic level, ritualized sharing has much in common with ritualized conflicts as in *brogez*, which similarly dramatize what is probably the most fundamental and the most enduring source of tension in social life: that between self-gratification and self-assertion on the one hand, and the ever present need for some degree of accommodation to others on the other. This tension is, of course, the existential point from which a moral consciousness can begin to develop. From this standpoint, children's daily participation in ritualized sharing is an invaluable practice ground for social living and serves an important socializing function. In the context of *hibudim*, the individual child is integrated into his or her social world by a process of compromise. At the same time *hibudim* establishes the legitimacy of self-gratification. Retaining some yet giving up some of his or her treat in the proper ritualistic way serves to reaffirm the child's affiliation in a broader, loosely structured network—the world populated by the communal term "everybody." This is most appropriately symbolized by an act of symbolic sacrifice in which one's self-interest and primordial greed are controlled and subordinated to an idea of sociality shaped by particular cultural values, such as equality and generalized reciprocity.

Ritualized sharing also serves to delineate a particular domain of others. It demarcates the outer boundaries of the child's social world thus serving to objectify and to reaffirm the reality and standing of his or her larger, diffuse social group. As such, it functions as a communicative resource that children use to socialize each other by introducing subtle degrees of differentiation into their social world.

The aforementioned egalitarian values, as well as the privileged standing of in-group / out-group relations (with the school class or the youth movement group as major units of affiliation), are also promoted by the formal ideology and rhetoric of Israeli social education (see chapter on *gibush*). They represent deep-rooted cultural values that can be discerned in other domains of culture as well (Katriel 1986a), and that children seem to have assimilated as part of their own peer group expressive repertoire.

On yet another level, ritualized sharing serves to reassert the very existence of children's peer-group culture as such. This is suggested by a consideration of the particular symbolic materials utilized (snacks) and the social context in which they find their quintessential place—on the way home. This makes good sense from the standpoint of symbolic analysis: The way home represents a transitional moment temporally, spatially, and socially squeezed between the world of school and the world of home. Its autonomous existence is punctuated by children's pilgrimages to the local store, where they can actualize their equality and purchase power, underlining their temporary disengagement from school (where sweets are usually disallowed) and home (where they are often grudgingly tolerated). This is emphasized by the form the transfer often takes, a form that goes against the home and school-based norms of hygiene that would not recommend the passing of food "from mouth to mouth." The celebration of childhood in ritualized sharing accounts for its entertainment value, which, from the children's perspective, is one of the most salient features of *hibudim* exchanges.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of *hibudim* has foregrounded one ritual pattern in the fabric of Israeli children's communicative life. Such communicative resources become particularly significant in that they provide templates for the demarcation and charting of peer group relations. In R. Harre's terms (1980:5), these patterns are important aspects of children's "expressive order," which involves "a transformation of something personal into something public." It is precisely in this transformation of the personal into the public, the negotiation of self with others, that interactional forms play such a crucial role in providing shared patterns and channels for the objectification and communication of one's subjectively experienced social reality. As we have seen, much of the import

of ritualized sharing lies in the tension between self-gratification and public gesture, which this ritual form elaborates upon.

The rules of *hibudim*, whether verbal or nonverbal, contribute to the creation and maintenance of children's expressive order. Whether followed or not, they underlie the exchange of social messages in the sharing of treats. The specific contribution the rules of *hibudim* make, in line with the etymology of *hibudim*, is the communication of respect as this notion is conceptualized by the children in the context of their peer group life, that is, in terms of the notions of inclusion and exclusion. Ritualized sharing signals the social recognition of the party deferred to as included within the domain of one's social world, as having a social identity, and as subject to the rules of diffuse, generalized exchange that underlie enactments of *hibudim*.

I would like to propose that the thematization of generalized exchange in Israeli childhood culture is not incidental. In fact, it echoes the centrality of generalized exchange patterns and diffuse affiliation that are part of the *gibush*-ethos as described earlier. Other semi-institutionalized social practices that have been identified as central on the Israeli sociocultural scene attest to the same orientation. Thus, B. Danet (1989) has discussed the social institution of "*protektzia*," which involves procuring preferential access to public resources of all kinds through personal influence activated by a "rhetoric of connections," as G. Philipsen (1975) has aptly referred to it in his Teamsterville studies. The point about "*protektzia*," for the purposes of our discussion, is that it involves a diffuse, communal arrangement of sharing connections. Family ties, or loose membership in a friendship network, or even acquaintanceship relations, place people in a position to approach each other in search of *protektzia*, and although reciprocity is expected, it is not the balanced reciprocity associated with a contractual type of exchange. The widespread use of *protektzia* is officially deplored, and is often only halfheartedly admitted, although, in some contexts, it is taken as an index of the range of one's connections and becomes a source of pride.

A similar underlying exchange pattern can be detected with reference to the social institution of hitchhiking (the *trempe*), whose folkloristic dimensions have been explored by Shenhar (1986). Giving and getting a ride (*trempe*) have become symbolically loaded acts in contemporary Israeli culture, signifying solidarity and a communal spirit. I submit that it is precisely the generalized exchange pattern involved in hitchhiking, and the altruistic spirit it implies, that has made it such a positive symbol of community. This is so much so that popular critiques of the deterioration of values in contemporary Israel are often summarized by the statement that nowadays people will give each other a ride (*trempe*) only in times of war. The social institution of the *trempe* is, thus, idealized as a symbolically charged form of communal arrangement.

These are but two examples of Israeli adult sociocultural practices, which both reflect and reinforce communally shared patterns of sentiment and obligation for which *hibudim* exchanges seem to be a valuable practice ground. Of course, generalized exchange is only one form of culturally regulated social exchange relevant to Israelis' experience. As we shall see in the next chapter, Israeli children's peer-group culture provides them with ample opportunity to become socialized into a pattern of balanced exchange. A prime context for this socialization process is the ritualized swapping of collectibles in *hahlafot*.

Chapter 8: "*Behibudim*":

1. A testimony to the widespread recognition of *hibudim* as a social institution was given by the fact that during the time this study was underway a popular radio jingle advertising a snack used the chant *behibudim* with the sing-song tone I have encountered in my observations.

2. The shift away from word-final stress is typical of children's register in modern Hebrew and functions as an in-group marker. My notes contain dozens of examples of this child-marked stress pattern (cf. Katriel 1986b).

3. J. Irvine, 1979, "*Formality and Informality in Communicative Events.*" In *American Anthropologist* 18:773–790. Irvine notes that one aspect of formality has to do with the invocation of personal identities.

4. Preliminary observations suggest that there are cultural differences in children's norms for sharing treats: Israeli children who spent time in the United States have noted that their American friends did not engage in ritualized sharing when buying a treat. On the other hand, I am told that, for Arab children, copresence defines the sharing circle even when no acquaintanceship relation holds.

Hahlafot: Rules and Strategies in Israeli Children's Swapping Exchanges

INTRODUCTION

Like children's sharing of treats in *hibudim*, the trading of collectibles in swapping exchanges (*hahlafot*)¹ is an instance of a patterned cooperative social engagement. In both cases, the symbolic materials employed are not words but things. The objects children share or swap, like the words they exchange, are tools of social interaction, and children's engagement with them is both patterned and meaningful. Clearly, children's swapping in *hahlafot* does not cover all the trading Israeli children do. Rather, it refers to the particular stylized patterns of exchanging collectibles that are different from the kinds of more individualized trading exchanges among children that have been described, for example, by E. Mishler (1979) and I. Sluckin (1981).

Forms of Collecting Among Israeli Children

Children's collecting activities fall into two broad categories: (1) Faddish collecting, and (2) Long-term collecting.² The distinction between these forms of collecting can be inferred from the ways in which children engage with their collection, but a couple of the children consulted also elaborated on it in discussing the differences between "eternal collections" (*osafim nitshi'im*), and "faddish collections" (*osafim ofnati'im*). Let us briefly consider the differences between these two forms of collecting:

Faddish collecting tends to be peer-oriented and highly transient. It generally involves a great deal of swapping conducted in public spaces. Very different types of collectible items can provide the materials for this form of collecting: various commercially produced cards (such as "garbage pail kids"), stationary paper, stickers, and so forth. As children are well aware, although these items are definitely "child-marked," serving to demarcate a distinctive domain of peer-group activity, such important features as the rarity of a particular item—which affects its market value for swapping—are adult controlled.³

Children often start the "faddish" form of collecting through imitation of other children, and as a move towards social participation: "I saw the

children were collecting these cards so I wanted to collect also.” They are strongly motivated by a desire to “be like everybody else,” or “be in” (*lihjot ba'injanim*, in native terms). Involvement in these collections is sometimes gender and age marked. Some items (e.g. paper napkins) tend to be collected mainly by girls “because they are more tender,” according to the stock account volunteered by the male informants. Other items, such as pocket knives, I was informed, “belonged to boys.” The most faddish collections at the time of the study, such as stickers and commercial cards, tended to be shared by boys and girls alike. A child may “outgrow” his or her collection, come to consider it “babyish,” at which point it is often passed on to a younger sibling, relative, or neighbor.

The long-term collecting, a more stable form of collecting, tends to involve items, such as stamps and coins, which are not specifically child-marked, and are often found in adult collecting as well. Children frequently begin to collect such items through the active encouragement and assistance of parents or older siblings rather than through the influence of their peers. These collections are assembled in a more sustained fashion than the “faddish” collecting described earlier. The swapping associated with this form of collecting tends to be less of a public affair, and is generally centered around the home. Interestingly, my data indicates that although participants in these trading sessions are usually friends, these swapping sessions tend to be remarkably task-oriented. Their businesslike air is only minimally tempered by the delight the children take in showing off their holdings and in appreciating each other’s collection.

Finally, let me note that whereas a great deal of secondary play activity is found in relation to faddish collectibles (e.g. competitive games), no such activity has been observed or reported in relation to long-term collecting. In these, other dimensions of the collecting experience, however, become more salient, for example, the opportunities it gives for interaction with family members, the sense of continuity and growth the collection provides, and the element of aesthetic appreciation it involves.⁴

In what follows I will focus on three forms of interactional activity that children associate with collecting: (a) swapping (*hahlafot*), (b) the formation of partnerships (or being *shutaf*), and (c) games involving collectible items. Notably, by taking children’s interactional activities as the point of departure for this inquiry rather than the ways in which objects are organized into a collection (Stewart 1984; Danet and Katriel 1989), much of my attention has been drawn away from the core of the collection as a system of objects, and has gone to children’s engagement with those dispensable, surplus items, the “spares” that are actually exchanged and played with.

Taking an “emic” perspective, I have tried to uncover the cultural logic that underlies children’s collecting activities. My questions have been: What communication practices are typical of children’s peer-related collecting

experiences? In what ways does children's immersion in the tangible language of social objects instruct them about the semantics of social life? The following account of *hahlafot* exchanges, *shutaf* arrangements, and playful engagements with collectible items is an attempt to respond to these queries. The basic rules for swapping are the same for the two forms of collecting described earlier, but become socially more elaborate in the context of the dynamic swapping exchanges and playful activities associated with faddish collecting. In developing this account I have been attentive to what V. Turner (1977) has termed the "exegetical meanings" of these communicative practices, that is the meanings assigned to them by the children themselves, as well as to their "operational meanings," that is the meanings that could be inferred from watching their activities. I will conclude with some remarks concerning the "positional" meanings attending swapping exchanges, that is their relationship to other types of social enterprises found in Israeli childhood culture, especially in the context of *hibudim* exchanges.

Swapping Exchanges in Children's Social Life

The central place that swapping occupies in children's collecting world can be gleaned not only from their ongoing trading activities, but also from the way they conceptualize their involvement in them. Some children's comments clearly indicated that for them "collecting" and "swapping" were near equivalents.

Most children cite the social participation afforded by the give-and-take that attends collecting, and especially the fun of swapping, as a major reason to cultivate a collection. A twelve-year-old girl explained her decision to start collecting stationary paper in simple terms: "I saw kids were collecting and I wanted to, too." An eleven-year-old boy who collects "garbage pail kids" cards explained: "I see kids playing with them and I don't want to be different." At the same time, risking his friends' disapproval, he insisted that they were stupid nonsense, to which one of them responded: "It's not nonsense. It's being in." A ten-year-old boy expounded: "I prefer to collect things that all the kids collect because this way I can swap for things I don't have, and this is a great part of the fun. Otherwise, it would be boring." A nine-year-old girl expressed her belief that "most children want to collect what others have so that they can show others and swap with others," and a ten-year-old girl simply said: "In my spare time I love to swap. It causes me to have more friends." To the question, if she knew anyone who collected something nobody else did, an eight-year-old girl responded in a puzzled tone: "Why would they collect something if they couldn't swap it?"

Collecting items other children collect does not seriously hamper the sense of specialness that surrounds one's collection. As in the case of adult collectors,

the child's close familiarity with his or her collection, memories of the way each item was acquired, the work put into organizing and arranging the items, all produce an attachment to the collection as a form of personal expression. Participating in the peer-group collecting world balances two contradictory pulls—the pull toward social integration, and the pull toward individuation. A similar balance can also be achieved within the family context. Since the family usually supports the child's collecting activity, the recognition of the child's distinctive interests within the multi-generational family unit serves both an affiliative and an individuating function. As we shall see, the theme of affiliation (experienced as a desire to engage in shared activity), and the theme of individuation (experienced as the force of personal desire and calculated utility) are complexly articulated in children's collecting and swapping exchanges.

The following analysis will focus on the norms that regulate participation in children's swapping exchanges, including the formation and working of partnerships, on their interactional form and sequencing, and on the ritualization and suspension of the sense of finality that attends the conclusion of a swapping deal.

Norms of Participation

Interestingly, there is relatively little social discrimination in choosing swapping partners for the faddish collections. Many children say they swap with kids they don't know, "Older, younger, anybody who has a card I need," in the words of a twelve-year-old boy. In observing the children swapping in our village center, I have often heard them addressing each other with the customary form of addressing a child one does not know: "Kid, show me what you've got" (*Yeled, tar'e ma jesh leha*). Following this opener, the child addressed pulls out a pack of cards and shows them to the inquirer, usually running them expertly through his or her fingers. It is also not unusual to see a six or seven-year-old child swapping cards with youngsters twice his or her age.

The easy access children have to a variety of potential partners in swapping exchanges stands out in particular if we take into account the fact that Israeli children's social life generally tends to be restricted to same age peers, and, even more specifically, to members of one's own school class (see chapter on *gibush*). The exchange patterns involved in *hibudim*, in contradistinction, reinforce the privileging of the school class as the primary social unit. Whereas the rules of exchange associated with *hibudim* do not apply to close friends relations (for which equal sharing is the norm), children usually claim that, as far as swapping is concerned "it makes no difference if he is a friend or not," in the words of a thirteen-year-old boy. In swapping exchanges, generally speaking, the ordinary patterns of holistic interactions and personal or group loyalties are suspended, and criteria of utility and self-interest are given precedence, although here and there such humanitarian feelings are cited as

“taking pity” on a child who badly wants to swap a particular item, or the prerogative of a friend to be offered a rare item in swapping. The unrestricted participation in *hahlafot* exchanges thus goes hand in hand with the limited relational scope required for their enactment.

Despite the basic pattern of open participation in swapping exchanges, there are some considerations that mitigate against swapping with particular categories of children. Thus, the fear of being cheated causes some children to avoid swapping with children they don't know, or with older children who might take advantage of them. Also, the institution of *haratot* (regrets), which allows one to annul an exchange (see later), is workable only when children are in continuing contact. Finally, in those cases in which there is gender specialization in the kinds of items collected, the social “mapping” of the swapping scene is accordingly affected. Since swapping exchanges are so common in children's lives, they therefore do not only reflect but also crucially reinforce gender differentiation.

Participation in swapping exchanges establishes one's reputation as a potentially “available” swapping partner in a general way, and also gives others an opportunity to assess the scope and value of one's holdings. Once in the swapping circle, a child's participation is taken for granted and only minimal, routinized initiating gestures are required for swapping to be enacted (see below). Interestingly, alongside the rules that regulate children's participation in swapping exchanges, there evolved a playful activity that permits a child to dramatize his or her categorical renunciation of “availability” as a partner. Children speak about it as the game of “*ufi, ufi*” (fly, fly,). I've seen it only once, and at the time did not understand what was going on: a boy climbed a slightly raised rock at the corner of the playground area, and started throwing his “garbage pail kids” cards in all directions. The other children ran quickly toward him and scrambled to catch as many cards as they could, at times fighting bitterly over a card. It was later explained to me that this game is initiated by a child who is tired of collecting and wants to give up the whole thing. The game of *ufi ufi* is clearly a complete reversal of children's ordinary collecting activities. It is a grand gesture of disengagement, countering the careful, systematic and sometimes obsessive pursuit of collectible items with a public, highly dramatic gesture of release, a celebration of disorder. At the same time, it is still in the mode of participation in the world of collecting, as the child's holdings are reinfused into the others' collections, and his or her disengagement revitalizes the collecting scene by triggering frantic demonstrations of the collecting spirit among those who rush to catch the dispersed cards. *Ufi ufi* is thus not only a mechanism for the suspension of participation, but also an ironical meta-communicative statement on collecting as a social enterprise.

Partnerships

Children may begin their collecting career by being *shutaf* (in a state of partnership) with an elder sibling. These familial partnerships provide a supportive context for children's initiation into the world of collecting. Being *shutaf* involves shared ownership and identification with the collection, though the preferential status of the older sibling is usually maintained (e.g. it is usually the older sibling who will do the swapping). Then, as they become full-fledged, independent collectors, the youngsters sometimes form more symmetrical partnerships with their peers. Many of the children interviewed had some experience with partnerships, and were willing to discuss their advantages and disadvantages with relish.

Listening to this talk, one can discern differences in the spirit and functions of these partnerships—some are more utilitarian and some are more affiliative in spirit, although both business and relationship are cultivated to some extent in each given case. In what follows I delineate the interactional patterns associated with the formation, the maintenance, as well as the breakup of partnerships.

When the *shutaf* is predominantly utilitarian in spirit, it is primarily motivated by considerations of expediency, that is by the recognition that two people can do better than one. In the words of a seven-year-old boy: "It's worth it (*kedai*) to be *shutaf* with my brother because I get stickers more quickly and I also have a lot of spares." And a twelve-year-old boy acknowledged this principle and boasted: "A lot of kids wanted to be *shutaf* with me because they heard that I knew how to get cards."

This kind of partnership presupposes a comparable starting point as far as the partners' initial holdings are concerned. Comments about a (usually young) kid who had very few collectible items of a particular kind, and yet approached another child, who had many more, with an offer of partnership are made with a chuckle, and have become a standard joke. Such partnerships are only possible within the family. A seven-year-old boy expressed the problematics associated with forming partnerships in qualitative, not only quantitative terms: "It is hard to find a new *shutaf* because you have to check what he has and see if it's worthwhile being his *shutaf*."

The initial symmetry is expected to be maintained as long as the *shutaf* is in effect: each child expects the other to invest as much effort and money (where applicable) as he or she does. In each case, some arrangements are made so that each child can actualize his or her ownership over the collection: usually, the integrity of the collection is maintained, and it is kept in the home of one partner for one or two weeks, and then moves to the other's home for the same amount of time. A couple of cases were reported in which one partner kept half the collection, and the other kept the other half, and they arranged to meet regularly at a particular spot. These matters are negotiated before the

decision to form a partnership is made. For example, I have observed a child make an offer to another saying, "Want to be *shutaf*?" and the child who was approached replied: "*Tov, aval bitnai shebashavua harishon etsli*" ("O.k., but on condition that the first week it's at my place"), trying to make something of his bargaining position.

It is generally believed that partnerships are a precarious affair, that they are likely to lead to quarrels and eventually to break up. One source of tension is the rule that both partners have to agree to each swapping deal, and if one performs badly at swapping the other may be annoyed. A ten-year-old boy said: "There are children who fight and hit each other (*holhim makot*) because the *shutaf* (partner) swapped a card they didn't have two of." A feeling that the symmetry has been upset may be the cause for tension as well. A twelve-year-old boy illustrated the problems that *shutaf* can cause, referring specifically to card games: "One claims that he wins more and therefore he should keep the collection in his home longer, and he says 'I've done more and I should keep the cards longer. And you're losing all the time and if you weren't *shutaf* with me, you'd lose everything.' And so they fight, and there are problems."

Sooner or later, such problems lead to the breakup of the partnership. Children are forever attuned to this possibility: some keep close track of who added what to the collection and when the *shutaf* breaks up "each one takes what he brought," as goes the near-formulaic expression. Another strategy has been reported by a ten-year-old girl, who said that her partner in a stationary paper collection "kept two of each type in case we want to divide up the collection." If none of these precautions have been taken, the standard solution is to "divide it up half and half, and fight all the time who takes what," as an eleven-year-old girl put it. One seven-year-old boy presented a rather self-serving strategy: "If I stop collecting with *shutaf*, then I'll take the stickers and I'll give the spares to the *shutaf*." His older brother jeered at this, saying that he could not get away with it ("*lo jeleh leha*"). The symmetry, it appears, needs to be maintained throughout.

For some children the establishment of a partnership is a by-product of close friendship relations between them. A twelve-year-old boy described such a partnership: "I'm good friends with S., and we spend a lot of time together, so we thought perhaps we'd be *shutaf*." In these cases, the joint care of a collection both affirms and fosters close friendships, and the spirit that governs them differs from the businesslike spirit that governs the more utilitarian partnerships described earlier.

Performing *Hahlafot*

Whether swapping takes place in chance encounters, or whether it takes place in the semi-institutionalized context of the school yard or village center where children congregate for the explicit purpose of swapping, it involves the enactment of a largely recognized pattern of activity, and serves an interactional locus in which children's interests and passions can be articulated.

The children often leave their “core” collection at home, and carry around only their “spares,” holding and fondling them rather conspicuously, so that others can consider them potential swapping partners. Such signals of a child’s participation in the peer group collecting world, however, do not yet guarantee that he or she will be interested in swapping on a given occasion. A child’s readiness to swap needs to be further advertised, or negotiated. The swapping scene is inhabited not only by swapping partners but also by onlookers who serve important functions as audience and referees. Thus, children move in and out of their roles as swapping partners in an unproblematic way, maintaining their active participation on the swapping scene. Despite the fluidity of the scene, however, a consistent reluctance to swap on the part of a potential swapping partner may give rise to either speculation or outright consternation, or both. A thirteen-year-old girl, for instance, said: “A kid who comes with the collection and doesn’t want to swap, it’s a sign that he has very beautiful and valuable things. I will envy him and I will pay no attention to him. I won’t talk to him and perhaps we’ll gossip about him.” Similar disapproval was expressed by a thirteen-year-old boy: “There are kids who don’t like to swap or to tell that they’ve got “spares” and we call them “misers” (*kamtsanim*).” The only somewhat benevolent interpretation of a child’s consistent refusal to take part in swapping exchanges was a reference to the fear of cheating, which is more pronounced among the younger kids. A ten-year-old boy explained: “Kids who are afraid to be cheated only buy cards.”

Once they are enacted, the unfolding of swapping episodes manifests an underlying pattern of interactional regularity. The sequential organization of swapping exchanges can be described as a five-structure episodic sequence. Each of the phases is analytically distinguished by its episodic function: (1) Initiation / invitation phase, (2) Acceptance / display phase, (3) Bargaining phase, (4) Finalization phase, (5) Appraisal phase. Let us consider these phases one by one:

Initiation / invitation phase: As noted, one’s desire to initiate a swapping exchange is usually signaled explicitly. A ten-year-old boy thus described the swapping scene as follows: “We swap at school and in the neighborhood. Everyone walks around with the pack of cards in their hands and asks the kids if they want to swap.” The more generalized bid for engaging in swapping is often formulated as, “Want to swap?” or “Show me what you’ve got.” It has the advantage of not disclosing what one is after, since, as a seasoned thirteen-year-old explained: “It is better not to let the other kid know that there is a card that you want, because then he’ll pretend he is not really sure he wants to swap it, or that he promised to swap it with his friends, and he’ll make you beg and beg and then ask for a lot of cards in exchange. Believe me, I have already made that mistake.” When a child is hunting for a particular

item, moving impatiently from one group to the other, the opener more typically used is: "Have you got X?"

Acceptance / display phase: A favorable response to a generalized invitation to swap often takes the form of the kids displaying their holdings so that they can, as a ten-year-old girl explained, "see if there is something that is worth swapping." This phase of the swapping exchange involves the display and appreciation of the partners' exchangeable holdings. These mutual display sessions clearly serve as foci for the dissemination of social information concerning "who has what," and help children build a reputation around the ownership of impressive items. No less significantly, however, they serve as a context for the articulation, as well as the alignment of personal tastes. A twelve-year-old collector of stationary paper described an instance of successful alignment as follows: "I want to swap and I say, 'See how beautiful it is,' and the other kid says, 'Yes, it's beautiful' so we decide that it's valuable."

Bargaining phase. It is at this point that negotiation and bargaining come in, as decisions concerning the relative value of the items exchanged have to be made. Although for some items there are general guidelines for determining value, based on such diverse criteria as rarity, size, or visual attractiveness, there is often quite a bit of room for interpersonal negotiation. Moreover, the value of an item is as much a product of the negotiation process as a determinant of it, since the assessment of worth is made on the basis of other swapping exchanges through ongoing participation in the world of childhood collecting. Children clearly distinguish between the socially regulated assessments of value and the subjective desire for a particular item, which has its obvious costs in bargaining situations. An eight-year-old girl expressed it thus: "If there is something that somebody wants very much then he will give a lot for it, and if it's nothing special then it's one for one." Children may coax and manipulate each other, sometimes pretending they don't want to swap so as to raise the "price" even further. An eleven-year-old boy said coaxing might help: "If he doesn't want to swap a particular card, you offer him several cards for that card, or you even start to flatter him. Sometimes it helps and sometimes it doesn't."

Practice at swapping seems to generate a measure of flexibility, so that rigidity in bargaining is considered a sign of immaturity. In one case I observed, a first grader became fixated on a card he wanted to get, and roamed around whining its "name." Showing his cards around, it turned out that he had a card that one of the older boys wanted very badly. However, he would not swap it for anything but the particular card he himself wanted, refusing to compromise although he was being offered several cards he didn't have. The older boy tried to coax him, leaving him in exasperation and coming back again, and finally shouted in anger: "You're a baby, you don't know how to swap."

One of the things that struck me most in observing children's swapping exchanges was that they were rarely a dyadic affair. It is clear that children like to watch others bargain and swap, and they keep track of "interesting" exchanges, whose recounting becomes part of the group's lore. Thus, on different occasions, several children independently told me rather dramatically of the kid who was so desperate to get a particular card that he paid eighty-six cards for it. The audience, however, is not passive, but plays an active role in the proceedings as both consultants and referees.⁵

The role of onlookers is acknowledged in such labels as '*hamamlitzim*' (roughly, the advisers) who may either act in good faith, or give deliberately misleading advice (in which case they may be called '*jo'atsei sheker*,' false advisers). A twelve-year-old girl described the advisers' role as follows: "If a kid wants to swap some stationary papers and doesn't want to pay so much for them, they argue, and immediately someone comes that will help to judge if it's really worth it. Sometimes he is for one side, so he'll persuade the other side to agree." A ten-year-old girl said she would decide about swapping "according to whether it is valuable, and also I ask the kids if it's worth it." Opinions may, however, be divided, in which case, according to a ten-year-old boy, "the majority decides. If, say, five kids say that one is valuable and ten kids say that the other one is valuable, then the majority decides."

Finalizing phase: Having concluded a swapping exchange is not the last word on it. There is still the question of how final the deal really is. What if a child comes to regret it? What if one finds that one has acted rashly, and, in the heat of the moment, confused by the often conflicting advice of the onlookers, has made a bad deal? Perhaps in recognition of the precariousness of the swapping situation, an institutionalized way has evolved in Israeli child culture to either finalize or allow for the annulment of swapping deals. Having swapped an item, one can quickly announce either *beḥaratot* or *bli ḥaratot* (with / without regrets). This term is exclusively and very commonly used in the context of swapping exchanges among children, although morphological or lexical variants have also appeared in the data, for example, *im / bli hithartujot* (from the same root stem), or *im / bli aḥzarot* (with / without returns).

In accounting for the institutionalized possibility of annulling a deal shortly after it has been concluded by declaring *beḥaratot*, children mention the need for safeguards in various situations. For example, when someone made a mistake and swapped an item he or she had no duplicate of; or, when a swapping deal was concluded and it then turned out that one item was damaged; or, when a kid recognizes that he or she has been carried away in the swapping exchange ("I came home and saw that I didn't like what I had swapped" is a sentence repeatedly heard in stories of bad deals). Given the varied circumstances in which flexibility is allowed by declaring "with regrets," it is not surprising

that it has become the interactionally “unmarked” strategy. In cases in which neither *beḥaratot* nor *bli ḥaratot* is declared, a child may be allowed to go back on a deal closely following its conclusion. The question as to whether a deal made can be revoked then becomes one of timing, goodwill and interpersonal negotiation.

The employment of the verbal formulas *beḥaratot* / *bli ḥaratot* is marked by a magical flavor as well as a strong sense of manipulability. Children testified that they would be quick to finalize a swapping exchange if they felt they were getting a particularly good deal, especially when the other was unaware of the real worth of the items he or she was swapping. In the words of a ten-year-old boy: “The side that feels that the deal is very worthwhile will declare *bli ḥaratot* (without regrets). If they hesitate they will say *im ḥaratot* (with regrets).”

Some kids claim that the announcement of *bli ḥaratot* has a thoroughly finalizing force, and a ten-year-old boy even claimed that having declared “*bli ḥaratot*” (without regrets), he would not be required to return an item even if it turned out that he had cheated! Other children, however, concede the force of personal pressure even in the face of this finalizing ritual statement. An eight-year-old boy said: “We have something called ‘*bli aḥzarot*’ (without returns). If somebody says ‘*bli aḥzarot*’ then nothing can help, only if the other kid cries.” A nine-year-old girl said: “If I swapped and the friend says ‘*bli aḥzarot*’ then I cannot regret it. Sometimes I beg and I get it back.”

In some places, the finalizing ritual is more elaborate, and takes the form of a magical chant accompanied by a hand gesture of touching something that’s red in color in the child’s vicinity (a piece of clothing or object). It is chanted in full or in part, and the young children I’ve heard using it rather expertly could say nothing more but that it means “*bli hiḥartujot*” (without regrets). It runs as follows:

bli aḥzarot / leḥol haḥa'im / nagati ba'adom / uvḥol kadur ha'aretz / bli soref ḥukim / nagati ba'adom / uvḥol kadur ha'aretz.

without returns / for all life / I've touched the red / and the whole planet
/ without burning rules / I've touched the red / and the whole planet.

Appraisal phase: Having served as consultants during the bargaining phase, the outsiders’ commentary following the conclusion of the deal serves an appraisal function. Not only the deal as a whole but also the swappers’ performance is judged. One can hear supportive comments such as “*haja leḥa kedai*,” it was worth it; or biting remarks, such as “*freier*” (a sucker), or taunting “*avdu aleḥa*,” you have been taken. It seems to me that the onlookers’ involvement serves not only to keep the action going, but also an instrument for socializing children into the criteria of value and the norms for conduct associated with the performance of swapping.

Let me conclude this section by recapitulating the typical pattern of the sequential unfolding of *hahlafot* exchanges in schematic form, employing the notation I have used in describing *brogez* exchanges. The episode as a whole is placed within episodic "brackets" ([. . .]), and the finalizing and appraisal phases are bracketed so as to indicate optionality. Thus:

[initiation—acceptance / display—bargaining—(finalizing)—(appraisal)]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In describing and analyzing the rules and strategies associated by Israeli children with the social institution of *hahlafot*, I have sought to delineate a particular experiential domain that is central to the childhood world I have been studying. Rather than taking a formal definition of collecting as my starting point (Danet and Katriel 1989), I have taken the children's lead and attended to the activities they referred to as "collecting," as well as to the various activities they performed with collectible objects. It is clear that for Israeli children, much more so than for adults, collecting is a socially centered experience, and that swapping exchanges as well as the games they play are not a by-product of their interest in the objects, but, at times, become the *raison d'être* of the whole enterprise. This highly group-oriented slant given to an essentially two-party, contractual exchange is very much in line with the collective, solidarity-based orientation of the peer-group culture of Israeli children, as discussed in previous chapters, especially the chapter on *gibush*.

Having delineated the communicative patterns associated with *hahlafot* episodes, as I have done with *brogez* and *hibudim*, let me briefly try my hand at what Turner (1977) has called "positional analysis," sketching some of their interrelationships as culturally patterned forms of social exchange. Since they are operative in the same world of childhood, the *brogez* agonistic episodes and the *hibudim* and *hahlafot* cooperative episodes are socially distributed and interrelated in ways that disclose their differential, as well as complementary, sociocultural functions. Tracing the links between them can, therefore, enable us to begin to appreciate the larger cultural configuration of the communicative practices they form.

Generally speaking, conflictual episodes mark interruptions in cooperative social enterprises, but, as is indicated by the interpenetration of *brogez* episodes on the one hand, and *hibudim* and *hahlafot* episodes on the other, the relationship between them is more intricate than would be suggested by this image of mutual exclusion. Thus, the most intense cooperative efforts found in the context of childhood collecting, namely, partnerships, are recognized by children as very likely to lead to fights that end in *brogez*, that is, in a state of noncommunication that rules out the possibility of shared activity. Also, the desire to engage in swapping activities can override the rules of *brogez* just as, as indicated in the previous chapter, the rules of *hibudim* can override the

sustainment of a state of *brogez*. Thus, several children explicitly stated that they would make *sholem* (peace) with a child in order to be able to swap with him or her.

It is interesting to note the ways in which the rules of *hibudim* and *hahlafot* define culturally distinctive, but interrelated social enterprises. In children's actual experience, the rules of *hibudim* and *hahlafot* are not simultaneously applicable. Although both patterns deal with social exchange, the materials exchanged differ in kind: in *hibudim* one exchanges "consumables," whereas in *hahlafot* one exchanges "durables." The difference between them, however, goes much further; it relates to the models of social exchange that underlie these two patterns. As noted, the exchange of treats in *hibudim* follows a pattern of "generalized reciprocity" (cf. Befu 1977:264), in which giving entails a diffuse obligation to reciprocate when necessary, and no attempt is made to maintain a precise balance of giving and getting. Giving, as it were, is directed to the group at large and is not fundamentally a matter of interpersonal relations, even when dyads are involved. Although children do in fact keep some track of the sharing of treats in *hibudim*, only rather blatant or persistent breaches of the rules of sharing are noted and negatively sanctioned. In *hahlafot*, on the other hand, very close track is kept of what is being exchanged. Most deals are carefully concluded on the spot, and the notion of "debts" is invoked for those that are not. The effort to determine and negotiate the value of the items swapped is predicated on the desire to maintain "balanced reciprocity" in each dyadic exchange. At the same time, as noted, the value of the objects, as well as the quality of participants' performance in the swapping exchange, are grounded in the collective judgments of group members, which are part and parcel of the swapping episodes.

It appears, then, that by engaging in the ritualized pattern of *hahlafot* and *hibudim* children are socialized into complementary forms of exchange in a peer group context of symmetrical social relations. As social enterprises, *hibudim* exchanges provide daily opportunities for children to follow a pattern of generalized reciprocity, whereas *hahlafot* episodes provide for interactional contexts governed by the rules of balanced reciprocity, which are as central to children's growth in a complex, modern society as are the rules of generalized reciprocity, as discussed in the previous chapter. In both types of socializing contexts, social learning occurs in which the brittle balance between the fulfillment of personal desires and the requirements of social participation is repeatedly dramatized. The social experiences provided by these childhood contexts of social exchange are both crucial to children's learning as they concretize patterns of obligations and expectations that underlie much of social life. Therefore, let me suggest that in learning about social exchange as it relates to the tangible objects that populate their childhood world, children, in fact, learn important lessons about social interaction in general. The essential

relationship between the concepts of interaction and of exchange has been pointed out by G. Simmel: "Interaction is, to be sure, the broader concept, exchange the narrower one. In human relations, however, interaction generally appears in forms which lend themselves to being viewed as exchange. The ordinary vicissitudes of daily life produce a continuous alternation of profit and loss, an ebbing and flowing of the contents of life. Exchange has the effect of rationalizing these vicissitudes, through the conscious act of setting one for the other" (Simmel 1971:44).

Thus, in Israeli children's social relations, interaction often appears in the form of the concrete exchange of objects, whether these are "consumables" as in *hibudim* or "durables" as in *hahlafot*. It is partly through the language of objects (and its verbal accompaniments) that they acquire the rudiments of social interaction and practice its various forms. The enmeshing of the language of objects and the language of social relations in children's development may, indeed, be a more general phenomenon. In fact, L. Vygotsky has spoken to this issue when he noted that "the path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person. This complex structure is the product of a developmental process deeply rooted in the links between individual and social history" (Vygotsky 1978:30). As these studies have indicated, important aspects of children's social experience are, indeed, communicatively mediated through the exchange of objects. While this may very well be a universal aspect of children's growth, the particular forms of exchange that find their elaboration in given cultures of childhood may be given to distinctive cultural inflections, as is evidenced by the collective flavor of the essentially dyadic swapping exchanges of collectibles that Israeli children refer to as *hahlafot*.

Chapter 9: *Hahlafot*:

1. The penultimate stress in *hahlafot* is a major marker of child register in spoken Hebrew as was observed for *hibudim* in the previous chapter.

2. The analysis is based on sixty-two transcribed interviews with children aged five to fifteen, as well as on numerous casual conversations with children in this age range.

3. At the time this paper was first written, the Hebrew version of the garbage pail kids cards (*havurat hazevel*, the garbage gang) was ruling the market; additional imaginary card figures have included *dardasim* (smurfs), *zarbuvim*, *dubonei ihpatli*, and others. The influence of popular children's TV programming is apparent.

4. The few studies that have dealt with children's collecting relate to the first part of the century, employing a psychological framework (Burk 1907;

Whitley 1929; Witty and Lehman 1930). This, like the other chapters dealing with children's world in this book, adopts an ethnographic perspective on child culture in an attempt to understand children's sociality from the standpoint of children's situated practices (Sutton-Smith 1982).

5. Cf. W. Labov's, "Rules of Ritual Insults." In D. Sudnow, ed., *Studies in Social Interaction* (New York: New Press, 1972), p. 120–169. Labov describes the role of audience in animating and evaluating individuals' performances in the context of ritual insults among Black youths.

Sodot:

Secret-Sharing as a Social Form Among Israeli Children

CHILDREN'S SECRETIVE EXCHANGES

The last two chapters dealt with ritualized exchange patterns among Israeli children. Both dwelt on the social and symbolic meanings attending the exchange of objects—"consumables" in *hibudim* and "durables" in *hahlafot*. Another salient form of exchange in children's peer-group culture involves the ritualized exchange of privileged information, which takes the form of trafficking in secrets (natively referred to as "*sodot*"). The keeping and telling of secrets proved an emotionally charged topic for the children consulted in my studies. I was initially alerted to the centrality of secret-sharing as a social form in their lives as I listened to accounts of *brogez* incidents that were triggered by a breached promise "not to tell," or when I heard threats "if you tell I'll be *brogez* with you." I was also intrigued to hear a number of children say matter-of-factly that they were careful about sharing their secrets with a friend in case they "became *brogez*" and the secret would "come out." One boy even told me he had made an explicit agreement with his friend that they would not tell each other's secrets "even if we became *brogez*."

The centrality of secrets in children's lives is recognized by adults as well. This can be seen in treatments of the topic in poems and stories written for children and often read in school, and more directly, perhaps, it is indicated by the fact that topics like "My Secret," "I Have / Had a Secret," "A Secret I Never Told," or "I Kept A Secret," are standard fare as set topic compositions in school. Children's written accounts are revealing, and I will use some of them to anchor my further analysis and discussion of children's secret-sharing, adapting the research strategy so fruitfully employed in Jules Henry's (1963) classic analyses of American children's world.¹ This written testimony will be supplemented by data derived from my non-participant observation of the social life of the middle-class, Jewish Israeli children among whom I have conducted my inquiry.

The children's written accounts impart some of the experiential flavor and dramatic appeal the trafficking in secrets holds for the youngsters, and point to the central normative arrangements that regulate secret-sharing among them. The following illustrative examples were written under the heading of "I Kept a Secret," a standard topic given by the teacher as part of an in-class sixth

grade composition assignment. As is customary, it was one of three topics children could choose from in completing their writing task.

The first account nicely brings out the desire to share important personal information and the interpersonal dynamic such sharing can generate:

One day when I came to school my best friend ran to me and said she had been trying to hold something in for some days, and now she must tell me something nobody must know: A secret. I promised her I would not tell even though I knew it would be a little hard not to reveal. "My Mom is pregnant," she whispered in my ear. "Really? What fun! And what month is it?" I asked. "She is in the third month," my friend said. Later, all through the school day we kept whispering secrets concerning her mother. When I got home I really felt like telling my big sister, because she surely would have been able to explain everything, as she is older than I am. But I knew that I had promised not to tell, and really in all these days I never told anybody.

The second account brings out the sense of risk and temptation that children often associate with secretive exchanges, as well as the pride in one's ability to keep a secret, which was evident in the previous contribution as well:

I kept a secret that *T.* told me. Oof, how many oaths she made me take before she told me. The next day I went to visit *K.* and I was dying to tell her the secret because we simply talked and chatted and gossiped a little, so at the very last moment I didn't tell her the secret. The next day I went to *T.* again: "Did you tell the secret?" she asked. She shouted and threatened me that if I told the secret then. . . . Even if I had revealed it I wouldn't have told her about it after all her talk. And so *T.* and I kept telling secrets to each other, and although I want to, I never tell anybody.

The next two accounts, by two different girls, tell tales of betrayal, indicating how breaches of trust are discovered, handled, and incorporated into ongoing relationships:

When I myself found out who I love (I won't mention names) I told *K.* and *K.* swore she would not tell anybody. After a while *G.* came to me. I wanted to tell *G.* I made her take an oath (and she swore in the name of her mother, her father and all her family members) and finally I revealed the secret, and what do I hear from *G.*? That *K.* had told her. How angry I got! I could have killed her, and she begged me not to tell *K.* And then *M.* came and asked me to tell her. I wondered how she knew about it, and then the whole class knew who it is I love.

And,

One day I told a secret to a girl from class. I told her not to tell anybody because this was something only between the two of us (and I didn't want her to reveal it). One day passed and the next day when I came to class (after one lesson and another one). Suddenly during breaktime that girl came to

me and told me she had revealed the secret to somebody in the class and told me who that girl was. And then I got terribly angry and asked why she had revealed. Then she said she had to tell. And then the girl she told it to revealed it and it passed through the whole class. And in the end everybody knew about the secret I kept for myself, and then the girl I had told it to first came to me, and she was sorry she had told the whole class.

As both these accounts suggest, secret-sharing has both intrapersonal and interpersonal functions: It is an act of unburdening, but one that serves to affirm bonds of trust and may also have a consultative value. The following locutions, which were used by children in discussing the issue of secrets, illustrate the way the unburdening and consultative functions figure in their discourse: "It takes a stone off my heart," "I feel better after I tell it to my best friend," "I feel I will burst if my friend is sick and I cannot tell it to her right away in the morning," "I know what I can do with my problem after I tell it to my friend."

Children's trafficking in secrets is, thus, a multifunctional affair. As I will argue later, in addition to the uses of secrets recognized by the youngsters themselves, secret-sharing as a ritualized social form serves important (though latent) group functions. Before I can substantiate this point, I must turn to an analysis of secrets as a social form as well as to a more careful consideration of the categories of secrets children share.

The exchange of secrets, like all other forms of human exchange (Gouldner 1960, Homans 1961), implies an interpersonal or social "contract" that is predicated on a norm of reciprocity. In discussing the ritualized exchange of treats in *hibudim* and the swapping of collectibles in *hahlafot*, I have pointed out that they articulate the patterns of generalized reciprocity and balanced reciprocity, respectively. The exchange of privileged information (identified as such by being defined as a "secret") can either involve a pattern of generalized or a pattern of balanced reciprocity. Secrets, which are self-oriented (about oneself or one's family) and directed to a specific other (usually a close friend), follow a pattern of balanced reciprocity in grounding relations of trust. Secrets that are other-oriented (about a third party) and directed to an incidental other follow a pattern of generalized reciprocity. They can flow from anybody within the group who happens to know, to anyone who does not. I will refer to the first category of secrets as "self-oriented" secrets and to the second as "other-oriented" secrets, and will discuss them separately following some further conceptual clarifications.

Simmel's (1950) seminal analysis of secretive exchanges as social forms has highlighted the general sociological and psychological significance of secret-sharing. In attempting to characterize the nature of secrets in adult life, he made direct appeal to his observations of children's conduct. His comments address both the intrapersonal and the interpersonal functions of secrets and

suggest that, for children, the ability to engage appropriately and meaningfully in secretive exchanges is socially acquired, or, as we would say today, it is part of the development of their communicative competence (Hymes 1972b). Thus, Simmel notes:

In comparison with the childish stage in which every conception is expressed at once, and every undertaking is accessible to the eyes of all, the secret produces an immense enlargement of life: numerous contents of life cannot even emerge in the presence of full publicity. The secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former (Simmel 1950:330).

And later:

Among children, pride and bragging are often based on being able to say to the other: "I know something that you don't know"—and to such a degree that this sentence is uttered as a formal means of boasting and subordinating the others, even where it is made up and actually refers to no secret. This jealousy of the knowledge about facts hidden to others is shown in all contexts, from the smallest to the largest (*ibid.*:332).

A number of more recent studies have been devoted to explorations of the role of secrecy in human affairs, for example, S. Bok's (1982) discussion of secrets from the standpoint of ethics, and E. Schwimmer's (1981) study of secrecy and power, which develops a semiotic framework for the study of secrets along the lines set out by Simmel. Although discussions of secrecy among adults tend to include passing references to children's world, to the best of my knowledge children's trafficking in secrets as a social activity has not been specifically addressed in its own right. An exception relating to children's playworld is H. Sacks' (1980) enlightening analysis of the "button button" game, which discusses children's social learning with regards to the control, detection, and manipulation of personal information. The present study of Israeli children's handling of secrets in both play and nonplay situations suggests, by analogy, that children's intense preoccupation with secretive exchanges serves as a practice ground for learning the subtleties of information control in social life. The development of the intricate notion of "privileged information" is extremely important given young children's initial (egocentric) assumption of a nondifferentiated discursive world similarly shared by all partners to an exchange.

In what follows, I will draw on the aforementioned general discussions of secrets to analyze the social uses Israeli children make of secretive exchanges. As I will try to show, by focusing on the ways in which the themes of concealment and revelation are shaped and negotiated in a particular culture of childhood, we can gain some significant insights into fundamental aspects of social learning among children more generally. The main interest in secret-

sharing as a communicative activity lies in the social functions served by the "information game" involved, the structures of participation it engenders, and their implications for social inclusion and relationship building. In other words, secret-sharing will hold our attention as an interactional activity rather than as a linguistic performance per se, although some of the ways in which it is talked about will serve as important clues to children's own perceptions of the nature and social roles of secretive exchanges.

Schwimmer's (1981) semiotic account of secrets can help to characterize the structure and functions of secretive exchanges in a more formal vein. He draws a distinction between "code secrecy" (e.g. secret languages) and "fact secrecy" (e.g. concealment of information), focusing mainly on code secrecy. The concern of this chapter is, by contrast, with "fact secrecy." Schwimmer's account of fact secrecy foregrounds two interrelated aspects of such exchanges, both of which are independent of their particular contents: (a) The structure of participation they imply; and (b) The nature of the information circulated. Their interrelationships provide a structural link between the secretive and the manifest worlds inhabited by the partners to the exchange.

As far as participation is concerned, secretive exchanges imply a three-person system: the two (categories of) persons between whom the secret is shared (say, *A* as sender of the message and *B* as receiver) and the (category of) persons from whom the secret is excluded (say, *C*). Regardless of the specific content of the message exchanged, the nature of the information is presupposed to have some bearing on the excluded party (or on his or her relationship to the sender). This characterization of secretive exchanges as participatory activities has an important developmental implication: In secretive exchanges not only knowledge of facts but also knowledge about one's own and others' states of knowledge comes into play. Thus, children's participation in secretive exchanges is a spontaneous indication of their ability to make metacognitive assessments that are essential to communicative conduct in general.

Notably, quite a number of the very young children (around age five), whom I probed on their understanding of secret-sharing, characterized secrets as "a surprise," "a surprise you shouldn't know," "something you shouldn't reveal," and / or "something you whisper in the ear." That is, they oriented themselves to one's knowledge or lack of knowledge of some fact (usually without any indication of what kind of fact it might be), or to the form the exchange takes. They did not indicate an understanding of the subtle configuration of relative states of knowledge implied by the full-fledged concept of a secret as characterized above, and as it figures in the social life of preadolescents.

For the latter, the type of information circulated is not immaterial: It depends on, and partially defines, the nature of the secretive exchange. In discussing secrets, many of the preadolescent informants drew an explicit

distinction between two major, variously designated categories of secrets. The first category included secrets referred to as “big” (*gadol*), “serious” (*retsini*), “personal” (*ishi*), or “most confidential” (*sodi bejoter*). The second category included secrets referred to as “small” (*katan*), “simple” (*pashut*), or “teasing” (*mitgare*). The two categories of secrets differ both in the types of information they convey and in their social functions within the children’s peer group. They are discursively distinguished not only through these polar attributions but also in other linguistically marked ways: The act of sharing a secret of the serious variety is typically spoken of as “*legalot sod* (to reveal a secret) while the act of sharing a nonserious secret is typically spoken of as “*ledaber / lehagid sodot al*” (to speak / tell secrets about), a child-marked expression constructed in analogy to the expressions “to gossip about” (*lerahel al*) or “to tattle on” (*lehalshin al*), both of which imply that the person the information is “about” would not like it to be circulated. Also, the telling of a “serious” secret is usually spoken of in the singular (e.g. *lesaper sod* — to tell a secret), while the use of the plural usually implies the exchange of secrets in gossiping activities (e.g. *lesaper sodot* — to tell secrets). Clearly, the category of “big secrets” in children’s parlance refers to the analytic category of “self-oriented” secrets posited earlier, whereas the category of “small secrets” corresponds to the analytic category of “other-oriented” secrets. Let us consider each of these categories in turn.

SELF-ORIENTED SECRETS

Instances of seriously disclosed secrets typically range over a number of experiential domains. Knowledge of such things, as one ten-year-old girl put it, “makes the mouth locked.” The following categories of information were repeatedly mentioned as privileged:

1. Sensitive information concerning one’s family, for example, “Mom is pregnant.”
2. Discrediting or sanctionable information about the self, for example, “My baby brother fell to the ground when I was taking care of him.”
3. Information related to bodily development, for example, “I started wearing a bra.”
4. Romantic information, for example, “the name of the boy I love.”
5. A piece of information circumstantially requiring unusual protection, for example, “I found a precious stone on the way home from school.”

Disclosing information of any of the above types is a serious matter, and the trafficking in secrets of this kind forms a lively undercurrent of activities in children’s social life. I will argue that such acts of disclosure serve important

intrapersonal as well as interpersonal functions in children's social learning. In the intrapersonal domain, secrets involve the demarcation and privileging of particular "bits" of information about oneself and others. These may assume a formative role as they become a source and anchor for the child's self-knowledge and his or her self-reflective activity. In the interpersonal domain, secretive exchanges of this type serve crucial social functions in peer-group relations as they provide a social form through which intimate bonds can be objectified and reaffirmed.

Of the two actional elements involved in secretive exchanges, which figured in Schwimmer's aforementioned semiotic analysis—"telling to *B*" and "keeping from *C*"—it is the "telling to" element that is mainly brought out in children's discussions of self-oriented secrets. Children repeatedly evoked the category of "close friend" in discussing close friendships, they repeatedly claimed that a good friend is someone you can trust not to reveal your secrets. Just as a secret is something you tell to a close friend, a close friend is someone you can tell your secret to. The ability and willingness to guard another's secret thus becomes the ultimate test of friendship bonds.

As the many conflicts and betrayals surrounding secret-sharing suggest, the norm of symmetrical reciprocity cannot be taken for granted. This is also suggested by the need children often feel to explicitly verbalize the condition: "I'll tell you my secret if you tell me yours," as I have overheard a ten-year-old girl say to her friend. Furthermore, secretive exchanges are often subject to interactional reframing: the act of disclosure tends to take place in a spatially removed spot, for example, "I take her to the side," "I take her to the corner." It may be both preceded and followed by ritualized promises not to tell. For example, "During breaktime they called me out to the yard. They said: 'We have a very confidential secret to tell you. Promise not to tell anybody.' I said: 'I promise.' "

When the secret is very important, or the person to whom it is disclosed is not felt to be fully trustworthy, an oath ensuring that one will not tell it, not just a promise, may be demanded. Examples of such oaths reported in the data include: "I swear to God," "On my mother's life," or "On the Bible." I have not found as elaborate and stylized expressions for secret-keeping as those reported by I. Opie and P. Opie for English children (1959:121–128). It appears that the more accentuated the hedging is around secret-sharing activities, the more important the secret is held to be, and the more difficult it is to keep, according to some.

In sum, the sharing of self-oriented secrets provides a form and a context in which intrapersonal states of feeling and knowledge can be given palpable shape, and in which interpersonal bonds can be objectified. When a child says, "I wanted to have a secret," or "I thought and thought: 'what will my secret be?' " to cite two of my young informants, what is expressed, I believe, is

both a quest for a self-identifying, verbally objectified sense of self, and a recognition of secretive exchanges as a cultural resource for engaging in such a quest.

OTHER-ORIENTED SECRETS

Unlike self-oriented secrets, which tend to be a dyadic affair, other-oriented secrets are more of a group affair. They are less a matter of "telling," with a particular addressee in view and the implication of interpersonal choice, and more a matter of "keeping from" and "using against," as an expression of social rivalry and peer-group tactics.

A child who declares, or more or less subtly lets out that he or she "has a secret" automatically invites persistent and insistent pestering and exhortations not to be "a pig" and to tell his or her secret. This is an ideal means of drawing social attention to oneself—a precious commodity within the peer group. A nine-year-old girl spoke to this issue when she said: "If you go and you say 'I have a secret,' then it can't be a real secret, because everyone will nag you 'Tell me, tell me,' and you will end up telling. A real secret—it's a secret that it's a secret."

Indeed, the idea of discretion was not easy for me to convey to many of my young informants; they usually felt that any secret whispered around them was very much their business. This did not seem to be only a matter of sheer curiosity, or nonacceptance of others' rights to privileged information. It was also a matter of wariness: Children, especially girls, seemed to be very sensitive to the possibility of finding themselves the topic of other-oriented secretive exchanges (of having secrets "told against / about" them). Secrets of this type function very much like gossip (Gluckman 1963; Abrahams 1970; Haviland 1977; Heilman 1982). They involve social commentary about others' conduct, appearance or character and thus provide a channel through which social standards and expectations are articulated and reaffirmed.

Unlike self-oriented secrets, other-oriented secrets are not kept from some "generalized other" but specifically from the person the secret is "about" as well as his or her associates. Thus, you do not tell a secret about *C* to *C*'s friends: "I made a blunder," an eleven-year-old girl told me, "I told a secret to *G*. against *M*. and didn't know she was her friend. Now they're both angry with me." Outside blunders of this type, secretive information is routinely circulated by individuals labeled as "gossips." These individuals are denigrated for their inability to protect others' secrets and at the same time they are recognized as convenient indirect channels for passing on information for which one does not wish to be held accountable. More likely than not, a secret will make its unofficial, though highly predictable passage from child to child until it eventually reaches the ears of the child it is "about." That child may either choose to ignore it or not. A piece of social information, usually criticism of

some sort, has been thus conveyed to a specific child in such a way as to involve minimal commitment on the part of sender and receiver alike: Just as anyone can deny having said it, the target child can pretend not to have heard it, exempting him / herself from the need to respond to the affront. In their social uses, then, as well as in their playlike quality, other-oriented secrets differ markedly from the self-oriented secrets described in the previous section.

Other-oriented secretive exchanges, moreover, are also used as deliberate teasing devices. Complaints like the following one reported by a nine-year-old girl, who explicitly used “gossiping against” and “telling secrets about” as synonymous locutions, are common occurrences: “I went to the teacher and told her that they were telling secrets about me, that they were gossiping against me.” Actual or imputed secretive exchanges of the teasing variety may trigger a conflict resulting in *brogez*, the ritualized suspension of communication and the institution of a ratified state of nontalk, discussed in Chapter 7.

As partners to these exchanges, children are aware of their teasing potential, and some were able to be quite explicit about the nonverbal cues that they use in order to mask them: Not wanting a child to know that a secret is being told “against” him or her, one will take care not to draw his or her attention—to refrain from looking in his or her direction, and so on. Awareness of the irritation induced by the whispering of secrets has produced the generally recognized and often verbalized formulaic injunction: “*lo omrim sodot behevra*” (one should not tell secrets when in company). Asking children to comment on this saying proved a fruitful opener for my probings.

In conclusion of this section, I might say that through their preoccupation with other-oriented secrets children chart and rechart their group relations, enhance or undermine their own and each other’s social standing, and reaffirm or shift social alliances. In all of this activity, the content of the secrets exchanged becomes secondary, often even to the child the secret is about or against. It is in the very activity of telling secrets against one another, with the particular structuring of information involved, that children utilize the social form of secret-sharing as a strategic tool in their manipulation of social relationships. Secret-sharing is used to accomplish this social task much in the way that states of *brogez* are generated in a teasing and competitive spirit to test loyalties and affiliations within the group.

Given the centrality of secret-sharing as an instrument of children’s social life, it is not surprising to find that games revolving around the themes of concealment and revelation are central to their social play as well, especially among preadolescents. As I will try to show in the next section, these games both condense and reverse the secret-sharing patterns described earlier. At the same time, the world of play and the world of everyday life interpenetrate each other, as personal confession is transformed into play, and playful gesture becomes the stuff of gossip.

SECRET-SHARING GAMES

The secret-sharing practices I have described as part of the flow of pre-adolescents' social life have their more formalized counterparts in the children's party game repertoire. For this age group in Israel, parties held in private homes typically involve the whole school class (about forty youngsters), whether it is considered a school class night (*erev kita*) or a birthday party (cf. discussion of the role of parties in the ritual construction of the school class as a social unit for Israeli children in the chapter on *gibush*). In what follows, I will briefly discuss two games that are generally felt to be the high point of these parties, and that manifest a concern with the control of personal information. One is a combination of two "kissing games" described by B. Sutton-Smith (1974): The "spin the bottle" game and the "truth or consequence" game; it combines the chance element of bottle spinning with the choice element of choosing between disclosure (the name of the boy or girl one is in love with) or the performance of a ludicrous or embarrassing act (often, but not necessarily, involving kissing or other heterosexual touching). This game is called "*emet o hova*," literally "truth or duty." The other game, less common than the first, is called "*vidui*," or "confession" and involves naming three opposite sex classmates: A loved one, a liked one and an admired one (labels considered to be in decreasing order of weightiness).

Both games provide a ludic context in which the concealment / revelation issue is thematized, but while in everyday life attention is mainly directed to the element of concealment in secretive exchanges, in the party context attention is directed to the moments of revelation as the pinnacle of the playful activity.

Since the game proceeds through individual selection, it does not create a completely insulated game world, but rather serves as an arena where attachments and fancies not acknowledged in everyday life are channeled and given expression. Although no one is officially excluded from playing, a child who is marginal within the group may find that he or she is never actually "paired up" and may subsequently choose to drop out, complaining that the game is boring. Given the participation structure of these games, as well as children's tendency to play them at the end of the party, not all children actually participate in them. Indeed, those who regularly participate in these games are sometimes felt to form a distinctive subgroup within the class, and have been referred to on several occasions as "the kids who stay up late and play *emet o hova* and games like this." Notably, *emet o hova* is lighter in tone than *vidui*. *Vidui* provides no slots for tension release in the form of funny performances and requires a higher verbal differentiation of feelings (the children's own version of sociometric nominations, in a sense).

The most interesting point about these games from the standpoint of this study is that they mark a play context in which self-oriented and other-oriented

secrets become inextricably fused. The excitement attending revelations in the game context has, of course, to do with the topic of love. From a social, not a romantic point of view, the act of naming the person one loves permits the playing child to have his or her preferences publicly ratified, and thus to exert control over the web of his or her public image and social relations. That this is indeed the case is indicated by the ways in which such disclosures are later incorporated into the stream of gossip about "who loves whom."

Observations of these party games suggest that the individual's social right to control his or her projected image and the disclosure of personal information is not unlimited. The group does not automatically ratify any statement made by playing members.

The voice of the group steps in first of all when a child asserts that he or she does not love anybody, or loves somebody "who isn't here," and therefore is not in a position to disclose. Such a claim can always be interpreted as an evasion, and a player who consistently makes such claims can be branded as a spoilsport. On some occasions, I observed instances in which a player's statement was not only considered evasive, but was rejected outright by his or her peers as insincere: "We know who you really love," they chimed in one time, brushing aside the child's own choice. Surprised by such incidents, I probed my informants about them, and found them singularly unperturbed and casual about the group's pressure on individual children: "Yes, they want him to say what they gossip."

These games, then, are double-edged affairs: They provide occasions for individual self-disclosure as well as occasions for the exercise of social control by peer group members who may interfere with the individual's attempt to define his or her interpersonal preferences. In the context of these games, the precarious balance of revelation and concealment is openly negotiated between the individual and the group: Self-disclosive playful acts feed into the system of gossip; gossip may become the measure of their validity. These games can, therefore, be considered as a way of charting and recharting the group's relational web through a relatively safe process of social negotiation. Thus, as playful counterparts of secretive exchanges in everyday life, these party games serve, *inter alia*, as meta-comments on secrets and their uses in children's social experience.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has sought to trace the social uses of secret-sharing among Israeli children. Following the children's lead in distinguishing between self-oriented, "serious" secrets and other-oriented, "small" secrets, I have identified the major uses children make of secretive exchanges in their social life, and some of their latent, group-related functions. Self-oriented secrets contribute both to a heightened sense of one's inner world and to the establishment of intimate

relations through the dramatization of interpersonal choice. The exchange of other-oriented secrets is a strategic move in the establishment or in the renegotiation of social hierarchies and social groupings, and comes very close to the concept of gossip. Despite their aforementioned intrapersonal functions, the keeping and sharing of secrets was mainly experienced and talked about as a social, group-oriented practice by the children I have consulted. Secret-sharing punctuates the allocation of both interactional and social attention more generally. Thus, a child who has a secret to share becomes—momentarily, at least—a social resource for the group as a whole, infusing new information as well as new social energies into the group's life. Whatever they are “about,” secrets are a valuable resource for group entertainment, and the child who chooses to share or withhold a secret enjoys a moment in the sun. This positively experienced social attention is countered by the dread of becoming the topic of secrets told “against” oneself. Children are extremely sensitive to this possibility and are quite adept at teasing each other with actual or imaginary exchanges of secrets spoken against an unfavored child. These essentially aggressive secretive exchanges function in such a way as to enhance social cohesion and exert social control, providing ever available contexts for the articulation of group norms. Whereas in all societies secret-sharing serves as a communicative bridge between the private and the public world, it seems to me that, in Israeli children's social world, it is the public life of secrets that assumes a special poignancy. Like so much in Israeli children's social life, and in the culture's life in general, it is the collective dimension of secrets as an interactional activity that takes precedence rather than their intrapersonal dimension. Trafficking in secrets can, therefore, be most meaningfully considered as part of the larger network of children's communicative patterns.

Secret-sharing as a social practice can be compared to the ritualized sharing of treats in *hibudim* and swapping collectible items in *hahlafot*. These patterns of exchange define culturally shared contexts in which relations of reciprocity are regulated in such a way as to give concrete form to various interpersonal and group bonds. They work in different ways, however: For example, while the sharing of treats serves to demarcate the outer boundaries of Israeli children's social worlds, operating within acquaintanceship relations in a generalized exchange mode, the sharing of privileged, personal information serves to delimit the intimate domain in a balanced exchange mode. Thus, children whose relationship is such that they exchange self-oriented secrets will not ordinarily treat each other with the token gift characteristic of ritualized sharing, but rather will divide their “goods” equally. Other-oriented secrets follow a generalized exchange mode in such a way as to signal inclusion and exclusion vis-à-vis group participation. The swapping in collectibles, like secret-sharing, involves a balanced exchange mode but defines impersonal, contractual (marketplace) relations rather than intimate, wholistic ones. Taken together,

these exchange patterns serve to give form and stability to Israeli children's social world. The expectation of reciprocity—whether generalized or balanced—that attends all these patterns induces a measure of continuity and coherence into children's interpersonal and group life. It is for this reason that they are felt to be not only part of, but also constitutive of, Israeli culture of childhood. At the same time, as I have tried to show, children's participation in their peer-group world prefigures some of the patterns of meaning and relationship that are central to the cultural world into which they grow, a world in which group experience serves as a major locus of personal identification and cultural authority, providing an arena both for the articulation and for the silencing of individual voices.

Chapter 10: *Sodot*:

1. Several of my students, who were teaching in grade schools at the time of the study, made a large number of such compositions available to me. I have chosen a few illustrative ones out of the close to three hundred (usually paragraph length) compositions I have read.

By Way of Conclusion

ANOTHER METAPHOR

One way to recapture the story-line of this book is to say that it starts out by exploring the meanings and uses of *gibush* as a “key symbol” in contemporary Israeli culture, and proceeds to trace a variety of ritualized communicative practices and contexts in which the cultural meanings associated with *gibush* play a role. It is in and through these largely mundane, taken-for-granted practices that the central cultural semantics of cohesion is sustained, whether it is wholeheartedly reaffirmed or subtly renegotiated. By exploring the rhetoric of cohesion associated with the notion of *gibush*, I have highlighted the collective orientation that is such a well-recognized mark of Israeli culture. By considering the contours of its metaphorical underpinnings I have been able to address some of the implications of this culturally interpreted communal focus.

Having taken the reader through this multifaceted ethnographic journey into the workings of some “cultural communication” forms and practices in contemporary Israel, let me reiterate some of the threads that link these various probings into a coherent, yet essentially open-ended account. As noted, the communal focus runs through each of the foregoing chapters, but the shape and tenor it is given are very different in each one of them. The participation in a communal practice may be half-acknowledged, as in the case of “gripping rituals,” or conscious and intentional, as in the case of “fire rituals.” It may be diffusely orchestrated as in the case of “familial picnics in military zones,” or it may be directly and presistently manipulated as in some “radio discourses for children.” Finally, it may be defined and delimited by culturally coded communication patterns like the ones explored in the chapters dealing with Israeli peer-group culture. It is these kinds of patterns and the experiences they anchor that make up the flavor of an “Israeli childhood” as lived by children and as constituting a communally shared memory for adults.

My attentiveness to the ritual dimensions of communication practices is clearly in line with the substantive focus on the communal. The various chapters address ritualization at the level of speech modes, such as gripping; at the level of public occasions, such as fire rituals, at the level of privatized encounters, such as family picnics, at the level of mass-mediated occasions, such as radio discourses; and in the analysis of both conflictual and cooperative exchanges within children’s peer-group culture. In each of the chapters, it was the double weight of ritualized form and communal function that has motivated and

anchored the particular study. While attention to communicative forms is a necessary, very fruitful starting point for the kind of inquiry I have engaged in, I hope my reference to "forms" has not blurred the processual orientation I have tried to maintain throughout this book. I have tried to maintain a focus on griping sessions as interactional processes, not as assemblages of stylistic features. I have attended to the phenomenology of reading fire inscriptions as they are embedded within cultural events rather than viewing fire inscriptions as isolated cultural products. I have considered familial picnicking as a social occasion, not as a mere reflection of institutional social arrangements, and so on. Indeed, our language for capturing cultural processes, particularly those fluid preformations R. Williams (1977) has called "structures of feeling," is highly limited and quite slippery.

Thus, in my research, I have both echoed and utilized my informants' efforts at representing and understanding their own culture. I offer these pages as the best I could do by way of reconstructing their world as I perceived and experienced it from the vantage point of my liminal ethnographic corner. The analogy, however, works both ways: While the study of ritual reveals the "human seriousness of play," in Turner's (1982) delightful phrase, I believe ethnography celebrates the human playfulness of work. In ritual, as in ethnography, the serious and the playful merge, joining to drown the gnawing suspicion that all we have been able to say to ourselves and to others both "is and is not."

Let me therefore turn to the language of metaphors once again, recalling my discussion of C. Geertz's spider-web and J. Clifford's collage metaphors in the introductory chapter. As I think of my movement between these two metaphors for culture and ethnography, I am tempted to add yet another metaphor to the anthropological pool, my own play on play. The image that conjures itself before me is the image of a summer beach, that liminal world between land and water to which we make our weekly pilgrimage with secular devotion. As we turn onto the unpaved road that leads to the beach, as the fresh, salty air hits our faces and the hum of the Tel Aviv-Haifa highway recedes into the background, we know we have crossed a threshold. To some of us, the beach is the delight of open land stretched before us, offering itself as ground for our games and play. To some it is the delight of open sea, luring us with its promise of a cool embrace. To some, however, it is the delight of land and water intermingled. The latter, the ethnographer types, can be seen scattered along the narrow stretch of land where the tips of the waves periodically touch, gently reviving the drying sand with another splash of life. There they sit, immersed in playful seriousness, constructing their wet-sand castles: the soothing touch of the cool sand; the purposeful hunt for shells and glittering "found objects"; the urge to fix a moment of sand and water in a form as mundane and as spectacular as any castle in the sand can hope to be.

And we know that next time when we come to the beach (the humming of the Tel Aviv-Haifa highway far behind us), our eyes will be searching for the castle so painstakingly wrought out of sand and seashells. At times we will pretend we have found traces of it in that belt of dry-wet sand, forever shifting, forever negotiating its boundaries with the fluctuating tide. But mostly we will not, finding both strength and comfort in the voice of the poet, who concludes his own quest for form, his own “raid on the inarticulate” with a note of sober resignation:

But perhaps neither gain nor loss. For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business. (T.S. Eliot, *East Coker, Four Quartets*)

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Tamar Katriel is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, University of Haifa, Israel. She is the author of *Talking Straight: 'Dugri' Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture*.

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