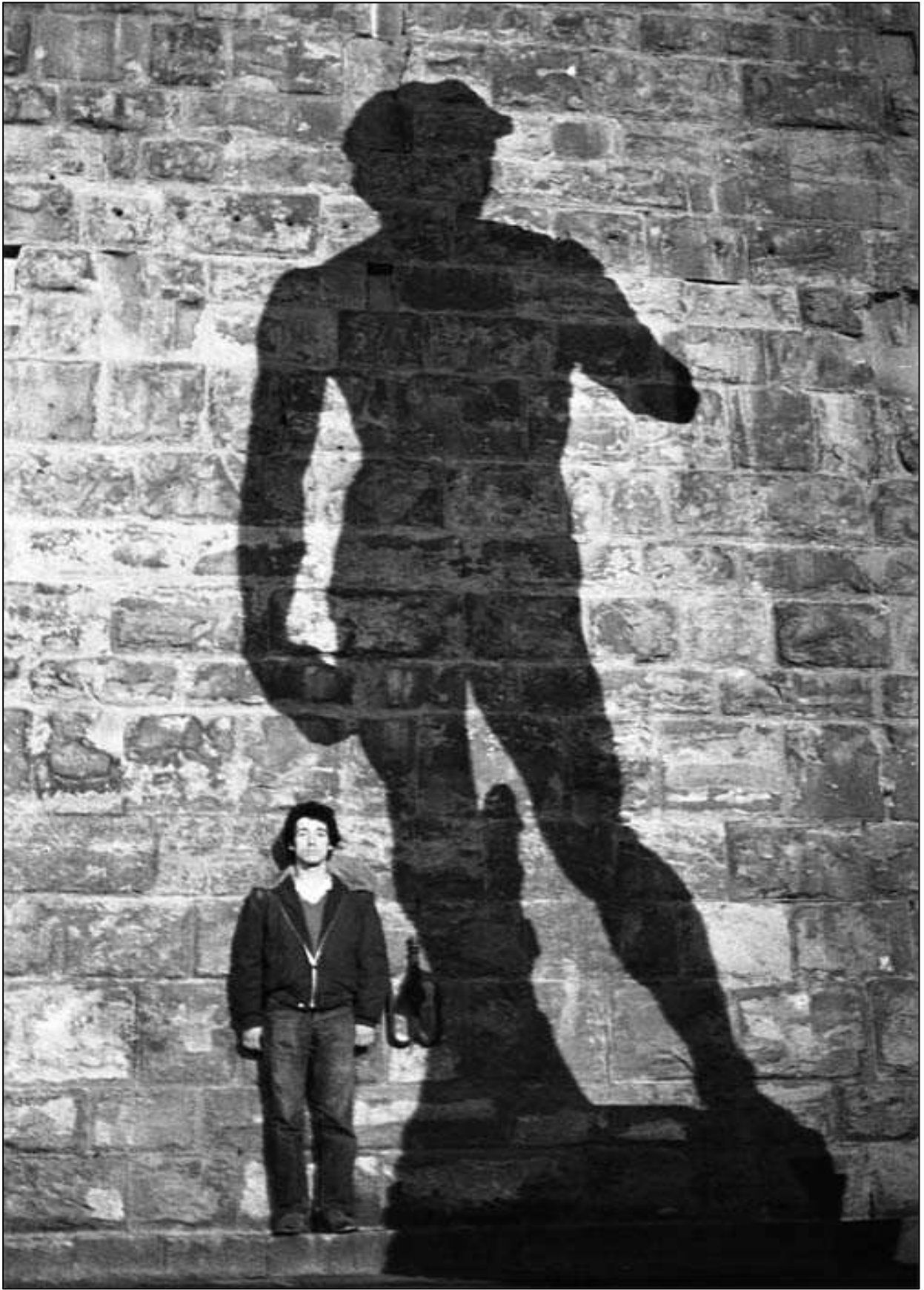


## Chapter Three

### **When David Get Lost: Is it Still Good to Die for the Country?**



### 3.1 The 1973 Yom Kippur War and the Political *Mahapach* Overturn of the Seventies

...Why they never told us that is going to be a bloody battle?

Why they left us alone those who were sitting in the upper floors<sup>1</sup>?...

(from *The Song of David*, poem composed by a soldier on the Budapest outpost on the Suez Canal, 1973)

#### *From the post-1967 Euphoria to the 1973 Hysteria*

Unlike the relatively stable cease-fire agreements which followed the War of Independence and the 1956 Sinai Campaign, the 1967 Six Day War was followed by Egypt's war of Attrition against Israel (1967-1970). This war consisted of sporadic yet constant military clashes along the cease-fire border by the Suez Canal, as well as guerrilla and terrorist activity on behalf of the different Palestinian organizations, which operated mainly from Jordan and the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The intermittent military and guerrilla activities continued until the next major war in October 1973, which is referred to in Israel as the Yom Kippur War,<sup>2</sup> for the Jewish Day of Atonement. With the 1973 war, Israel was strategically surprised by a coordinated attack by Egypt and Syria from north and south. Egyptian and Syrian forces crossed ceasefire lines to enter the Israeli-held Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights respectively, which had been



Fig. 3.1 Territories occupied by Israel after 1967 Six Day War.

<sup>1</sup>In the original version in Hebrew: מדוע לא אמרו לנו שכאן יהיה קרב דמים? מדוע נטשונו אלה שישבו בחלונות הגבוהים?

<sup>2</sup>The Yom Kippur War (in Hebrew מלחמת יום כיפור, *Milhemet Yom Kipur*) is also known as the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the Fourth Arab-Israeli War, October War or Ramadan War, because the war coincided that year with the Muslim month of Ramadan.

captured and occupied since the 1967 Six Day War (fig.3.1). The reason for choosing the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur to stage a surprise attack on Israel was that on this specific holiday the country comes to a complete standstill. Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar; both religious, observant Jews and most of the secular majority fast, abstain from use of fire, electricity, engines, communications, etc., and all road traffic ceases. Many soldiers also go home from military facilities for the holiday, and Israel is more vulnerable with much of its military on leave.

The war began on October 6 with a massive and successful Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal during the first three days. The Syrians coordinated their attack on the Golan Heights to coincide with the Egyptian offensive and initially made threatening gains against the greatly outnumbered defenders. Within a week, Israel recovered and launched a four-day counter-offensive, driving deep into Syria. To relieve this pressure, the Egyptians went back on the offensive, but were decisively defeated. The Israelis then counterattacked at the seam between two Egyptian battalions, crossed the Suez Canal, and advanced southward and westward in over a week of heavy fighting. An October 22 United Nation brokered ceasefire quickly unraveled, with each side blaming the other for the breach. By October 24, the Israelis had improved their positions considerably and had completed their encirclement of Egypt's Third Army.

This development led to tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. As a result, a second ceasefire was imposed cooperatively on October 25 to end the war. Although the 1973 war was won by Israel, which re-established its pre-1973 cease-fire borders, the price paid in human lives was unprecedented for Israeli society, with heavy casualties on both sides.

More than 2.500 were killed in action and around 8.000 soldiers were wounded. According to then Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, nearly half of these were shot down during the first three days of the war (Herzog, 1975, p. 260).

Nonetheless, the 1973 war called into question Israeli military superiority in the region and reemphasized the Israeli state's vulnerability. In fact, despite impressive operational and tactical achievements on the battlefield, the war effectively ended Israel's sense of invincibility and complacency. Until the Yom Kippur War, the Israeli strategy was, for the most part, based on the precept that if war was imminent, Israel would launch a pre-emptive strike. Therefore, it was assumed that Israel's intelligence services would give about 48 hours notice prior to an Arab attack in the worst case scenario.

According to the American historian and journalist Abraham Rabinovich, when Prime Minister Golda Meir, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and the IDF Chief of Staff David Elazar met at 8:05 a.m. on the morning of Yom Kippur, six hours before the war began, Dayan opened the meeting by arguing that war was not a certainty. Elazar then presented his argument in favor of a pre-emptive attack and when the meeting finished at 10:15 a.m., Golda Meir, having learned of possibility of the impending attack, made the controversial decision not to launch a pre-emptive strike (Rabinovich, 2004, p.48).

After the Yom Kippur War, the term *mekhdal* (מְחֵדָל), literally “failure”, “omission” in Hebrew, became the term which is used to refer to the Yom Kippur War “fiasco”.

This is how Motti Ashkenazi, a reserve captain in the IDF who commanded Fort Budapest, an Israeli fortification on the Suez Canal and the only position along the Bar Lev Line that did not fall to the Egyptians during the war, described the Yom Kippur War, 30 years later:

“The battle for the Budapest outpost on the Suez Canal was a microcosm of the entire Yom Kippur War. The sector commanders, who should have known what was coming, were thrust unprepared into the war. Consequently, the battles were fought sloppily, with a lack of knowledge of the field, without the proper organization and integration of forces, and in a panic bordering on hysteria. What saved the day was the high motivation of the junior officers and ordinary warriors, who paid a very high and unnecessary price in blood in a series of battles whose real contribution to the outcome of the war was marginal. [...] I couldn't believe how stupid the IDF plans to protect the Bar Lev line was. The preparations were irrelevant to the threat. To call the Suez Canal a fortified obstacle was a joke: 14 outposts along a waterline over 160 kilometers long; fewer than 400 infantry soldiers; inferior to the Egyptian army in both arms and equipment. The IDF plan was a recipe for disaster from the moment the war was launched” (Ashkenazi, Jerusalem Post, October 2003).

On March 30 2011 I had the opportunity to visit Ashkenazi in his house in Jerusalem. During the interview he described the Yom Kippur War *mekhdal* as a direct consequence of the Six Day War *euphoria*: “They knew perfectly what was going on, but they were in such a kind of euphoria after the Six Day War that they thought to handle the war in even less than six days. They didn't want to realize that the situation in Middle East was changing, a lot. As von Clausewitz said: 'war is not merely a political act, but also a political instrument, a continuation of political relations'. Everyone knew that Sadat<sup>3</sup> couldn't wait anymore to attack Israel, because

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<sup>3</sup>Muhammad Anwar Al Sadat was the third President of Egypt, serving from October 15 1970 until his assassination by fundamentalist army officers on October 6 1981. He led the Yom Kippur War of 1973 against Israel, making him

even the Egyptian students were protesting in the street in Cairo, and all of us saw this! So everyone knew that we were going to the battlefield, but no one could believe in the stupidity of the government in their strategic way, therefore at end of the war, instead of finding ourselves in a better position, we were even in a worse position than before the war”.

*From the Mekhdal to the Mahapach: the Overturn of a Split Society*

Motti Ashkenazi became famous after being released from the reserve in February 1974. He was so outraged by the conduct of the Israeli leadership before and during the war that he began protesting in front of the Prime Minister's office. Initially alone, Ashkenazi's protest soon spread and achieved widespread popular support: tens of thousands of reserve soldiers and civilians who



Fig. 3.2. Motti Ashkenazi leading the protest on February 17, 1974. Picture taken by David Rubinger

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a hero in Egypt and, for a time, throughout the Arab World. Afterwards he engaged in negotiations with Israel, culminating in the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. This won him the Nobel Peace Prize but also made him unpopular among some Arabs, resulting in a temporary suspension of Egypt's membership in the Arab League, and eventually his assassination.

came straight from the front started calling for the resignation of the government (fig.3.2).

Moshe Dayan and others underestimated him. After a few months, however, growing public pressure forced Golda Meir's government to resign. On April 11 1974, his protest eventually led to the demise of the *Mapai* Labor Party, which had governed the country for the first 29 years of Israel's statehood.

As Ashkenazi explained in his article published in *Haaretz* in June 1974, “The war can be seen as an outstanding characteristic of Israeli society in its entirety, as well as a mirror of its state affairs. [...] We find ourselves in the process of building a leadership that is the product of the environment and the era in which we live today, and in which we shall be living in the immediate future” (Ashkenazi, in Rabinovich, 2008, pp.284-285).

Yitzhak Rabin succeeded Golda Meir's government on 3 June 1974, advantaged in the contest to succeed her because he was in no way associated with the blunders of the Yom Kippur War.

However, as Kimmerling argues, different political groups deduced different “lessons” from the 1973 War. From one angle, the logical conclusion of the war was the necessity of peace and readiness to pay territorial prices for such peace. The interpretation of the situation from the other side of the political spectrum was that there is no chance of a Jewish policy being accepted in the region, and that only its military and political might, including control of as much territory as possible, can ensure its very existence (Kimmerling, 2001, p.47).

The Yom Kippur war and the type of shock of recognition it generated after the post-1967 euphoria, was one of the cardinal factors leading to the downfall of the *Mapai* Labour party, and the rise to power of the right-wing *Likud* party in the 1977 elections.

A pair of scandals, in fact, hamstrung Rabin's government, and he was forced to step down in 1977. The right-wing *Likud* party, under the prime minister ship of Menachem Begin, won the elections that followed. This *mahapach* (מַהְפָּךְ), literally “changeover”, marked a historic change in the Israeli political landscape: for the first time since Israel's founding, a coalition not led by the Labor Party was in control of the government.

The consequences of the *mahapach* influenced not only political but also national identity in Israel, which suddenly could not see herself as David anymore and began to ask to itself, confuting Trumpeldor's motto, if was it still good to die for the country.

Culture soon underwent a far-reaching mutation. This went hand in hand with the socio-economic detachment from the egalitarian tendencies of the past, and the exposure of Israeli society to the globalization process and the international capitalist market game.

In 1977, as Miron argues, the narrative confronted its most dire examination in Yaakov Shabtai's quintessential novel *Past Continuous*.<sup>4</sup> Shabtai depicted a whole ilk of banner waving social-Zionists in the style of Ben Gurion through a dense and immense description. He ruthlessly examined moral and human degradation, the ever-growing gap between the language he uses, which turned into the grandiloquent, devoid of any significance, and the deeds he does: between the *halutzim*'s past to the Israeli corrupted bourgeois present (Miron, 2006, pp.295-296).

In the next section I will analyze how this overturn led to deep change in the representation of the Israeli soldier, as a different David, vulnerable and confused, looking for a new (not necessarily) national identity.

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<sup>4</sup> In Hebrew *Zikhron Devarim* (זכרון דברים) literary means "Remembrance of Things" but, it is also a word game between "memorandum" and the word *zikhron* (זכרון), "memory".



### 3.2 The Aesthetic of *Mekhdal* and the End of the Collective Hangover

What is the sound that I hear?  
The sound of the *shofar* and the sound of drums  
If only all that we ask for would be  
If only among all these a prayer  
from my mouth would also be heard  
If only all that we ask for would be ...<sup>5</sup>  
(*Lu Yehi*, Naomi Shemer, 1973)

The 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the protest wave which followed it, sharpened the Israeli political atmosphere even further, placing moral issues and identity questions regarding the affinity of Israelis to place and existential environment at the core of intellectual discussion.

As Zalmona argues, the artist's awareness of his political obligation, within the framework of his creative work, which was deeply embedded in Europe and the United States following their respective student rebellions, also became characteristic of some Israeli artists, most of whom belonged to the left-wing (Zalmona, 2006, p.250).

The motive of sacrifice started to become central in the post-1967 works of certain prominent Israeli artists, as an expression of identity involving national and personal despair which they conveyed by means of mythological metaphors of the irrationality of human fate.

In 1967, Yigal Tumarkin created his sculpture *He Walked Through the Fields* (fig.3.3), a complex assemblage built of casts of the artist's body in black bronze combined with other metal items. Tumarkin's work represents a man with no hands wearing army shoes. His face is torn, he is painted in army khaki and red pigment, and his belly is wide open, exposing weapons and heavy cannon ammunition. The soldier's tongue is sticking out grotesquely, his trousers are

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<sup>5</sup> In Hebrew:

מה קול ענות אני שומע  
קול שופר וקול תופים  
כל שנבקש לו יהי  
לו תישמע בתוך כל אלה  
גם תפילה אחת מפני  
כל שנבקש לו יהי

pulled down to his feet, and his penis droops, as if signifying national castration. As the Israeli scholar of Art History Nissim Gal describes, this work represents a radical reaction to the ethos of the 1948 generation with which Tumarkin dealt in several of his works (Gal, 2009).

The sculpture's title, in fact, is taken from Moshe Shamir's novel, *He Walked Through the Fields* (1947). While the hero of the novel is a foundational figure in the construction of the image of the mythical Israeli *sabra*, this sculpture is a reaction to the 1967 Six Day War, and more accurately to the euphoric atmosphere of victory prevalent at that time. In Tumarkin's works the body of the soldiers, built by army materials, paradoxically looks fragile for the first time, already showing the presage of the vulnerability of Israel and of the Israeli army.

The body, suppressed by the abstract discourse of early Israeli art, returned to center stage in the 1970s.

After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, several artists positioned the body at the heart of their artistic activity.

Art became more political and critical in its relation to society: borders, the holiness of the land, and the issue of Israeli national identity were urgent questions during these years.



Fig. 3.3 *He Walked Through the Fields*, Yigal Tumarkin, 1967

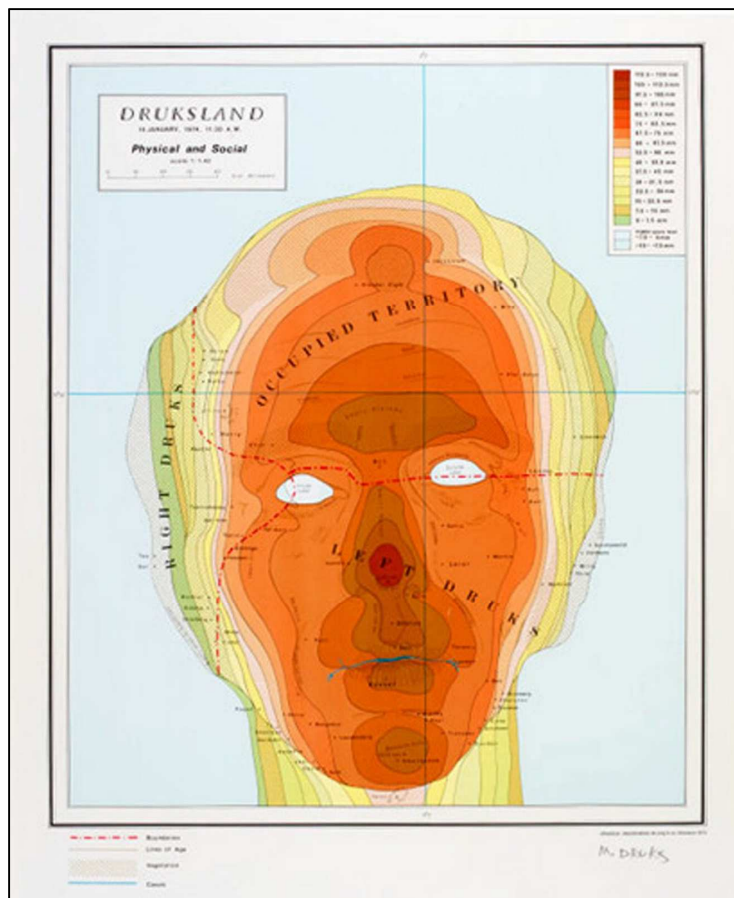


Fig.3.4 *Druksland – Physical and Social* 15 January 1974, 11.30 am, Michael Druks, 1974

Michael Druks' 1974 work *Druksland – Physical and Social* 15 January 1974, 11.30am (fig.3.4), represents his self-portrait/map in which he explored personal and political identity using the idiom of mapping as metaphor of his particular relation with borders and boundaries, and their social and political implications, which he started to explore in his work of 1972 *Hidings* (fig.3.5), hiding the TV screening of the faces of Moshe Dayan and Golda Meir as members of the Israeli government, and Henry Kissinger, also involved in Israeli politics.

To quote McLuhan's famous phrase, Druks was the first artist to

use the *medium* of TV as *message* in Israeli art. Also the use of black and white, both in TV screening and in Druks' work, represents the contrast between the "fictional" world of media and the colorful and dramatic "reality" of the country.

The relation between reality and representation, nation and individual was also explored in the 1974 work *Flag* (fig.3.6), a performance in which the artist, Efrat Natan, is lying on the ground in a walking position, holding a white flag in her hands that covers her face. In this kind of performance the use of the "anonymous" flag as *media* object has a double *message*: the "false" world, in which the flag is blowing in the wind and covering the head, represents the "blindness" of ideology, juxtaposed with the "real" world, where a figure lies on the floor covered with cloth, like the dead body of a soldier. As woman, the body of the artist represents also the female perspective of the war: the mimesis of the body of the mother(land) into the body of her children, sacrificed for the country.

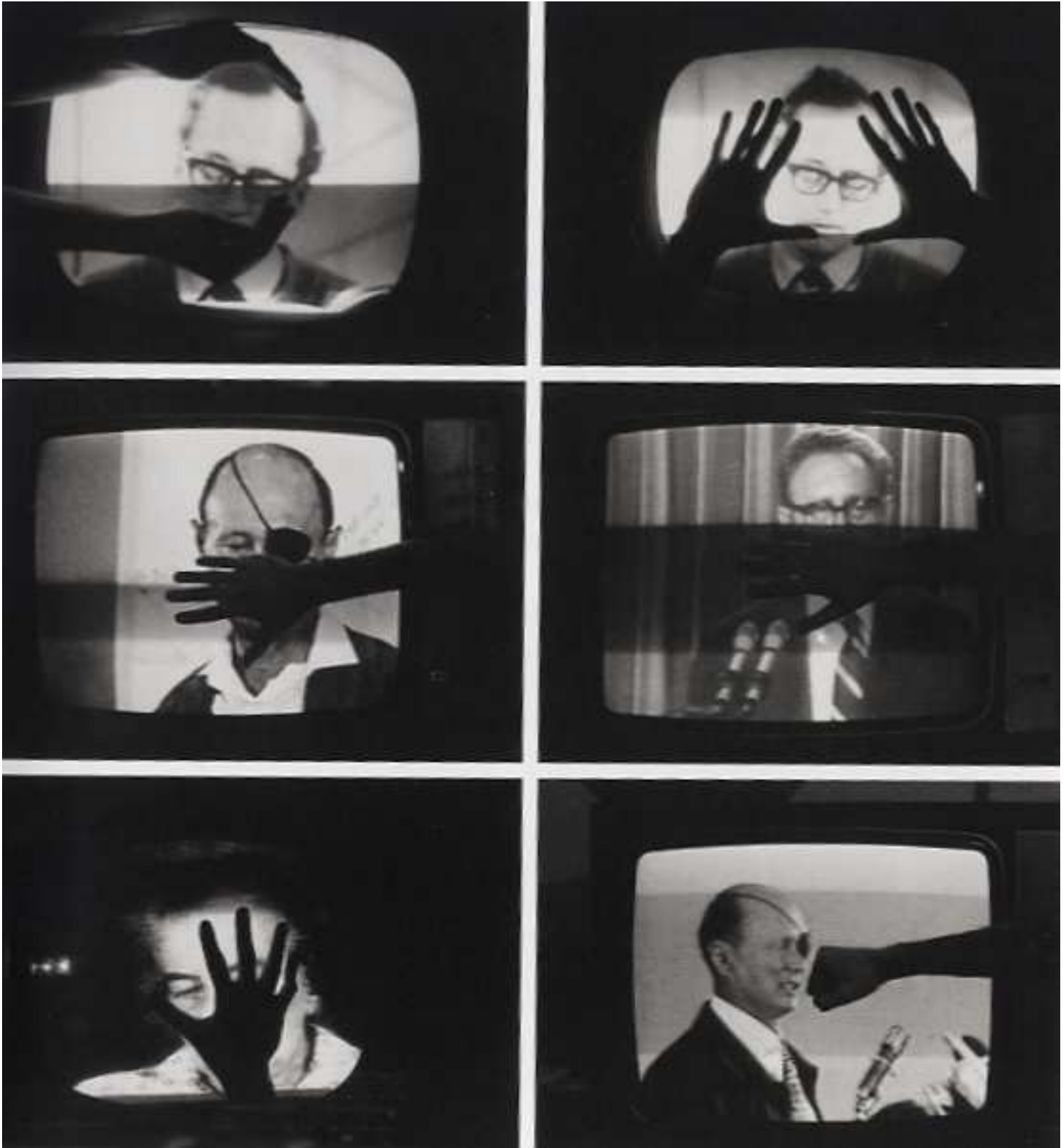


Fig. 3.5 *Hidings*, Michael Druks, 1972

After the Yom Kippur War, and the end of the collective hangover caused by the post-Six Day War euphoria, Israeli artists started to question if it was still “good to die for the country”.

Who is David now? David Ginton’s work *David and I* (fig.3.6) was made just a few months after the Yom Kippur War. The work represents the portrait of the artist in the shadow of Michelangelo’s statue at Piazza della Signoria in Firenze.

The colossal shadow of the statue presence of David contrasts with the little figure of Ginton, not only physically, but also symbolically, because the myth of King David has become just a shadow in the context of the post-Yom Kippur War reality.

Nonetheless, just through the shadow-game, the artist even goes so far as to desecrate the myth of David with the dialectic of “rifle and gun” that is characteristic of the machos’ army slang<sup>6</sup>.

Several Biblical myths were shattered in the Yom Kippur War when many combatants were left to die on the battlefield.



Fig. 3.6 *David and I*, David Ginton, 1973

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<sup>6</sup> As Richard Allen Burns argued in his article *This is my Rifle, This is my Gun...: Gunlore in the Military* the ethos associated with the military and attitudes toward sex, power and guns, referring to the rifle as something more than a weapon, enters oral tradition and even find their way into popular culture: “we find this phrase “This is my rifle, this is my gun. This is for shooting, this is for fun” dating back to at least early 1942, appearing in Leon Uris’ 1953 bestseller *Battle Cry*, a book whose setting begins in Marine Corps boot camp, although I’m sure the expression entered oral tradition long before 1942. As folklorist Carol Burke observed (Burke 1989, 427), Stanley Kubrick employed it in *Full Metal Jacket*, and the phrase appears elsewhere as well” (Allen Burns, 2003).



If the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis, 22, 2-13) was one of the most relevant models for Israeli society, in order to sanctify the patriotic death of soldiers for the homeland, in the 1973 performance *The Binding of Isaac* (fig.3.7), Motti Mizrachi refers to the Biblical myth becoming



Fig. 3.7 *The Binding of Isaac*, Motti Mizrachi, 1973 (performance)

demystified in the context of the meaningless sacrifice of soldiers during the Yom Kippur War. Binding his body as in the biblical ritual, the artist also tries to represent the body of the nation and the collective anxieties related with the Yom Kippur War: the pain of his body became a metaphor of the country's pain.

According to Gal, the body came to be the anchor of meaning, a vehicle with which to resist intra-aesthetic procedures and to change gendered and political conventions. Artists in 1970s Israel also continued formal investigations of the artistic object. These creative experiments not only broadened the limits of various media in art but also paved the way for the institutional criticism of the 1970s (Gal, 2009).

What came to be known as 'the rebellion' in the Bezalel Academy. Radical teachers in the academy decided to abandon the language of painting and sculpture in favor of alternative, conceptual-material art. The artistic uprising failed at Bezalel, and teachers such as Moshe Gershuni, among others, were dismissed.

Gershuni worked at Bezalel from 1972 to 1977,

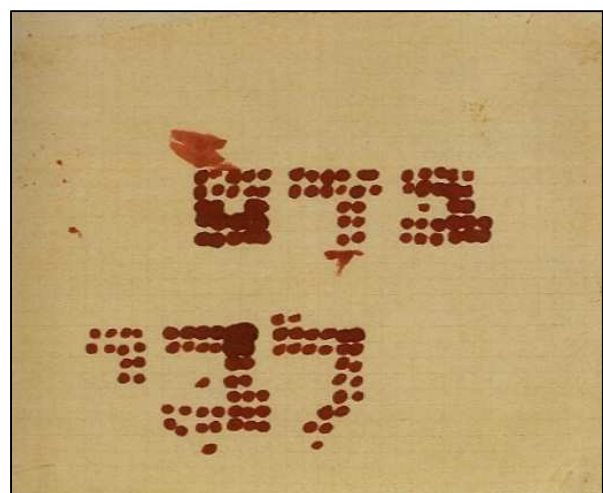


Fig. 3.8 *With the Blood of My Heart*, Moshe Gershuni, 1977

the year of the *mahapach*. This is also the year of his work *With the Blood of My Heart* (fig.3.8), written in Hebrew with red ink, as if he was using his own blood in order to describe his pain.

In Gershuni's soldiers series, the blood-red, highly expressive paintings of Gershuni reveal a disgorging process of biographical self-destruction and insanity parallel to the



Fig.3.9 *I'm a Soldier*, Moshe Gershuni, 1980



Fig.3.10 *We all are Soldiers*, Moshe Gershuni, 1980

(fig.3.11) Gershuni emphasizes the male figures' features as sexual and "female", such as bold lips.

As Zalmona points out, other components of identity that dictated the contours of the Israeli self-image are becoming ever weaker until they evaporate. The macho ritual of masculinity and strength, which was, as we have seen, an important and predominant feature of the Israeli identity right from the beginning, starts losing its magic. The *Sabra* is depicted as a war casualty or as a joke, and the symbol of the clear identity is becoming more and more complex (Zalmona, 2006, p.252).

After the Yom Kippur War, for the first time in the history of Israel and of the Israeli army prestigious soldiers such as Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon appear

insanity and catastrophe of the reality itself. The Hebrew letters, as in remnants of burned scrolls, are combined to form quotes from old prayers, national hymns with strophes like obsessive laments blessing the beloved soldier in his departure to war: "I am a soldier" (fig.3.9); "We are all soldiers" (fig. 3.10). In *Beautiful Soldier*



Fig.3.11 *Beautiful Soldier*, Moshe Gershuni, 1980

wounded (fig. 3.12). This not only showed the vulnerability of the soldiers but also a new kind of representation of Zionist masculinity.

Before the Yom Kippur War, the dead body of the *Sabra* pioneer was never visualized in Zionist imagery: the ideal Zionist body was the dead pioneer's soldier body, a body sacrificed for national ideology, in which private death was canceled and incorporated into the national revival process.

As Yosef argues, by eliding the representation of the materiality of death, Zionist cinema subjected the pioneer's dead body to the national collective and produced it as an oxymoronic metaphor of the "living-dead". In the film *This is the Land*, a pioneer who collapses in the field due to hard work is merged into the national earth, and thus into the national discourse, by a cinematic dissolve. Referring to Christian Metz, the Israeli scholar of cinema studies Yosef highlights that the dissolve suits the figure of the national "living-dead" perfectly (Yosef, 2004, p.45), because the dissolve itself, as Metz observed, "is a dying figure, a figure which is dying right from the start. [...]. Two images go to meet one another, but they go backwards, turning their backs on each other (Metz, 1982, p.277).

In the same way, in the context of the heroic-nationalistic genre, when the new Israeli fighter



Fig. 3.12 *Crossing the Suez Canal*, Micha Bar Am, 1973



replaced the pioneer as the national figure of the “living-dead”, like in *He walked through the fields*, protagonist’s death is not shown. Instead of an image of his dead body, the film freezes the frame of Uri’s surprised face, a second before he is shot. According to Yosef, the cinematic freeze-frame becomes a metonymic signifier of the threshold between life and death, establishing the national myth of the “living-dead” (Yosef, 2004, p.50).

This kind of national myth of the “living-dead” was shattered in the Yom Kippur War when many combatants were left to die on the battlefield.

The Independence War of 1948 and Six Day War of 1967, with Israel’s swift military victory soon led to a series of films on the subject. The 1973 Yom Kippur War, however, was never directly addressed cinematically until after the political overturn in 1977.

As Kronish argues, the heroes of the post-1973 films were no longer nationalist or superhero stereotypes, but human beings, with real worries. Their films no longer dealt with Israeli society as a collective whole, but with individuals within that society (Kronish, 1996, p. 89).

In the next and last part of this chapter I will analyze how the cinematic representation of the Israeli soldier as a hero changed to the “civilian” anti-hero, as a David who has lost his national identity, and is looking for a new, “universal” identity.

### 3.3 Ethnography of the the *New Sensibility* in the Cinema of the Seventies

Something changed during the Yom Kippur War. It was the first war that broke this façade for many individuals in the army. They got caught with their pants down and one is not accepted as a man without his pants, All of a sudden they discovered in themselves sensitivities and sensibilities which nobody suspected existed. I mean nobody in our society (Judd Neeman interviewee by Patricia Erens, *Film Comment*, 16:1, 1980).

#### *The 1970s New Israeli Wave and the Elision of the Yom Kippur War*

Between the 1960s and 1970s Israeli filmmakers, much like many other new wave movements such as French *Nouvelle Vague*, Italian Neorealism and New German cinema, lacked a clear-cut political orientation.

According to Shohat, “the principle of individualism reigned supreme”. The film hermetic discourse tended to foreground the subjective world of individual experience. All that was “provincial”, i.e., Israeli, was repressed as part of a process of complete assimilation to the “universal”, i.e. the West. The transition from heroic-nationalist films to personal cinema formed part of a general *Sabra* fatigue with explicit ideology. Nonetheless, in this period, the world “ideology” acquired negative connotations and became virtually a derogatory term. As Shohat puts it, “it was a political act to be apolitical, because you did not manifest bombastic Zionism and therefore you did the right thing. The importance of personal cinema, at the same time, consisted in its resistance against pressure to make propagandistic cinema along with its desire to experiment with film language” (Shohat, 1987, pp.197-204).

In the 1960s and 1970s, in fact, under the influence of the new European waves, Israeli filmmakers adopted a similar mode of cinema. Film critics called the new cinema the “new Israeli wave”, a designation that expressed the need of the cultural elite to trace within the local artistic cinema an affiliation with European Cinema. Judd Neeman prefers a title that is less committed to European cinema and attests to the local change of values: the *New Sensibility* cinema (Neeman, 1999, pp.100, 111).

According to Neeman, *New sensibility* films were characterized by low-budget production, black and white film, shoots done on location using live urban scenery, the use of vernacular language and slang, existential malaise and so on (Neeman,2001, p.229).

As Ben Shaul argues, in Israel both popular film and artistic stylized films were two apparently contradictory trends that are, however, an isomorphic implementation of the same liberal autonomy myth (Ben Shaul, 1997, p.124).

Thus, in the post-Yom Kippur War period, the two cinema genres, the popular cinematic cinema and the *New Sensibility*, represented a unified cinematic phenomenon that rejected both the ideological and the aesthetic values of Zionism Realism.

As Neeman puts it: “the unwritten manifesto of those films focused on to dissociate Israeli cinema from politician engagement and subordination to the Zionist master-narrative” (Neeman, 1999, p. 113).

I will attempt to contextualize the films within the 1970s, especially within the Israel of the post-1973 war period and the change of power from the thirty-year reign of *Maapach* (Labor Party alignment) to the rise of *Likud* in 1977.

During the mid 1970s the vulnerability and depression that accompanied the tragic loss of life during the Yom Kippur War led many Israelis to rethink traditional heroic values. As Kronish argues, the IDF were no longer considered sacrosanct and above criticism; nor was it still the case that a young man would serve in the army without first examining and questioning his own commitment to that service (Kronish, 1996, p. 105).

According to Shohat, in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War many films discarded the conventional narrative closure typical of the earlier “heroic nationalistic” films in favour of ambiguous, open-ended structures, as if classical narrative forms were incapable of “containing” the explosive ideological complexities of the altered perception of Israeli reality (Shohat, 1987, p.225).

One of the best examples in this sense is the Uri Zohar movie of 1974 *Big Eyes* (*Eynaim G'dolot*, 3.13), a cinematic metaphor of the post-*mekdhal* period.

Taken from the script of Yaakov Shabtai, just a few years



Fig.3.13 Poster of *Big Eyes*, Uri Zohar, 1974

before his 1977 masterpiece *Past Continuous*, the movie represents the too “big eyes<sup>7</sup>” of the country, still euphoric after the Six Day War “hangover”, and not able to understand the vulnerability of the State and the Israeli society.

If in *Every Bastard is King* Zohar’s narrative was still the heroic-nationalist one, and all the main characters were the typical *Sabra* heroes, in this movie, the main characters of the *Sabra*, Benny Furman, played by Uri Zohar himself, starts to turn into an anti-hero.

Benny, in fact, is a Tel Aviv basketball coach, usually successful in juggling his many sexual affairs with the home life he shares with his wife and two children.

His best friend, the team’s star player, played by the Israeli pop star Arik Einstein<sup>8</sup>, warns him about playing around with the lives of others and throwing away what he’s got.

Through the metaphor of the basketball match Zohar portrays two very different male friends and characters: the married man in conflict over remaining faithful to his wife, and the bachelor who desires to be a family man.

The anti-hero, Benny, is used to manipulating his players, his friends, his wife and his mistresses when, suddenly, everything starts to fall apart for him.

When he accuses his best friend of being involved with one of his mistresses and his wife discovers his many infidelities, his lifestyle begins to crumble, and he begins to realize how he is humiliating and manipulating the people around him.

As Kronish argues, the hero, who previously has shown no emotional involvement with women but has used them as a kind of adolescent achievement, shows some development and he begins to realize things about himself (Kronish, 2003, p.36).

Throughout the movie, the fight for winning the basketball match becomes a mirror reflecting the fight for love, jealousy and the ambivalence in human relationships.

In this sense, the basketball court becomes the “border” of the fight not only for the individual but also for national freedom. Meanwhile the players of Benny’s team are clearly shot, as is they were in uniform, it is almost impossible to recognize the faces and even the uniform of the other team, which is represented as just an ‘Other’ to fight, by definition.

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<sup>7</sup> The idiomatic expression *einaim gdolot* (עיניים גדולות), in Hebrew literally “big eyes”, is usually referred to people with a great “appetite”, also used in a sexual context.

<sup>8</sup> Arik (Arieh) Einstein, born in Tel Aviv in 1939, is one of the most famous Israeli singer-songwriters. Einstein's influence has been so profound that virtually all Israeli pop music can be traced back to musical projects in which he participated. He managed to infuse the new styles of rock and pop with a deep Israeli flavor. He dominated the nascent Israeli Bohemia scene along with Uri Zohar, who was his best friend.

The “big eyes” of Benny also represent in this sense the “big eyes” of Israeli society, almost “blind” because of the post-Six Day War euphoria and not able to look into the eyes of the “enemy”.

The vulnerability of the country after the *mekdhal* of the Yom Kippur War is also represented as part of the *ethnoscape*, as we can see from the graffiti on the streets of Tel Aviv, recalling the need for “breaking the myth”<sup>9</sup>.

Actually, the *ethnoscape* of Tel Aviv itself, as “sin city” in the Holy Land, becomes one of the main characters in all of Uri Zohar’s movies and in the *New Sensibility* in general.

In particular, Big Eyes is the second film of Zohar’s “trilogy”, the first movie of which is *Peeping Toms* (*Metzitzim*, 1972) and the last *Save the Life-guard* (*Hatzilu et ha Matzil*, 1977).

Together, as Shohat puts it, they, “form a poignant and humorous portrait of the “never-grown-up” instability of restless *Sabras*” (Shohat, 1987, p.223).

The instability of Zohar, who during the 1970s became an icon of Israeli cinema and society, reaches its climax just after his last movie, in 1977, when Zohar returned to religion and became a *Haredi* Orthodox Jew and a rabbi.

Another legendary figure of Israeli cinema and society changes course during the time after the Yom Kippur War. Assi Dayan, “the son of” Moshe Dayan, starring Uri, the mythological Sabra in *He walked through the fields*, became a film director in the 1970s whose work tried to demystify his and his father’s male image.

In 1976 he directed his first film: *Hill Halfon doesn’t answer* (*Givat Halfon Eina Ona*, fig. 3.14), whose name is an explicit parody of the name of the Israeli nationalist-heroic film *Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer*, by Thorold Dickinson (1955). Poking fun at army discipline, international diplomacy, and traditional value, this parody is a brilliant satire on the various absurdities of IDF.

As Neeman argues, this outright farce mocks the absurdities of military discipline, the traditional values of family, Biblical myths and Israeli machismo (Neeman, 2001, p.264).

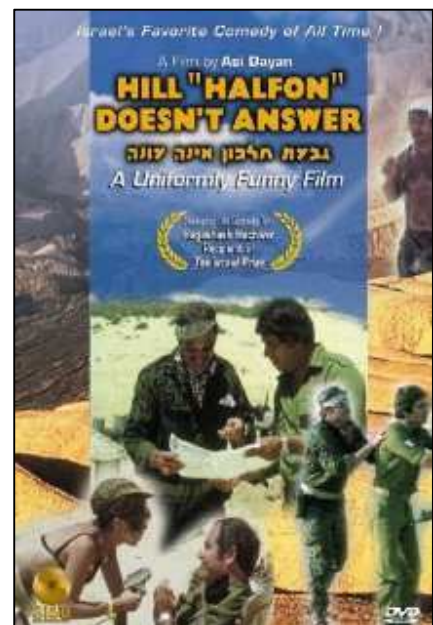


Fig.3.14 Poster of *Hill Halfon doesn’t answer*, Assi Dayan, 1976

<sup>9</sup> In Hebrew: “שבירת מיתוסים”

Starring the popular comedy trio *HaGashash HaHiver* (“The Pale Tracker”, whose members are Shaike Levi, Yisrael Poliakov and Gavri Banai) this cult Israeli comedy film, is ranked the “most Israeli” film of all time in many surveys.

The movie tells the story of a *miluim* reserves company watching the Egyptian border in a remote army base in the Sinai desert. Sergeant Gingy, is ordered to recruit a sleek Rumanian conman, Sergio Konstanza to the reserves.

On his way back, his girlfriend Yael sneaks into the luggage compartment of the car. Her father, Victor, follows her and is taken hostage by the Egyptians. In order to get him back, they kidnap an Egyptian soldier, dress up as UN observers and effect the hostage exchange.

The movie ends with the triumph of the rescue operation, even though their success was not of the result of the good planning of the operation, but just mainly the combination of luck and brass.

Beyond the funny and provocative plot, the portrait of the base and the military unit itself represents one of the most critical gazes on the IDF in Israeli cinema.

The small unit of Gingy, in this sense, becomes a microcosm of the IDF, where everything is possible and there are no rules anymore.

Yael and her father, for example, both become part of the unit even though they are just civilians. Sergio comes up with a plot to make her an authorized visitor, by claiming that she is a singer/entertainer sent from the Education Corps, in order to make a show about the history of Israel, starting from the time of Herzl, which in the end is no more than a kind of *striptease* dance. In the same way, when it is discovered that Victor is an excellent cook, he is sent to the kitchen to join Yosifoun, the chef who makes fun of him using military acronyms in order to cook.

Characters such as the con man Sergio Konstanza, the Egyptian-born Victor and the huge cook Yosifoun became classics in Israeli culture, and even today, in every *miluim* unit soldiers like to give nicknames to each other that correspond with the characters of the movie<sup>10</sup>.

Not only the characters, but even entire dialogs are still quoted today, inside the IDF and in everyday situations in Israel.

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<sup>10</sup> Several situations and dialogues of the movie have become such a part of Israeli culture that today there is even a group on Facebook for *Giv'at Halfon Eina Ona* with more than 7000 members.

Below is a selection of memorable quotes from the movie:

Colonel Bondi: What do you do if the Egyptians come near the outpost?

Victor: What we did in '56

[referring to *Operation Sinai*]

Colonel Bondi: And what did you do in '56?

Victor: What kind of question is that? What we did in '48

[referring to *Independence War*]

Victor: Nothing is better than that.

Colonel Bondi: But what did you do in '48?

Victor: [laughs] Thirty years, who's going to remember that?

### *Heroes and Anti-heroes in the Time of Mahapach*

In the post-Yom Kippur War period and in the wake of the 1977 victory of the right-wing *Likud* party, Israelis began to suffer from growing despair and disillusionment.

The rise of Likud in 1977 led to concrete feelings of marginality and threatened hegemony on the part of young *Sabras*. As Shohat puts it, “the ideological vertigo of this *Sabra* generation resulted in a pronounced nostalgia for the easy certitudes associated with earlier stages of Zionism, especially that of the pioneers and to certain extent that of the *Palmach*” (Shohat, 1987, pp. 232-233).

This kind of nostalgia found its representation in 1977 in Mehanem Golan’s movie *Operation Thunderbolt* (*Mivtza Yonatan*, fig. 3.15).

Based on a true incident of international terrorism, the film tells the story of a planeload of people that was hijacked and taken to Entebbe airport in July 1976.

Filmmaker Menachem Golan decided to use a prestigious international cast in this portrayal of the story of the hijacking and the many days of agony suffered by the hostages (Jews and non-Jews alike) the crew, and even the terrorists.



Fig. 3.15 Poster of *Operation Thunderbolt*, Mehanem Golan, 1977

The film reveals the working of the Israeli cabinet and was shot with the participation of Yizhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yigal Alon. For six days, in fact, the Israeli cabinet deliberated over whether or not to give in to the demands of the hijackers.

At the same time the commandos prepared and trained for the rescue mission. Soldiers flew across Africa in four massive Hercules jets, loaded to capacity with jeeps, equipment and personnel.

On July 4, 1976, the Paratroopers unit of the IDF, led by Yonatan Netanyahu (starring the famous *Sabra* character, Yehoram Gaon) rescued 104 hijacked passengers from the hands of terrorists at Entebbe airport.

The operation was a success, the terrorists killed, the hostages rescued, but at the cost of two hostages and Yonathan Netanyahu. His name became the official name of the rescue mission, *Operation Jonathan* (as in the original title of the movie in Hebrew), in memory of the unit's leader.

Filmed with the full cooperation of the IDF, even to the extent of providing the use of Hercules jets, the film covers many aspects of the story, especially the military rescue operation.

According to Shohat, while the post-1973 war was characterized by a collective hangover, a disenchantment with post-1967 euphoria, the Entebbe Operation victory engendered a “structure of feeling” similar to that of 1967, quickly becoming a celebrated, almost mythical military action (Shohat, 1987, p.104).

In the same year of *Operation Thunderbolt* and of the *mahapach*, another movie screens a paratrooper unit, but this time with a completely different perspective. It shows the obsession of Israeli society with the IDF's paratrooper unit and is critical of it.

Unlike the heroes of the earlier films, the new anti-heroes in Judd Neeman's *Paratroopers* (*Masa Alunkot*, literally “Journey of Stretchers” fig.3.16) do not embody the Zionist mission and they do not usually belong to any defined collective or organization such as the kibbutz or the IDF, and even when they do, it is in order to assume his individuality in the face of collective expectations and group pressures.

As Ben Shaul argues, the peculiar trajectory followed by



Fig. 3.16 Poster of *Paratroopers*, Judd Neeman, 1977



Neeman in his post-1977 films reveals the characteristic of the political consciousness of a large group of Israeli artists, academics, and self-oriented activists. The political consciousness of this group began emerging in response to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip that followed the 1967 War (Ben-Shaul, 2005, pp.94-96.).

According to Shohat, *Paratroopers* further explores the social and psychological impact of constant military preparedness and the demystification of heroic-national myths surrounding the *Sabra*. Unlike the idealizing attitude typical of the heroic-nationalist films, this film undercut the myth of the brave Israeli warrior. Rather than being set in combat situations, a more likely locus for heroism, the films emphasize the more mundane reality of military training (Shohat, 1987, p.220).

The movie starts with a long shot of the paratrooper unit, easily recognizable because of the idolized red shoes and their red beret. All the paratroopers in this shot are singing together, apart from one, Weismann, a sensitive recruit who volunteers for an elite corps of paratroopers, but finds himself unable to bear the physical and mental strain.

Weismann, in fact, finds it difficult to adjust to the pressures of basic training and the discipline of the military framework. As a result, he suffers in his relations with the other recruits and with the squad commander, Yair, the other main and controversial character of the movie.

Yair actually tries to listen to Weismann, but cannot understand emotional problems. In the platoon meeting, Yair says to another officer who wishes to transfer Weismann to another unit: "I was also a Weismann when I was young and this doesn't mean anything. You can make a superb soldier of him". When Weismann asks for a psychologist, Yair brings him the doctor who asks "What hurts? Do you not feel well?", because he does not understand that it is an emotional problem and not a physical one.

Weismann tries to repress his own doubts, but intense peer pressure and conflict with Yair make him break under the pressure and, with a growing sense of despair and entrapment, he throws a live hand grenade into a room in the middle of a training exercise, again entering before it has detonated, and is killed.

The film does not end with his death, however, but rather with the cutting off, by Yair, of an investigation into its causes.

Yair tries to visit Weismann's grieving parents, but escapes at the last moment, refusing to resolve the pain and preferring to torment himself from within. In a second visit, he succeeds in encountering the parents, but lies, distorts facts, and, again, does not confess.

Confused and burdened by feelings of guilt and remorse, Yair decides to abandon his military career, even if the verdict is given his favor. However, he finds himself unable to leave the army and returns to training recruits and leading his men on endless marches.

The final scene ends like the starting one, a cyclical process, in which nothing is going to change, and the hegemonic power of collectivism prevails over individualism.

This kind of cyclical process completely breaks down the classical Hollywood paradigm. Neeman, in fact, divided the story in two parts, going against the classical structure of three acts. As he puts it: "I built to a climax in the middle of the film and then a new story begins. [...] I think that commercially this was a mistake. When one produces or directs a film, one has to take into consideration the conventions of the audience. To have another beginning in the middle of the film is misleading the audience. It destroys their ability to identify" (Judd Neeman interviewed by Patricia Erens, 1980).

As Ben-Shaul argues, *Paratroopers* is a film based both formally and rhythmically upon American films protesting the Vietnam War. Unlike theirs, however, its protest is hopeless, confined to the military establishment without reference to the political sphere (Ben-Shaul, 2005, p.94).

This movie debates the whole image of the Israeli warrior. Its significance is that this is the first Israeli film that portrays the Zionist, Israeli *Sabra* as non-heroic. He is weak, does not conform and eventually commits suicide. Unlike the movie *Hill 24 Does Not Answer* where the soldiers die in defense of the country, here the soldier takes his own life, and his death is meaningless and has no national significance.

During Weismann's memorial, Yair says the following about him "Tzvi (Weisman) was a soldier in the Paratroopers... the best youth fall and do not stand up...". This sentence represents a clear disconnection from the truth, but is the only truth acceptable to his parents, which need to believe that he died as a hero, and not because of a "meaningless" death.

Actually, only when he is dead, does he become Tzvi in the eyes of Yair, as a "real" person and not just Weismann, just another of the paratroopers.

In this sense, Neeman construes two specular protagonist types (fig.3.17): Weismann, the unfit victimized protagonist and his officer Yair, the victimizer-authoritative protagonist whose actions lead to Weismann's death.

As noted by Nurit Gertz, the scene of the suicide subverts a key mythological scene in pre-independence patriotic literature



Fig. 3.17 Particular of *Paratroopers*: Weismann versus Yair

and cinema. It refers to the literary death of Uri, Moshe Shamir's legendary *Sabra* of his 1947 emblematic book *He walked through the Field* and the cinematic transposition by Yoseph Millo in 1967 (Gertz,1993, p.191).

As Ben-Shaul highlights, whereas in *He walked through the fields* it is the officer who gives his life to save his men after the misfit soldier drops the grenade on the ground, meaningfully giving his life for the sake of the collective, in *Paratroopers* it is the officer who brings about his subordinate's senseless ambiguous suicide/accidental death (Ben-Shaul, 2005, pp.94-96.).

Nonetheless, *Paratroopers* is the first Israeli film to deal with the subject of suicide in the army, questioning the tough discipline measured out in the training of new recruits, and the power and the authority held by young and inexperienced officers. As Kronish argues, Neeman's first film is critical of the conformism and discipline demanded by army life, and shows one individual's inability to adapt (Kronish, 1996, pp.105-106).

As Neeman himself puts it, "the conflict between the individual and the group reflects, as in many *new sensibility* films, the decline of the national consensus, as well as the partiality for individualism" (Neeman, 2001, p.291).

Individualism in the movie is portrayed as problematic. This reflects the Israeli society at that time that was disappointed at its military leaders who, like in the movie, could not prevent the disasters: the Yom Kippur War in Israel and the suicide in the movie.

In one of the scenes, Yair says “we wanted to make him a soldier.” In other words, he wants to make him unified with the group. The stretcher represents the unification and the soldiers’ dependency on each other. But unity is depicted in the movie in an ambivalent way, and it shows that the warrior brotherhood is false. We see this in a paradigmatic scene, the source of the original title in Hebrew (*Masa Alunkot* literally means “journey of stretchers”), when four soldiers have to carry a soldier on a stretcher. During the hike they rotate between those who carry and the one who is being carried. If one of the soldiers who carry the stretcher breaks down, the stretcher falls down. The movie shows the breaking of this unity. The soldiers carry the stretcher with the soldier Weismann, who is a trouble maker, but as they do not believe him when he says he is sick, they torture him. When Weismann is being tortured, Yair tells him “if you will be like everyone else they will not torture you.” This scene shows that the military leaders do not succeed in unifying the unit. One needs to be like everyone else to be accepted otherwise he cannot survive.

But the paratrooper unit is not for everyone. Not everyone can become part of the group even if he tries. It projects a unit that has a very male structure, and serving in it is a test for masculinity. The soldiers have conversations about women and about having sex with them. In the movie the female soldier is projected as a sex object, and all the officers in the base compete to be with the secretary.

Also the song sung by one of the paratroopers in the movie is paradigmatic in describing sexual ability as a prerequisite quality to succeed in the army: “...my dick was like a cannon. Now it fails the test. My girlfriend who was excellent. Now she fucks the desk-job male soldiers...”.

Regarding the *bodyscape* of the movie, as Yosef highlights, Weismann’s body is marked as “feminine”, delicate, lean, light in skin colour, lacking “manly” hair. He is positioned in the film as the binary opposite of another soldier, Yenoka, who has a muscular, strong, firm, dark and hairy body. The difference between Yenoka’s “masculine” body and Wiseman’s “feminine” body



Fig. 3.18 Scene of *Paratroopers*, Weismann is recommended by one of the commanders and he is asked to take off his clothes in front of the platoon

is represented in one of the first scenes of the film in which the platoon doctor asks for a volunteer to demonstrate how to stop haemorrhages. Yenoka volunteers first, but he is sent back because his body is too muscular but Weismann is recommended by one of the commanders and he is asked to take off his clothes in front of the platoon (fig.3.18). For the soldiers, Weismann's feminized body becomes an object of sexual harassment, as well as of homoerotic attraction. The remarks that the soldiers make in reference to his body are remarks that are usually directed toward women: "Wow, what an ass!" (Yosef, 2004, pp. 57-58).

The film was widely discussed in the Israeli media, although it received mixed reviews and modest box office sales (selling some 95.000 tickets), even though in 1978 it was selected as "outstanding film of the year" at the London Film Festival.

#### *"A Farewell to Arms": Meeting Judd Neeman*

Neeman was born in Israel in 1936. He holds a degree in medicine and completed one year of an internship as a doctor before turning to filmmaking.

Talking about *Paratroopers*, Judd Neeman describes the army as a "total institution oppressing the individual. [...] This pioneering nihilistic drama deals for the first time with the devastating impact of the army on the individual and portrays the military system as the fundamental adversity of Israeli society, depicting its oppressiveness as a habitat that nurtures the death ethos" (Neeman, 1999, p.123).

In the interview with Patricia Erens, Neeman describes Weismann as the typical volunteer for the paratroopers who really wants, or at least he thinks he wants, to become a soldier, a warrior: "he is not haunted by other recruits. He is not really oppressed by senior officers or by company leaders. Weismann is manipulated and hunted by those values that he internalized in his childhood, throughout his education. So it is the burden which he brings into the army which really decides his fate. [...] His character represents the character of the average Israeli boy who goes into the army. There is a line by the company leader in which he says to the other officers, 'I was also Weismann when I was young.' I meant by this to emphasize that Weismann is incorporated into every one of us".

On April 13, 2011 I had the opportunity to meet Judd Neeman in his studio in Tel Aviv, in order to talk with him about his movie, from the beginning of the production to the impact that *Paratroopers* has today on the Israeli audience.

I started my interview by asking Neeman some specific questions about his interview with Janet Burstien, which was published in BOMB in 2006.

FM: In the interview Janet Burstein is not so clear if the idea of making this movie matured during the Yom Kippur War or even already at the time of the Six Day War.

JN: Actually, at the time of the Yom Kippur the script was ready, and most of the experience was reflecting my personal experience as sergeant and combat surgeon in a paratroop unit unit during the Six Day War. But during the Yom Kippur War, when meanwhile I became a physician, and suddenly I found myself as physician of my *miluim* unit, it was like a “booster” in my memory and all the material that came out after this kind of “booster” took place in my movie. Both in Six Day War and in Yom Kippur I saw a lot of soldiers of mine dying on the field and it’s always hard to explain why a certain story drew you and not another. But one thing that was on my mind when I made *Paratroopers* was to show what military pedagogy is all about. Basic training in the military teaches you two things: how to injure and kill the enemy and how to endure being injured yourself and being ready and willing to suffer and die. In basic training you learn much about weapons, tactics, and ways to protect yourself and hurt the enemy. But they do not tell you anything about the other art to which you’re initiated: how to get hurt and how to get used to suffering and to the idea that you’ll die soon. All they tell you is how to apply dressings to wounds.

I wanted people to see that no one openly teaches you in basic training how to react to being injured or to having your fellow combatants killed or injured. That kind of training takes place when they torture you: spiritually, mentally, and physically. It’s not a side effect, not marginal or residual. It’s the core, a pillar of military pedagogy. No one breathes a word about it. But that’s what the film is all about: how you get trained to suffer; how they train you to take more and more pain. They teach you that you can take enormous pain, survive or die.

FM: But there is also something ambivalent in this kind of process, because actually most Israeli men love the army, even during *miluim*.

JD: Of course this process is very ambivalent. Because in the army you’re encouraged to believe that you’ll never die alone. *Paratroopers* shows that. In the last weeks before the kids mobilize

for the army, some go to a *gibbush* course, which means “crystallization.” They learn there, “You are not alone.” It’s like the chemical process of crystallization, when many molecules join to create a new structure, a new single thing out of many parts. For many Israelis this belief, this musketeers’ “one for all and all for one,” was shattered in the Yom Kippur war when many combatants were left to die on the battlefield or abandoned to be captured.

FM: How did the IDF react to this kind of representation of the Israeli army?

JN: At the beginning the IDF declined to cooperate in the making of the film, and we needed their help because of all the military hardware, but they made us a lot of problems to get the weapons because they were against the idea of the suicide. The army spokesman did not like the story at all. He came to me over and over again with suggestions of how we could rewrite the script. He asked us to try to represent a “positive” suicide, which was meaning that we were allowed to create the same shot, but adding a “good reason” to die, for example, saving a unit mate.

So, I pressured and the army spokesman gave the script to Motta Gur, at the time the Chief of Staff, and a very famous paratrooper in the history of the IDF. He was the one who wrote the story of *Azit*<sup>11</sup>. He read the script and still didn’t like it, so I wrote a letter to Israel Tal, who was the aide of the Ministry of the Defence. I said to him: “we have a constitution. This is a violation of the freedom of expression. What is the damn the army doing in censoring my script?” He said that to him my argument sounded logical, and actually he told me also that he loved my script. He wanted to talk to the Minister of the Defence, which at the time was Shimon Peres, and a few days later I got a call from the general saying that my appeal was granted. They decided that I could rent everything from the Ministry of Defence, but that I must not mention in the film that I got from them.

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<sup>11</sup> Mordechai “Motta” Gur was born in Jerusalem in 1930 and soon joined the *Haganah*. He continued serving in a military capacity with the founding of the IDF during the Israeli War of Independence in 1948 and in 1974 he became the 10th Chief of Staff of the IDF. He even wrote a series of children's books on the Israeli heritage. In 1969 he wrote *Azit, the Paratroopers Dog (Azit, ha Kalba ha Tzankhanit)*, the story of a super-talented German shepherd who gets sent to a paratroop unit to be trained for combat operations. Following the heroic-nationalistic representation of IDF, when *Azit*’s owner is captured by Arab terrorists, *Azit* is called into action to save him. In 1972 Boaz Davidson made a movie based on Gur’s book that became a very cult movie for children.

FM: What about the cast, and the decision to cast Gidi Gov<sup>12</sup>, a kind of Israeli star, as lieutenant Yair?

JN: Actually, even if today all of the main actors are very famous, at the time nobody was. Even Gidi Gov was just the front man of *Kaveret*, which actually was an already famous band. The problem was that most of the main actors in the movie started their career playing in the *Ha Lehaka*<sup>13</sup>, but they weren't *kravi*. So I asked the two assistant directors to go to the *Bakum*<sup>14</sup> to take fifties real paratroopers in order to act as extras. Then we put all of them together for more than a week in the Kibbutz Givat Ha Sloscha and we trained them: to make the soldiers become actors, and the actors become soldiers. And at the end we had "our" company: a mix of soldiers and actors.

FM: And how did the IDF react after the film was finished?

JN: When everything was finally ready the censorship started to do obstruction. Fortunately, a friend of ours who has her father in the commission told us that the only possibility for us was to try to show the movie in front of the Chief of Staff, because with their approval, no censorship could stop us.

So all the generals came to the Cinemateque of Tel Aviv, and the director of photography and I, we were sitting in the back of the room, waiting for the verdict.

When the movie ended, they didn't say anything: they just left the room, nodding with their heads. But when we went out, Motta Gur, the Chief of the Staff, came to me and told me: "This is a very courageous film".

So the military censors eventually approved the film and in the end it was adopted by the army as an instructional film. Today, in fact, the IDF shows this movie to all its cadets of the academy and after screening the movie the cadets have to discuss with army psychologists what was wrong in the behaviour of lieutenant Yair as unit commander.

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<sup>12</sup> Gideon (Gidi) Gov was born in Israel in 1950. When he enlisted to the IDF in 1969, he passed the auditions and joined the *Nahal* entertainment troupe, where Gov actually began his acting and singing career. At the time of the Yom Kippur War, Gov teamed up with some of the former *Nahal* troupe members to form a band. The band became one of the most popular Israeli bands in the 1970s and is still considered today as one of the most successful Israeli bands in the history of popular music and entertainment in Israel.

<sup>13</sup> *Ha Lehaka* (in Hebrew: הלהקה, literally "The Band"), are IDF entertainment units.

<sup>14</sup> *Bakum* is the name of the base where all soldiers are processed before being sent out to the various bases or units where they will eventually serve.



FM: I remember that in your interview with Janet Burstien when she asked you if you would call this film “anti-militaristic,” you answered with another very interesting question: “Can a war film be anti-militaristic?”

JN: *Nachon!* (in Hebrew: “That’s right!”). Some elements of that are there, but other elements crystallize the identification of the audience with the army. We are all fascinated by two kinds of show: pyrotechnics and the male body show. In one hand, in fact, in any war movie, we have always the fascination of all the audio-visual effects, even in such anti-militaristic movie as *All Quiet on the Western Front*<sup>15</sup>. Also because everything is on the screen, so it doesn’t really touch us. The medium is part of the message, and we love the medium, even if it is a contradiction. Then, there is the show of the male bodies, which also we love a lot: *ein ma laasot!* (in Hebrew: “There is nothing you can do (you could also say ‘what can you do’)”!).

FM: Talking about the male body, in the interview you also talk a lot about the representation of the wounded bodies in war movies...

JN: Wounds and mutilated male bodies have become very visible in war films of the last decades. I argue that the big combat wound represents the opening up of the male body to the world, in a way that resembles the opening of the female body in childbirth. To the male body this opening happens only when it is torn apart in combat. The proliferation of wounds in recent war films is a call for, a yearning for, openness, a rejection of the regime of closure, of the closed body. I think these films look at the body as something vulnerable. Like a symbolic opening up to other people. Recently I wrote an article<sup>16</sup> about this kind of *patummimesis*, which explores issues related to the representation of the wound in recent Israeli war films. In contrast to the war films of the 1950s and the 1960s that hide the spectacle of the wound in the soldier’s body, the 1980s war films exposed the wound and the warrior’s dead body. Through an analysis of the 1980s war films the article argues that military pedagogy is structured by two goals: on the one hand, to train the soldier to kill the enemy; and on the other hand, to encourage him to hurt

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<sup>15</sup> *All Quiet on the Western Front* (which the original title in German was *Im Westen nichts Neues*) is a novel by Erich Maria Remarque, a German veteran of World War I. The book describes the German soldiers' extreme physical and mental stress during the war, and the detachment from civilian life felt by many of these soldiers upon returning home from the front. The novel was first published in November and December 1928 in the German newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* and in book form in late January 1929. In 1930, the book was adapted as an Oscar-winning film of the same name, directed by Lewis Milestone.

<sup>16</sup> Neeman Judd, 2008, “Wound the Gift of War”, *Israel special issue: History and Memory in Israeli Cinema*, 14

himself and even to get killed on the battlefield. This second goal of military pedagogy brings the soldier to a state of “abjection.” According to Julia Kristeva, the category of the abject includes bodily wastes, fluids and secretions. For Kristeva, the female body, especially the maternal body, is aligned with the abject due to its association with menstruation, childbirth, and the infant’s toilet training. The article traces and analyzes the visual and psychological analogies between the soldier’s wound and the image of birth in Israeli war films, seeking to offer a new insight into the source of young men’s desire for combat.

FM: Looking back on *Paratroopers* after more than 30 years, what is your feeling now about this movie?

JN: Actually, one of the best satisfactions which I had in the last years was when in 2008, to memorize Yom Kippur, *Haaretz* asked the most important cinema critics in Israel to write, after many years, a “new” critique about a movie that they didn’t appreciate when they watched it the first time, but meanwhile they started to appreciate only after many years.

Uri Klein decided to write about *Paratroopers*, which at the beginning he didn’t like, but that he start to appreciate a lot when he realized the real reason because he didn’t like it at the beginning. As Uri Klein explains in his article, what he didn’t like was the representation of the alienation between the main characters to the audience, because of which it was impossible to empathize with the (anti)heroes. The movie was happening at a distance from the audience, on purpose to avoid the damaging of the national heroism and glamour of the IDF, which was the *leitmotif* of all the Israeli movies at that time: “The drama came out of the anti-drama. Even thirty years after it we are still victims of this alienation and cruelty and that’s why it is still a movie which people should watch today” (my translation from Hebrew, *Haaretz*, October 8, 2008).

### *Sentimental Army Education...*

During the 1970s Israeli cinema begins to focus on the youth market with an emphasis on pop music, sex and pranks à la American Graffiti.

In 1978 Boaz Davidson directs *Eskimo Limon* (*Lemon Popsicle*), a series of teen tease films set in 1950s Israel, including great music from the late 1950s, teenage pranks, warmth, humor and attention to period detail.

The movie focuses on three high school kids (fig.3.19) growing up in Tel Aviv and deals with their relationships with each other and, of course, with girls. The films, although a typical adolescence story, tackle subjects such as abortion and unrequited love, which are not happily resolved by a neat ending.



fig.3.19 Scene of *Eskimo Lemon*

The series became a cult in Israel and a great success all over the world.

In the third sequel, *Sapiches (Private Popsicle*, fig.3.21), the trio joins the IDF, but they're not quite ready to give up the freedom they've enjoyed for so long and submit to army discipline. Therefore, instead of fighting for their country, the three young anti-heroes, which, beside the age, have nothing in common with the mythological figure of David, spend most of their time chasing women, trying to get out of doing any work, and avoiding their no-nonsense sergeant.

1978 is also the year of *HaLehaka (The Troupe*, fig.3.20), the first film of Avi Nesher, which depicted an army entertainment troupe similar to the *Nahal troupe*<sup>17</sup>. The film stars many of the leading actors and singers of that era, including Gidi Gov, Gali Atari, Sassi Keshet and Heli Goldenberg, most of whom served in military entertainment troupes themselves.



Fig.3.20, Poster of *The Troupe*

The musical comedy unfolds the intrigues within a military entertainment troupe during the 1970s War of Attrition between Israel and Egypt. When three new soldiers join the troupe they are greeted by the older members with coldness, distance, and plots against them.

At the same time, the troupe becomes a candidate for the newly established Israeli TV station. The soldiers will be judged based on the quality of their performances. During those days, there are quarrels among the soldiers who compete for solo parts.

<sup>17</sup> *Nahal troupe* (להקת הנח"ל) is the military band unit of the IDF, whose most of the best Israeli singers started their career.

The Troupe's commanders try to improve the performance by applying hard work and pressure on the soldiers. When, as a result, Miki, one of the soldiers, reacts by rebelling against the officer, she is punished and thrown out of the group. Only at this moment does the group realize that they have become a "big family" (they say in Hebrew "*anachnu mishpacha gdola*") therefore they start to fight to let her come back in the group.

All the soldiers then become united, Miki is returned to the group, and the TV show goes on. In the last scene they sing *Shir la Shalom*<sup>18</sup> along with the audience in the theater ("The Song for the Peace").

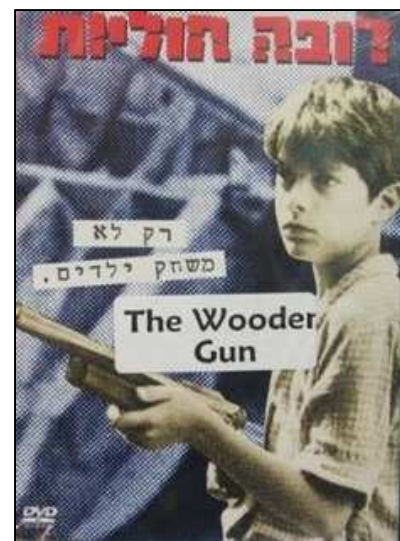
The unit of this movie like many others units at that time, was evidently very select, and constituted a good way to break into Israeli show business while also fulfilling one's military obligation. Little that happens to the troupe in the film reflects much about Israel at large, to reflect the breakdown of the Israeli public trust in their political leaders and their military leadership.

This debut feature, saturated with nostalgia for the popular songs of the army entertainment troupes, is a group portrait of male chauvinism and cynicism, all of which cover up naivety and vulnerability. As Neeman argues, the new *Sabra* emerges as an Israeli variant of the "me generation", in time becoming a cult movie (Neeman, 2001, p.273).

In the Israeli Cinema of the 1970s, not only youths, but also children, began to be represented as a part of Israeli society that lives in the shadow of the IDF.

Two films, in particular, were produced which deal with the effects that living in a society under siege has on the lives of children: *Wooden Gun* and *Hide and Seek*.

These movies explore the psychological impact of militarization on pre-adolescent children, in films set in a past



3.21 Poster of *Wooden Gun*

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<sup>18</sup> *Shir LaShalom* (in Hebrew: שיר לשלום, lit. *Song for Peace*) is a popular Israeli song that has come to be an anthem of the Israeli peace camp. The song was first written in 1969: the lyrics by Yaakov Rotblit and the melody by Yair Rosenblum. Though the song was originally written by members of the Nahal Brigade Entertainment Troupe of the IDF, many in the Israeli military establishment were not pleased by its anti-war message and Rehavam Ze'evi who was then the IDF's head of Central Command, banned the song from being played during performances. The song was also sung at the rally where Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated and is often associated with his assassination and its aftermath in Israeli culture. A copy of the song's lyrics was found on Rabin's body, soaked in his blood.

historical period, which also serves to allegorize the present. As Shohat argues, their plots turn on the coming of age of native Israelis *Sabras* who are instilled at home and in school with the values of toughness and heroism that had been taken for granted prior to the Yom Kippur War (Shohat, 1987, pp.217-218).

Directed in 1979, but set in the atmosphere of Tel Aviv in the 1950s, just after Israel had become an independent state, *Wooden Gun* (*Roveh khuliot*, fig.3.21) by Ilan Mossinzon uses a gang of children as a metaphor for Israeli society. The struggles and the anxieties of the grownups, in fact, are reflected in the war between two rival gangs of children who play “war games”.

Raised on the glories of war, soldiers’ honor, and nationalism, the boys have little sympathy for or understanding of the world that their families left behind in coming to the newly created State of Israel. Between the distracted silence of parents and the unthinking idealism of educators, the children do not appreciate the dangers of real violence.

The boys’ world is no larger than the battlefields of the schoolyards and streets of their small neighborhood. The impotent efforts of their parents and teachers to contain their escalating violent activities only serve to isolate the boys all the more from the older generation, who are stuck in the never ending celebration of the Israeli heroes’ pantheon, from Theodor Herzl to Ben Gurion.

An early scene in the film offers a perfect snapshot of this confusion of values: their teacher, a war veteran himself, pauses to briefly admonish Yoni, the ten year-old leader of one of the two gangs for his continued fighting with his peers, then turns without a beat and leads the rest of the students on a charge up the hill of a former battlefield, rat-tat-tatting imaginary machine guns at an invisible enemy.

In another provocative scene close to the end of the movie, we see the school play organized for *Yom HaAtzmaut*<sup>19</sup>, Independence Day, where they represent the entire history of *Eretz Israel* from the Roman Empire to the first Zionist congress organized by Herzl, which the children describe as “the same show every year”.

Ironically, just during the school play the boy playing Herzl starts a new gang war even using a knife. Yoni then aims his wooden gun at his rivals and almost kills him.

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<sup>19</sup> *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (in Hebrew: *יום העצמאות*) is the national independence day of Israel, commemorating its declaration of independence in 1948. Celebrated annually on or around the 5th of the Jewish month of Iyar, it centers around the declaration of the state of Israel by the Jewish Leadership led by future Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, on 14 May 1948.

Injured himself, he finds solace at the home of a female Holocaust survivor, called, not by chance, Palestina, who lives in a hut on the beach. Modelled on the Fellini type character of Saraghina in *8½*, Palestina is haunted by nightmares of the Shoah and prophesizes the redemption of Israel: she is the symbol of the Shoah survivors who came to Israel looking for shelter, a homeland and a better life, but found only conflict and strife.

The movie ends with Yoni leaving his gangs and showing the *ethnoscape* of the beach, where all the immigrants and Shoah survivors arrived. According to Neeman, this *New Sensibility* drama of initiation was the first to focus on the shadow cast by the Shoah and the ambivalent attitudes held toward the survivors, which comprise elements of guilt and rejections (Neeman, 2001, p.305).

Instilled at home and in school with the values of toughness and heroism, the children's behaviour and their interpretation of honour, nationalism and friendship show the problematic aspect of values that had been taken for granted prior to the Yom Kippur War, and certainly within the majority of films throughout the 1960s, by presenting an ironic and demystificatory look at the nationalist pathos. As Shohat argues, in fact, the film's irreverence toward the older generation's ethos, heroes, and style of pathos, serves to demystify the macho-heroic mentality that animates the earlier war films (Shohat, 1987, p.218).

In 1980, another film moving in this kind of direction is *Hide and Seek* (*Machboim*, fig. 3.22) by Dan Wolman.

Setting his story in 1946 during the time of the British Mandate when Jews were secretly working against the British rule in the area and adding a tale of homosexual love, Wolman, as Kronish puts it, "successfully interweaves the private anguish of an individual with the external pressures and political events of the time" (Kronish, 1996, p.80).

The movie tells the story of Uri, a difficult twelve-year-old boy living with his grandfather because his parents are in Europe on political missions, who



Fig.3.22 Scene of *Hide and Seek*

develops a warm relationship with his tutor.

Uri and his friends love to play as *Haganah* soldiers. Uri's tutor is not interested in joining the *Haganah*, and, when he is seen later with a young Arab man he is suspected of being a spy, he is beaten by members of the *Haganah* and thrown out of his teaching job.

Like Yoni in *Hide and Seek*, Uri realizes at the end of movie that something has changed in his life. He therefore decides to leave his gang and his conformist world.

The film, in fact, reflects the conformism of a society living in a state of crisis and siege, permeated by a kind of muffled everyday political violence. As Shohat puts it, "the delicate, unaggressive tutor, who does not join the *Haganah* underground and has an affair with a Palestinian man, is violently threatened by *Haganah* members who falsely accuse him of being a spy, a presentation which demystifies the *Haganah* as intolerant" (Shohat, 1987, p.218-222).

On April 2, 2011, I had the opportunity to meet Dan Wolman at the Tel Aviv Cinemateque to discuss *Hide and Seek* and the relation between this movie and his other movie *Night Soldier* (*Hayal Halayla*, 1984), another film deeply connected with the representation of the IDF. During the interview he described the character of the tutor, the protagonist of *Night Soldier*, as a kind of alter ego of the main character of his first film, *The Dreamer* (*Ha Timhoni*, 1970), a love story of a young man working in a nursing home who is attached to an older woman until the appearance of a younger girl interrupts him. "This is the first character in my films problematizing the army, as you can see in the movie when some people in the nursing home describe him as "army deserter," he says. *Hide and seek*, particularly, represents a very macho-oriented society, where the only one who could kiss an "enemy" must to be weak and, not less, gay. Not surprising me, a film critic said about my movie that wasn't realistic because the main character wasn't "Israeli" enough. Actually, in one way he was right, because I was born in 1941 and I remember perfectly that when I was 15 year old, in the time of the *Palmach* supremacy, this kind of macho attitude was such a part of the Israeli society that it influenced a lot also the Israeli cinema of the 1960s, as you can see in all the movies of Uri Zohar, whose all the main character are always sweaty. The boy, in particular, represents the conformism of the Israeli society, as we see at the beginning, when he affirms to be "against the British and against the Arabs" and the teacher asks him how he can hate them if he doesn't even know them?...."

As Neeman highlights, the movie uses its protagonist to link for the first time in Israeli cinema political and even sexual taboos (Neeman, 2001, p.289).



Still, while the Independence War of 1948 and Six Day War of 1967 and Israel's swift military victory soon led to a series of films on the subject, the 1973 Yom Kippur War was never directly addressed cinematically until 1981, by Yaki Yosua's *The Vulture*.

### *Breaking the Taboo...*

Based on the novel by Yoram Kaniuk *The Last Jew*, *The Vulture* (*Ha Ayit*, fig.3.23) offers an anti-heroic protagonist, Boaz, the vulture of the title, the bird of prey living off carrion, a disenchanted reserve officer who has lost his childhood friend Menachem in a pointless skirmish on the Egyptian front, moments after the cease-fire that ended the 1973 war.

The film open with documentary footage taken during the Yom Kippur War, organized in two opposing units. As in Ben-Shaul's analysis, first we have a succession of shots which feature army equipment on combat such as tanks blasting, planes dropping bombs, war ships firing, then the film cuts to shots to introduce human figures of soldiers praying, shaving, resting and smiling after the ceasefire (Ben-Shaul, 1997, p. 37).

Boaz returns from the war feeling guilty that he is alive and that his friend, Menachem, has been killed in a pointless battle during the last moments before the ceasefire.

During a visit to Menachem's parents, Boaz becomes caught up in the lie of trying to make Menachem into something that he was not, something that would make his parents proud.

For Boaz, what began as a sincere attempt to console the parents of a fallen comrade soon becomes a business enterprise creating memorial booklets for other bereaved parents.

Without any real effort, Boaz becomes the reluctant "editor" of an entire volume, finding himself at the head of a small lucrative industry devoted to the dead. During the period of the Yom Kippur War, in fact, when many soldiers were killed on the battlefield, Israeli society developed a unique industry of memorializing its fallen through monuments, commemorative albums and events.

Feeling unable to return to normal life, Boaz spends his time memorializing those who died. He becomes obsessed, preparing commemorative albums and memorial ceremonies, and, like a bird of prey, lives off the memories of war.



Fig.3.23 Poster of *The Vulture*



As Shohat argues, despite his apparent self-assurance, Boaz is a man adrift, scarred by the memories and pains of war and displaying the typical stigmata of survivor-guilt. His sexual adventures only exacerbate his confusion (Shohat, 1987, p.217).

The thin narrative line following the evolution of the protagonist's "career", elaborates upon the corruption of Boaz as well as of the society surrounding him. These find expression in his relationship to women as mere sexual objects and in his relation to his friend's art only in terms of possible financial gain or loss.

As Ben-Shaul observed, as the film progresses it becomes clear that Boaz' conduct is common to the other character as well: a graceful secretary of the Defence Ministry in charge of bereaved parents turns out to be a well calculated professional; the suffering artist gladly accepts the upside down positioning of his sculpture because he is well remunerated; and even the State, which prosecutes Boaz for tax evasion, bases its case upon the moral exploitation involved in his activities (Ben-Shaul, 1997, p. 41).

As in *Paratroopers*, in the end the protagonist goes back to prepare his soldier for another (undefined) war, accompanied on the soundtrack of *Lu Iehi*, the Israeli version of *Let it be*, which could allude to the never-ending process of the war.

The film ends, in fact, with documentary footage showing images of a "new" war which suddenly freezes, counterpoised by the peace song *Shir la Shalom*.

As Kronish highlights, the film points to the need for grieving parents to idealize their sons who have been sacrificed in war and examines the tension between the desire to return to normal life after the battlefield and the need to cling to the memories of the past, a tension which affected an entire generation of young people in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War (Kronish, 1996, p. 110).

According to Neeman, this nihilistic drama, the first involving the traumas of the Yom Kippur War, refutes the patriotic ethos and the ideology of self-sacrifice. He also argues that the film's rhetoric, by repeatedly displaying the moment of death in combat and employing documentary footage, constructs a post-traumatic picture in the spirit of the other 1980s films. Yet it stands out through its outraged iconoclasm over the memorialization of the fallen and its portrayal of a cynical, promiscuous and sometimes brutal protagonist, a caricature of the heroic *Sabra* (Neeman, 2001, p.265).

After the *mekhdal* of the Yom Kippur War and the 1977 political *mahapach*, the representation of the *Sabra* is subjected to a big transformation.

For the first time, as we can see in Ronit Shani's picture (fig.3.26), the Israeli soldier is no longer represented as a hero but just like a civilian, eating falafel on the street.

Deconstructing the myth of the *Sabra*, the cinema of the *New Sensibility* articulated little serious dissent from the Zionist consensus. But it was only with the 1982 invasion of Lebanon that it began even to address the perennially explosive issue: the Palestinians.

In the next chapter, I will analyze the political turn of Israeli Cinema during the time of First Lebanon War and the beginning of the Intifada and the representation of the metamorphosis of David to Goliath.