

Chapter Five

**Back to the Army: the Privatization of the War Experience as David vs David**



## 5.1 From the Second Intifada to the Wars of the New Millennium

“In the second Intifada, we, Jews and Palestinians, reverted to primal warfare: rocks, knives, vendettas, an eye for an eye, blood and soil, dismembered bodies. Israeli called it “the situation”. [...] A kind of frozen time. [...] The distinction between home and battlefield melted away. The entire country was the front line” (Boaz Neumann, 2010, pag. X-XI).

### *The New Millennium, the end of Hegemony and the Onset of Cultural Plurality*

“Thirty years later, today’s army, the senior officers who remain from those days, and the same politicians who were involved in the war then are still trying to keep the public in the dark. The truth, nonetheless, is gradually being revealed” (Ashkenazi, 2003).

As Kimmerling argues accurately in his work “The Invention and Decline of Israeliness,” alongside the already existing cleavage between Jews and Palestinians, the conquest of territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 war gradually introduced another major sociopolitical fall into the system: “‘Holy sites’ out of the Israeli state’s control since the 1948 war were once again in Jewish hands, raising strong religious (often messianic) sentiments among the Israeli secular and religious Jewish population. This overwhelming victory, after a long and traumatic period of waiting, was frequently presented in terms of divine intervention in Jewish history, the antithesis of the Holocaust and continuation of the “miraculous” victory in the 1948 war and the establishment of a Jewish sovereign state” (Kimmerling, 2001, p.113).

According to Kimmerling, these intertwining processes of occupation and mounting religiosity led to the first stage of the partial and incremental breakup of a hegemonic culture and the crystallization of new countercultures. Three competing Jewish countercultures appeared on the scene to challenge the original Zionist ideology.

One envisioned Israel as a Jewish state ruled by the Orthodox Jewish religious code. The second counterculture aspired to turn Israel into a liberal, secular, and civic state for all its present Jewish and Arab citizens. Both countercultures were rooted in the original Zionist hegemonic culture. Each emphasized particular aspects of that original culture and took them to their logical conclusions.

The third counterculture, known as traditionalist culture, had less sharply defined boundaries. Israeli traditionalism, in fact, is based on an incoherent set of values, norms, beliefs, and practices, mainly borrowed from codified “high” Jewish religion. This is mixed with many folkloric and “popular” religious elements, a middle position in the secularization process, presuming the existence of a continuum between “complete religiosity” and “pure secularism.”

A fourth, non-Jewish counterculture, Arab culture, emerged as an insulated culture.

Following later immigration waves to Israel, one from Russia (or the former Soviet Union)<sup>1</sup> and the other from Ethiopia,<sup>2</sup> two additional countercultural “bubbles” appeared.

As Kimmerling points out, although the social and conceptual boundaries of each of these countercultures are often blurred, each wave contributed to the shaping and reshaping of the Israeli state by infusing new and alien ethnic, cultural, and economic factors into the system (Kimmerling, 2001, pp. 113-114).

As Kimmerling puts it, “the initial era of hegemony is over. The Israeli state is divided among seven major cultures challenging one another for control of the basic rule of the game, access to

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<sup>1</sup> The 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union caused a very large immigration wave of Jews from Soviet states. Russian Jewish immigration to Israel began en masse when the liberal government of Mikhail Gorbachev opened the borders of the USSR and allowed Jews to leave the country for Israel. Many Jews chose to immigrate to Israel because the United States changed its policy of treating Soviet Jews as refugees and allowing unlimited immigration, whereas Israel was willing to receive them unconditionally.

The secular character of this immigration wave and the attempts of the new immigrants to preserve their eating habits caused in the mid-1990s the opening of stores selling merchandise which was prevalent in the USSR, notably non-kosher meat such as pork.

The weakening of the Zionist ethos and disappearance of the melting pot perception brought more tolerance from the Israeli society to the attempts of the Russian immigrants to preserve their culture. In tandem, many of the immigrants saw themselves as delegates of the Russian culture, and to them it was superior to the Levantine Israeli culture. These parallel trends, combined with the separate immigrant neighborhoods, helped create a distinct Russian-Israeli culture.

This culture is characterized to a great extent by the combination of characteristic elements from the Soviet Union and Israel. This mixture created a new secular culture that speaks both Hebrew and Russian, which puts a great emphasis between higher culture and lower culture in the fields of literature, music, theater, etc. Due to demand from the new immigrants, many Russian language newspapers appeared, and with the development of the multichannel television in Israel during the 1990s, many Russian channels started being rebroadcast in Israel. And in November 2002, a new Israeli-Russian channel, Israel Plus, emerged.

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of Russians living in Israel today is more than 1,200,000.

<sup>2</sup> Ethiopian Jews, also known as Beta Israel, are the names of Jewish communities which lived in the area of Aksumite and other Ethiopian Empires, nowadays divided between the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia.

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, nearly all of the Ethiopian Beta Israel community in Israel today comprises more than 120,000 people. Most of this population are the descendants and the immigrants who immigrated to Israel during two massive waves of immigration mounted by the Israeli government: “Operation Moses” in 1984 and “Operation Solomon” in 1991. Civil war and famine in Ethiopia prompted the Israeli government to mount these dramatic rescue operations. The rescues were within the context of Israel's national mission to gather Diaspora Jews and bring them to the Jewish homeland and some immigration has continued up until the present day.

and criteria for resource distribution, and the identity of the polity. Six of them are bound together under the additional umbrella of Jewishness and militarism” (Kimmerling, 2001, p.237).

### *Back to the Intifada*<sup>3</sup>

Under the Oslo Accords, Israel committed to the phased withdrawal of its forces from parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and affirmed the Palestinian right to self-government within those areas through the creation of a Palestinian Authority. For their part, the PLO formally recognized Israel and committed to adopting responsibility for internal security in population centers in the areas that were evacuated. Palestinian self-rule was to last for a five-year interim period during which a permanent agreement would be negotiated. However, the realities on the ground left both sides deeply disappointed with the Oslo process.

In the five years immediately following the signing of the Oslo accords, 405 Palestinians and 256 Israelis were killed, which for the latter represented a casualty count higher than that of the previous fifteen years combined (216, 172 of which were killed during the First Intifada).

After Rabin’s murder, in the 1996 elections, Israelis elected a right-wing coalition led by the Likud candidate, Benjamin Netanyahu who was followed in 1999 by the Labor Party leader Ehud Barak.

While Rabin had limited settlement construction, Netanyahu continued construction within existing Israeli settlements, and put forward plans for the construction of a new neighborhood, although the Oslo agreements stipulated no such ban of settlement.

The July 11–25, 2000 Middle East Peace Summit at Camp David was held between United States President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. The talks ultimately failed with both sides blaming the other. There were four principal obstacles to agreement: the Occupied Territory, the status of Jerusalem, refugees and the 'right of return', and Israeli security concerns.

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<sup>3</sup> The second Palestinian uprising is also known as the “Al-Aqsa Intifada”, because of the name of the place where it started: a mosque, constructed in the 8th century CE at the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, a location considered the holiest site in Judaism and third holiest in Islam.

Starting as early as September 13, 2000, members of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's *Fatah* movement carried out a number of attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets, in violation of the Oslo Accords.

On September 28, the Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon together with a Likud party delegation surrounded by hundreds of Israeli riot police, visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, widely considered the third holiest site in Islam. Although the compound has been under Israeli sovereignty since Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1980, and is the holiest site in Judaism, Sharon was only permitted to enter the compound after the Israeli Interior Minister had received assurances from the Palestinian Authority's security chief that no problems would arise if he made the visit.

The stated purpose for Sharon's visit was to assert the right of all Israelis to visit the Temple Mount. However, according to Likud spokesman Ofir Akounis, the real purpose was to "show that under a Likud government [the Temple Mount] will remain under Israeli sovereignty" (CNN, September 27, 2000).

The Palestinians condemned Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount as a provocation and an incursion. The armed bodyguards that arrived on the scene with him were also seen as a provocation.

On September 29, 2000, the day after Sharon's visit, following Friday prayers, large riots broke out around the Old City of Jerusalem. After Palestinians on the Temple Mount threw rocks over the Western Wall at Jewish worshipers and tourists below, wounding the district police commander, Israeli police stormed the Temple Mount and fired rubber-coated steel bullets at the rioters, killing four Palestinian youths and wounding as many as 200.

In the months that followed, demonstrations erupted all over the West Bank and Gaza, as violence escalated. Israeli police responded with live fire and rubber-coated steel bullets.

The events of 2000 refer to several years of disturbances and clashes inside Israel, mostly between Arab citizens and the IDF.

Palestinians view the Second Intifada as part of their ongoing struggle for national liberation, justice, and an end to Israeli occupation, whereas many Israelis see it as a wave of Palestinian terrorism.

Palestinian tactics ranged from mass protests and general strikes, similar to the First Intifada, to armed attacks on Israeli soldiers, security forces, police, settlers, and civilians, suicide bombing attacks, and the launching of Qassam rockets into Israel.

Israeli tactics included curbing Palestinians' movements through the setting up of checkpoints and the enforcement of strict curfews in certain areas. Infrastructural attacks against Palestinian Authority targets such as police and prisons were another method to force the Palestinian Authority to repress the anti-Israel protests and attacks on Israeli targets.

The ending date of the Second Intifada is still disputed, as there was no definite event that brought it to an end. Some commentators such as Sever Plocker consider the intifada to have ended in late 2004 (Plocker, 2008). Following the sickness and subsequent death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004, the Palestinians lost their internationally recognized leader of the previous three decades, after which the intifada lost momentum and led to internal fighting between Palestinian factions (most notably the Hamas-Fatah Conflict), as well as conflict within Fatah itself. Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, announced in June 2004 and completed in August 2005, is also cited, for instance by Ramzy Baroud (Baroud, 2006), as signaling the end of the Intifada.

As matter of fact, the incumbent Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas vowed in the days leading to the Sharm El-Sheikh Summit in February 2005 that the summit would mark the end of the Intifada. The meeting resulted in Abbas declaring that the violence would come to an end, and Ariel Sharon agreeing to release 900 Palestinian prisoners and withdraw from West Bank towns. Some consider this to be the 'official' end of the Second Intifada, although sporadic violence still continued outside PA control, and without PA agreement.

According to B'Tselem<sup>4</sup>, at the end of the conflict, the military and civilian death toll, is estimated to be 5500 Palestinians and over 1100 Israelis, as well as 64 foreigners.

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<sup>4</sup> B'Tselem (in Hebrew: **בצלם**, literally "in the image of", as in Genesis 1:27) is an Israeli NGO founded in 1989 by a group of prominent Israeli public figures, including lawyers, academics, journalists, and members of the Knesset. B'Tselem calls itself "the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories" and it stated goals are "to document and educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories, combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel," as is declared on their website, [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org).

B'Tselem also reports that through April 30, 2008 there were 577 Palestinians killed by Palestinians. Of those, 120 were Palestinians killed by Palestinians for suspected collaboration with Israel.

### *Back to Lebanon*

After only a few years of relative calm, on July 12, 2006 a conflict started again on the border between Lebanon and northern Israel.

The conflict began when Hezbollah militants fired rockets at Israeli border towns.

During the campaign, the Hezbollah rocket force fired between 3,970 and 4,228 rockets at a rate of more than 100 per day, unprecedented since the Iran-Iraq war. An estimated 23% of these rockets hit cities and built-up areas across northern Israel, while the remainder hit open areas. The major cities hit were Haifa, Hadera, Nazareth, Tiberias, Acre, as well as dozens of towns, kibbutzim, moshavim, and Druze and Israeli-Arab villages. The northern West Bank was also hit.

Israel responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon that damaged Lebanese civilian infrastructure, including Beirut's Rafik Hariri International Airport, an air and naval blockade, and a ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah then launched more rockets into northern Israel and engaged the IDF in guerrilla warfare from hardened positions.

Hezbollah engaged in guerrilla warfare with IDF ground forces, fighting from well-fortified positions, often in urban areas, and attacking with small, well-armed units. Hezbollah fighters were highly trained, and were equipped with flak jackets, night-vision goggles, communications equipment, and sometimes with Israeli uniforms and equipment. An Israeli soldier who participated in the war said that the Hezbollah fighters were "nothing like Hamas or the Palestinians. They are trained and highly qualified. All of us were kind of surprised" (Erlanger S, Oppel R.A., 2006). Hezbollah concentrated on inflicting losses on the IDF, believing an unwillingness to absorb steady losses to be Israel's strategic weakness. However, they sustained greater losses than the IDF during ground engagements.

The conflict killed at least 1,200 people, mostly Lebanese citizens, severely damaged Lebanese civil infrastructure, and displaced approximately one million Lebanese and 300,000–500,000



Israelis. After the ceasefire, some parts of southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable due to Israeli unexploded cluster bombs.

On 11 August 2006, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved UN Resolution 1701 in an effort to end the hostilities. The resolution, which was approved by both the Lebanese and Israeli governments in the days that followed, called for the disarmament of Hezbollah, for withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, for the deployment of Lebanese soldiers and an enlarged United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south. UNIFIL was given an expanded mandate, including the ability to use force to ensure that their area of operations wasn't used for hostile activities, and to resist attempts by force to prevent them from discharging their duties. The Lebanese army began deploying in southern Lebanon on 17 August 2006. The blockade was lifted on 8 September 2006. On 1 October 2006, most Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanon, though the last of the troops continued to occupy the border-straddling village of Ghajar. In the time since the enactment of UNSCR 1701 both the Lebanese government and UNIFIL have stated that they will not disarm Hezbollah. The remains of the two captured soldiers, whose fates were unknown, were returned to Israel on 16 July 2008 as part of a prisoner exchange.

### *Back to Gaza*

Gaza was occupied by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War following the defeat of the Egyptian Army. Frequent conflicts have erupted between Palestinians and the Israeli authorities in Gaza since the 1970s. The tensions lead to the First Intifada in 1987, when Gaza became the center of confrontation during this uprising, and economic conditions in the city worsened.

In September 1993, leaders of Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords. The agreement called for Palestinian administration of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, which was implemented in May 1994. Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza, leaving a new Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to administer and police the city.

The PNA, led by Yasser Arafat, chose Gaza as its first provincial headquarters. The newly established Palestinian National Council held its inaugural session in Gaza in March 1996.

Israel maintains that its occupation of Gaza, as defined by Article 6 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, ended following the completion of its unilateral disengagement plan in 2005, asserting that Israel has no functions of government in the Gaza Strip.

In 2005, Israel pulled out its troops occupying Gaza, along with thousands of Israelis who had settled in the territory.

January 2006 legislative elections brought Hamas to power of the Palestinian National Authority. Since the formation of a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority government Israel and the Quartet on the Middle East imposed economic sanctions against the Palestinian territories.

The President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, then dismissed the Hamas-led government and formed a government in the West Bank, bypassing the Hamas-dominated parliament. Israel imposed a ground, air, and maritime blockade on the Gaza Strip, and announced it would allow only humanitarian supplies into the Strip. Palestinian groups were partially able to bypass the blockade through tunnels, some of which are said to have been used for weapons smuggling.

Between 2005 and 2007, Palestinian groups in Gaza fired about 2,700 locally made Qassam rockets into Israel, killing four Israeli civilians and injuring 75 others.

On June 19, 2008, an Egyptian-brokered six-month "lull" or pause in hostilities between Israel and Hamas went into effect. The agreement required Hamas to end rocket and mortar attacks on Israel and to enforce the pause in hostilities throughout Gaza.

On December 18, a day before the truce officially expired, Hamas declared the end of the ceasefire. More than 20 rockets were launched from Gaza into southern Israel on that day.

On December 27, Israel launched a military campaign codenamed *Operation Cast Lead*<sup>5</sup> targeting the members and infrastructure of Hamas in response to the numerous rocket attacks upon Israel from the Gaza Strip.

Israel stated the strikes were in response to repetitive rocket and mortar attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel since 2005, while the Palestinians stated that they were responding to Israel's military excursions and blockade of the Gaza Strip.

On January 17, 2009 Israel announced a unilateral ceasefire, conditional on elimination of further rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza, and began withdrawing its troops over the days that followed. Hamas later announced its own ceasefire, with its own conditions of complete withdrawal and opening of border crossings. A reduced level of mortar fire originating in Gaza continues, though Israel has so far not taken this as a breach of the ceasefire.

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<sup>5</sup> In Hebrew: מבצע עופרת יצוקה

Difficulties in ascertaining an accurate Palestinian casualty count have been attributed to a number of factors. According to the involved combatants (IDF and Palestinian Ministry of Health, Gaza) and Human Rights NGOs (B'Tselem and Palestinian Centre for Human Rights) at least 1,300 Palestinians were killed in the conflict. On the Israeli front line ten soldiers were killed, along with three civilians.

### *Back to the Army*

“The ‘religion of security’ is a metaphor for considering the phenomenon of security in Israel.[...] Just as a child accepts unquestioningly the religion he was born into and some basic answer he receives...so too the Israeli child absorbs at a very early age the basic core-belief of national security” (Arian, Talmud and Herman, 1988, p.83).

According to Kimmerling, despite the segmentation of the Israeli state into seven cultures and countercultures, two common metacultural codes or narratives remain intact for at least most Jewish citizens of the State. The first code is the power-oriented “securitistic” one. The other one is a local Israeli version of “Jewishness”: “the main characteristic of the social and political order in Israel is its definition as a “Jewish state,” in large measure blurring the boundaries between nationalism and religion in many spaces. This situation is expressed in a taken for granted equivalency between the Jewish religion, on the one hand, and Jewish, as well as Israeli, nationalism and its expressions in the cultural, political, and judicial system, on the other. These codes are common to both the right and the left, to Ashkenazim and Mizrachim, to the poor and the rich, to women and men, and to the religious, in their various degrees and hues, as well as to the secular” (Kimmerling, 2001, p.173).

As Kimmerling argues, Israel’s system may be characterized as “total militarism”: “people participate in the military more as members of a nuclear family or a primary group (as husband, daughters, sons, first cousins, in-laws, school class or youth movement buddies) than as individuals. When a member of a family serves, the whole family is “recruited.” The specific content of this institution varies from cohort to cohort, or from sociological generation to another (e.g., the *Palmach*, “Six Day War”, “Yom Kippur War”, and recently, the Intifada generations). Each of these generations acquires its own experiences, developing its own slang, jargon, and worldview, either as “fighters” (which itself is a cultural attribute), as part of a primary group of

which only some directly participate in conflict, or through the mass media and folklore” (Kimmerling, 2001, p.220).

In the next part of the chapter, I will analyze the “return to the army” of Israeli new millennium media and how this is again going to change the representation of the Israeli soldier in Israeli new millennium cinema.

## 5.2 “It is Good to Die for Ourselves”

We want to return! Not to Uganda, not to Argentina or to Madagascar, not even to Palestine. It is Poland that we long for, the land of our fathers and forefathers. [...] We direct our appeal not only to Jews. We accept into our ranks all those for whom there is no place in their homelands, the expelled and the persecuted. [...] We long to write new pages into a history that never quite took the course we wanted. We count on being able to govern our cities, work the land, and bring up our children in peace and together with you. Welcome us with open arms, as we will welcome you! (*The Jewish Renaissance Movement In Poland: A Manifest*, Yael Bartana, 2011)

Yael Bartana, born in Israel in 1970, is the first non-Polish national to represent Poland in the history of the Venice Biennale. Bartana's films, *Mary Koszmary* (2007), *Mur i wieża* (2009) and *Zamach* (2011) revolve around the activities of the 'Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland': a virtual political group calling for the return of Jews to the land of their forefathers. The films traverse a landscape scarred by the histories of competing nationalisms and militarisms, overflowing with the narratives of the Israeli settlement movement, Zionist dreams, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and the Palestinian right of return.

In *Mary Koszmary* (“Nightmares”, fig.5.1), the first film in the trilogy, a young activist delivers a speech in the abandoned National Stadium in Warsaw. He urges three million Jews to come back to Poland and explores a complicated set of social and political relationships among Jews, Poles and other Europeans in an age of globalization.



Fig.5. 1 *Mary Koszmary*, Yael Bartana, 2007

The second film in the trilogy, *Mur i wieża* (“Wall and Tower”, fig.5.2) was made in the Warsaw district of Muranów, where a new kibbutz was erected to the scale and in the architectural style of those constructed in the 1930s.



In the new film *Zamach* (“Assassination”, fig. 5.3), Fig.5.2 *Mur i wieża*, Yael Bartana, 2009

the final part of her trilogy, Bartana ultimately tests the dream of multinational community and a brand new Polish society. The film takes place in the not too distant future, during the funeral ceremony of the leader of the Jewish Renaissance Movement, who has been killed by an unidentified assassin. It is by means of this symbolic death that the myth of the new political movement is unified, a movement that could become a concrete project to be implemented in Poland, Europe, or the Middle East in the days to come.

All of Bartana’s video works clearly refer to social symbols and rituals such as socialization and nationalization ceremonies.

The 2001 video *Trembling time* (fig.5.4) was filmed in Tel Aviv on Soldiers’ Memorial Day, the

day that commemorates those who died in the Israeli wars. Filmed from a highway bridge, it depicts a moment of silence in a traffic jam during a national siren. The siren unexpectedly interrupts the flow of cars along the highway: the cars slow down, stopping in the middle of the street, their doors



Fig.5.3 *Zamach*, Yael Bartana, 2011

open and people get out standing in silence, lowering their heads to look at the ground.

The issue of death becomes a kind of cross-sectional issue in the Israeli art of the new millennium.

In Eshkol Nevo's *World Cup Wishes*, which tells the story of four friends in their late twenties, we already know from the outset of the book that something has



Fig.5.4 *Trembling time*, Yael Bartana, 2001

happened to Yuval, the main character and the book's narrator. From 1986, the four friends always watch the World Cup together. Then, in 1998, one of the friends suggests they each write "where he dreams of being in another four years. And at the next World Cup, we'll open the papers and see what happened in the meantime."

*World Cup Wishes* is an account of the friends' wishes and what becomes of them by the time of the 2002 World Cup. Every one of them undergoes changes in their lives. Change is in fact the novel's driving force; how the friends change, and how Israel changes around them. Yuval is tormented by memories of an incident he witnessed during his military service. Some of the characters are preoccupied with what is happening to the Palestinians and there is a sharp sense of the growing brutalization of Israeli society. Yuval, in fact, risked his life not on the battlefield but in the traffic jams of Tel Aviv, where an ex-soldier affected by PTSD, beats him fatally after bumping into Yuval's car by mistake.

In 1992 the rock musician Aviv Geffen wrote of his thorax *Tov lamut bead atzmenu*<sup>6</sup>: "it is good to die for ourselves" (fig.5.5). Geffen was, and is, extremely popular among Israeli youth. His music deals with subjects such as love, peace, death, suicide, politics, the army in general and the IDF specifically. He is often criticized



Fig.5.5 Picture of Aviv Geffen written on his thorax *Tov lamut bead atzmenu*, 1992

<sup>6</sup> In Hebrew: טוב למות בעד עצמנו

for not serving in the IDF, though, officially, he was he was discharged for “medical reasons”<sup>7</sup>.

In the new millennium era there are no new national heroes, and the heroes of the past find a place only as ghosts of a Zionist era which no longer exists.

*Three Paratroopers at the Western Wall*, photographed by David Rubinger in 1967<sup>8</sup>, the iconic representation of David exhausted but triumphant after a long fight against Goliath, in 2002 is taken provocatively by David Tartakover in order to “celebrate” the *Thirty five years of Occupation* (fig.5.6).

As a designer who ceaselessly explores his culture, Tartakover ties the threads between past nostalgia and present reality. Strong compositional elements reinforce the powerful message of this poster that

commemorates the thirty-fifth year of occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israeli troops, like the image of Israeli generals marching through the gates of Jerusalem at the Occupation’s inception in the Six Day War.

In the new millennium several Israeli artists drill images into the collective Israeli memory from which there is no going back.

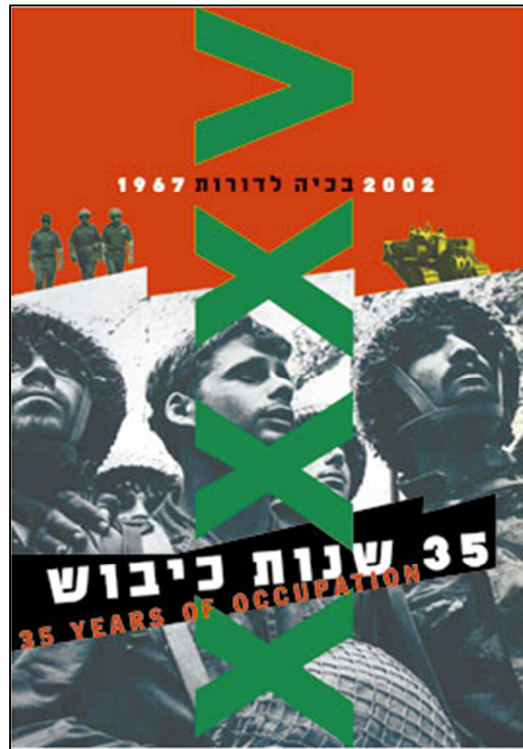


Fig. 5.6 *Thirty five years of Occupation*, David Tartakover, 2002

<sup>7</sup> The medical profile is code used in the IDF to indicate the suitability and medical status of a person to serve in various units and positions in the army. The range of the profile moves between profile 21, which is the lowest and rules them out from serving in the IDF, and 97, indicating the highest health status. Profiles of 64 and under rule out the possibility for service in combat positions.

As in Aviv Gefen’s case, some military service candidates take advantage of the medical profile procedure in order to avoid military service.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2, fig. 2.15, pag.67



In the 2009-2010 series *Made in Israel*, Eran Rubinfeld designs poster promoting a fictive Israeli Rock 'n' Roll hit adopting several iconic images of Israeli heroes. Moshe Dayan is the pin-up's tattoo. The well-know face of the Israeli Soldier in the Suez Canal is changed with the face of Paul McCartney of the Beatles, in an image celebrating Israel's victory in the 1967 war that became a famous *Life* magazine cover<sup>9</sup>.

During an interview with Rubinfeld on May 4, 2011, at the Café Ben Ami in Tel Aviv, I asked why he decided to use Israeli icons in his work.

“I decided to use the images of these Israeli ‘heroes’ not only because of their iconographic value, but first of all because these kinds of ‘heroes’ directly involved my personal life. My father died in Sinai during the Yom Kippur War, when I was eight years old. He was a doctor on *miluim* service, and the responsible for his death was Moshe Dayan.”

FM: “And how did the idea of the rock music and LP covers come about?”

ER: “Because at that time they were really thought to be like rock stars. For example, in one of my LP covers Moshe Dayan says, “the situation was never better,” which is a sentence that he really said at the beginning of Yom Kippur War”.

FM: “And why the pin-up models?”

ER: “Because all the models, wearing weapons and posing next to motorbikes represent the stereotypical image of the IDF and also the typical Israeli macho-centrism. Also all the tattoos, the pins and jewellery which they wear are taken from the symbols of some special unit of the IDF. For example, in the poster with the sign *Made in Israel* (fig.5.7) the model is wearing a white dress in a blue background, like the colour of the Israeli flag. The tattoo she has is the face of Moshe Dayan and in the corner of the poster is the comic strip of David Elazar, the Chief of

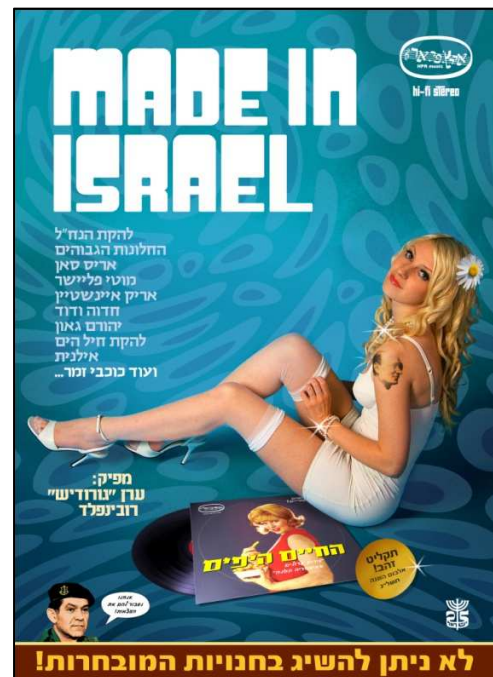


Fig.5.7 *Made in Israel*, Eran Rubinfeld, 2009-2010

<sup>9</sup> See chapter 2, paragraph 2, fig. 2.14, pag.66

Staff at the time of the Yom Kippur War, saying ‘we will break their bones,’ as he really said at the beginning of the war.”

“In *They say that it will be Happiness* (fig.5.8) the almost naked model covers herself with LP covers of Israeli nostalgic songs about the ‘48 and ‘67 wars. In the background there are the typical Sinai dunes and on the LP cover there is the famous picture of the Suez Canal’s hero. But nobody ever said in public that after that war he came out of mind.”

What has changed radically in the Israeli artworks along the time axis is the ability to recognize the multiplicity and diversity of narratives, and the fact that each side of the conflict assumes the right to speak of its own injuries, to express a multi-faceted identity: gendered, national, and human.

In the 2000 work of Gael Weinstein, *Anthem* (fig.5.9), the battlefield of the soldiers becomes the field of table football, with a line of football players threaded on a stick, standing at attention when singing the anthem. With this work Weinstein deals with two kinds of collective obedience, the one to the national anthem, and the other to the virile anthems of power, acceleration and victory.



Fig.5.9 *Anthem*, Gael Weinstein, 2000



Fig.5.8 *They say that it will be Happiness*, Eran Rubinfeld, 2009-2010

As Weinstein explained during an interview that I had with him on February 6, 2009, in his studio in Tel Aviv, “the fact that the players were molded in white porcelain created a mental hybridization built on the contrast between the ceremonial delicacy of the fragile porcelain, and the virile power-oriented cult that bursts into the stadium.

The players are made by porcelain because they became fragile, and they are not able to fight anymore.”

Not surprisingly, only a team is playing. In the new millennium game, the enemy doesn't exist anymore.

In Erez Israeli's work, even the body of the soldier itself disappears.

In the 2002 work *No Title* (fig.5.10) the battlefield is represented by a rank of 37 boots molded in pouring concrete.



Fig.5.10 *No Title* , Erez Israeli, 2002

As Israeli explained during an interview that I had with him on March 25, 2009, in his studio in Tel Aviv, “concrete is the material of our country: for the bunkers, the Memorial, the separation

wall. In Hebrew there is even a popular sentence: ‘*nalbishech shlemat beton va melet*’, which means ‘we will dress you with a concrete dress.’<sup>10</sup> I choose the subject of the boot because in our army boots there is always the name plate and because often during the war the feet are the only part of the body which doesn't disappear.”

Israeli's work is often related to his ongoing preoccupation with images of mourning and commemoration, and the flowers it contains recur in different works: in his installation in 2004, *For the Lady of the*



Fig.5.11 *For the Lady of the Flowers*, Erez Israeli, 2004

<sup>10</sup> In Hebrew: גלביש שלמת בטון ומלט

The sentence come from the poem *Shir boker*, literally “Morning Song”, written by Nathan Alterman in 1932. This song represented the love of the pioneers which were building the homeland, pictured as a beloved and surrounded (not sure what you mean by surrounded in this context) woman. The purpose of the sentence was describing the over-construction which corrupts the environment and the landscape of *Eretz Israel*.

*Flowers* (fig.5.11), the artist created a military memorial wreath out of tiny beads. In another work of 2005, *Fields of Flowers* (fig.5.12), the ethos of commemoration and mourning grows even more pervasive, while the blood-red flowers<sup>11</sup> (glass beads threaded on plastic netting) seem to seep into the green expanse, simultaneously injuring it and covering up for the presence of death that is seething below its surface.



Fig.5.12 *Fields of Flowers*, Erez Israeli, 2005

FM: “Why do you have this kind of obsession with the issue of the death?”

EI: “More than the army, I think it is the matter of death that all Israeli citizens really have in common. It is as if at a certain point all of us became ‘comfortable’ with this subject”.

The subject of death becomes central also in the work of Nir Hod. In his 2003 painting *Lost Youth* (fig.5.13), Nir Hod depicted a military funeral. This is a monumental work based on staged photography.



Fig.5.13 *Lost Youth*, Nir Hod, 2003

As Gal observes, at first glance, it seems to be a direct testimony of the way in which emotions surface in a mourning situation, but the sterility of the image, the positioning of the figure of the artist at the center of the composition, and the meticulous technique give this image a double status: “it

<sup>11</sup>According to the Israeli mythology the flower of French Lavanda, called in Hebrew *Dam ha Maccabim* (literally “the blood of the Maccabi”) grows in the fields where human blood hit the ground, in order to remember who died for the country.

is both a record of a very emotional, painful situation and a staged production in a framework of personal, narcissistic ritual in which emotion, like the wreath of flowers surrounding the picture, is manufactured, opposed to any authentic feeling” (Gal, 2009).

In his series dedicated to soldiers (fig.5.14), the object of Nir Hod’s work is the analysis and interpretation of beauty. This beauty often betrays a deeper, more abstract meaning that alludes to sleep, or death, in a kind of dialogic process between *eros* and *thanatos*.



Fig.5.14, *Love Story* Nir Hod, 1997

This particular mutual relation greatly influenced the representation of the soldier in the contemporary Israeli art and cinema, determining relative consequences in the representation of masculinity.

Early Israeli cinema had eradicated the dynamism and differences in the Hebrew culture of its time by creating a hierarchy meant to support a homogenous view of the “New Hebrew” identity. As Gertz observes, the Israeli male, who controlled space with his action and gaze, dominated all dimensions: length, breadth, and height. This male was not in truth a coherent, stable identity, but rather a product of literary and cinematic discourse, a negation of the feminine Jew rejected by Zionism: “The geography that unfolded beneath his feet and gaze denoted his connection with the homeland and his power to control it. The camera adhered to his point of view and identified with it, and the best cinematic techniques of the time amplified his image and displayed his control of space” (Gertz, 2002, p.158).

According to Gertz, the new Israeli cinema treats space similarly to his representation of people: instead of replacing Israeli space with an alternative space, it makes different spaces overlap and commingle. This cinema expresses a crisis in Israeli identity and implicitly seeks to transcend it by combining and blending the spaces that nationalities and gender have created within it: “by shifting between various identities and spaces, it dissolves the borders that separate them, and thereby transforms a Zionist discourse of the past into a polyphony of voices, creating room for a

new kind of Zionism, composed of various minorities from different regions, and attentive to the voices of the others” (Gertz, 2002, p. 158).

The films viewed in the next chapter define their nations’ border and social imperatives, but they also open them, challenge them, and create a wider space where classes, nations and genders intermingle more freely and establish dialogue. They thus anticipate a transnational discourse that seeks to place the debate over borders into what Gertz calls a “world that has ceased to be a space of places, and has become a space of flows” (Gertz, 2002, p.182).

### 5.3 Ethnography of Israeli iMovies in the New Millennium Cinema

“Have you tried anything?”  
“Like what?”  
“Therapy, a psychiatrist, shiatsu, anything...”  
“No Nothing. I called you”  
“I’m just a filmmaker”  
“Can’t film be therapeutic?”  
“You’ve dealt with all the issues in your film, right?”  
“No something like this”  
“ No flashbacks from Lebanon?”  
“No. Not really...”  
“Beirut, Sabra and Shatila?”  
“The truth is that’s not stored in my system.”

(*Waltz with Bashir*, Ari Folman, 2008)

*“Youtube Killed the Video Star”: how the Digital Revolution is Impacting on the Film industry*

According to the Jerusalem Post’s journalist Barry Davis, one of the most fascinating aspects of Internet-based communication is its double-edged sword property of alienating people, through reliance of impersonal electronic communication, and it’s continually evolving ability to connect people and create virtual communities (Davis, 2011).

The new millennium saw the acceleration of these trends, especially as Israel increasingly opened up to outside influences.

As Talmon and Peleg argue, millennial, postmodern sensibilities exercised a particularly strong hold on Israeli culture by emphasizing hybridity and ambiguity; the destabilization of grand narratives, and the fluidity of boundaries between national and global, masculine and feminine, real and virtual, and documentary and fiction (Talmon M. and Peleg Y., 2011, p. XV).

Many personal documentaries and autobiographical films were produced in Israel in the last decade and a half. In these filmic diaries and self-portraits, which Shmulik Duvdevani terms “iMovies,” an explicit allusion to popular Apple products like the iPod and iPhone, stands a defined subject who examines the historical world from his own personal viewpoint. Duvdevani’s work focuses on a trend, maybe even a cultural movement of documentary films that explore their creators' private lives and experiences. In this kind of movie, the camera and recording equipment are not hidden on the sidelines. When they are exhibited as though they are

a natural part of the set, the photographic equipment is an important element of the reality as depicted on film.

iMovies generally focus on the intimate family framework and on the relationships between the narrator and society and its institutions: family, the army, and so forth.

According to the Israeli scholar of Cinema Studies Schmulik Duvdevani, the flowering of personal documentary film in Israel is rooted mainly in an historical context, which is in the outbreak of the Palestinian popular uprising in late December of 1987. The First Intifada attempted by means of sticks, stones and Molotov cocktails to bring an end to the Israeli presence in the occupied territories and establish a Palestinian homeland, thus placing IDF soldiers in particular and the Israeli public in general in an ambiguous position: “punishment of the Palestinians by exile or destruction of their homes in the Intifada years placed the Jew for the first time in the position of his ancient persecutors, the Babylonians and Romans, who had expelled his forefathers from their homeland and imposed thousands of years of exile upon them” (Duvdevani, 2009).

Twenty years after the Six-Day War the Jew-Zionist is called upon to cope with this turnabout of roles as represented by the story of David and Goliath, where the boy armed with a slingshot and a stone is now the Palestinian youngster facing Israeli tanks.

On the other hand, when the camera reaches the battlefield, the injury and even the funeral of the soldiers, the “Unknown soldier” is no longer unknown. The “privatization of the broadcasting” determined what Yael Munk calls “the privatization of war memory” in contemporary Israeli cinema (Munk, 2011, p.96).

*“Stuck in the Middle with Me”*: *Privatizations of War Memory in Contemporary Israeli Cinema*

In the Israeli scholar of Cinema Studies 2008 Pablo Utin published “The New Israeli Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers” (in Hebrew, *Icebergs in the Land of Heatwaves*).

Subtitled “The Israeli Cinema of Disengagement”, the word “disengagement” here represents a metaphor referencing Israel’s 2005 dismantling of settlements in the Gaza Strip.

In the introduction Utin argues that contemporary Israeli cinema can be characterized by an aesthetic of disengagement, a withdrawal from direct political content. The author claims, in fact, that even those films that deal with social and political issues choose a minimalist aesthetics (hence we do not see the enemy), a subtle look inward, as if we are exposing the tip of an



iceberg, knowing full well that the mass is lying just underneath the surface: “In the wake of the Second Intifada, there began to be a need to deal with the political and the social, but in a more sophisticated way and without getting caught up in the slogans that many had dealt with. A realization emerged among some filmmakers that the personal is not the opposite of the political, but rather that the situation is more complex” (Utin, 2008b, p.13-27).

According to the Israeli scholar of Cinema Studies Eran Kaplan, with the Second Intifada, which erupted in late 2000 and turned the entire country of Israel, especially urban centres, into combat zones, the exuberance of the 1990s quickly gave way to a sense of existential fear. But unlike the earlier decade, this time the enemy was not the armies of foreign nations but clandestine terrorists, bringing a strong and wealthy country with a reported nuclear arsenal to a seemingly permanent state of emergency: “In this climate of terror, the Israeli soldier is neither a disinterested slacker nor a fierce fighter in the open battleground rather, like the rest of the society, he appears to play the role of victim of a hidden, menacing enemy” (Kaplan, 2011, p.65).

As Munk suggests, the new millennium films adopt muted tones and prefer symbolism over the explicit representation of war. The overt patriotism which characterized the national cinema of the 1960s and was then widely criticized in the 1980s, is abandoned making room for low-ranking soldiers to express their ambivalence towards war making, showing a random group of men who would not have met as civilians, and who are thrust into intimate situations that make them face the struggle for survival and the possibility of death together: “The patriotic meaning of military service, which figured as a conceptual and ideological framework in previous films, seems to have lost its validity. Fighting to survive, the Israeli soldiers in both films demonstrate the arbitrariness of their condition” (Munk, 2011, p.98).

In this new kind of representation of the soldier, the representation of the battlefield also changes greatly in the Israeli cinema of the new millennium.

Regarding the representation of the *ethnoscape*, this is done through representations of radical spaces: spaces of disorientation, as in the cases of *Kippur* and *Waltz with Bashir*, and the *mise en scène* of claustrophobia, in the case of *Beaufort* and *Lebanon*.

As Munk observes, their focus on the lives of a limited number of soldiers enables them to draw the way in which canonical history is experienced through the eyes of individuals. Revealing the gap between historical narrative and individual experience, they offer a new political

interpretation of the recent history of the State of Israel, an interpretation based upon the disillusionment with national myths and the privatization of war memories (Munk, 2011, p. 106). The films which I'm going to analyze in this paragraph reveal, as Munk puts it: "a distancing from that national ethos and a privatization of war memories that opened the way to the appearance of individual trauma and legitimized its public discussion" (Munk, 2011, p.105).

### *Back to the Past*

In 2000 Amos Gitai sought to mark the twenty seventh year of the personal trauma he underwent in the Yom Kippur War, deliberately releasing the film *Kippur* (fig. 5.15) in October, when the war broke out, in 1973.

The film opens with an unconventional lovemaking scene involving the protagonist, Weinraub, and his female partner. The entire scene is filmed in one extended continuous shot, a long take of seven minutes. During this long and slow sequence, accompanied by a soundtrack of a lone saxophone, the lovers hand-paint each others' bodies in a variety of primary colors that eventually turn into the khaki color of the battlefield. Their sexual act, in fact, is brutally interrupted when war breaks out and Weinraub is called to join his unit.

In the second scene he passes through the completely empty streets of Tel-Aviv<sup>12</sup> and then continues toward the front on the Golan Heights together with a friend who

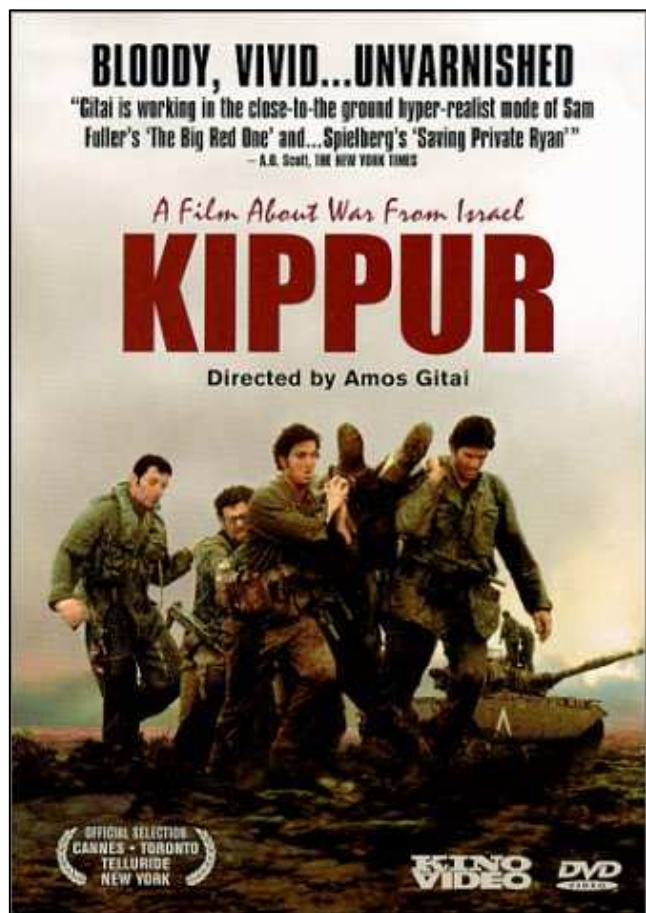


Fig. 5.15 Poster of *Kippur*, Amos Gitai, 2000

<sup>12</sup> Yom Kippur is a legal holiday in the modern state of Israel. On Yom Kippur there are no radios or television broadcasts, airports are shut down, there is no public transportation, and all shops and businesses are closed.

picks him up in his car.

When they arrive at the front, however, they realize that this war, as opposed to previous ones, is out of control and their chances of finding their unit are slim. Determined to help, they quickly join an airborne medical rescue unit that they encounter by chance and the rest of the film consists of their efforts to rescue wounded soldiers and airlift them from the battleground on the Golan Heights to hospitals in Israel.

The protagonists' journey comes to an end as they find themselves deliberating the evacuation of yet another fatally wounded soldier. While the doctor wants to airlift him, claiming that he is not dead yet, another soldier insists they leave him behind.

The soldiers still try to evacuate the wounded soldier but struggle to make progress in very deep mud. While the soldiers are wallowing in the mud, the wounded soldier falls off the stretcher twice, and eventually the soldiers have to leave him in the field as they are ordered only to evacuate the wounded. The scene ends as Weinraub covers the soldier with his coat, pronouncing his death. The death of this anonymous soldier marks the end of their mission (fig.5.16).

As Yosef observed, the rescue act, therefore, is stretched out, suspended, and infinitely held up, and does not reach its "heroic" climax (Yosef, 2005, p. 64).

When the soldiers finally get on the helicopter and begin their journey back home, Weinraub's gaze reveals the Israeli green landscapes now plowed by tank marks, a reflective vision that is brutally interrupted by a missile that hits the helicopter.

Thinking their mission is over, the soldiers now find themselves almost fatally trapped.

As two members of the crew are transferred to a hospital, Weinraub picks up his car and drives home after meeting with the pilot who declares his intention to fly to Tel Aviv to meet those responsible for the war.

The last sequence opens in Weinraub's house where his girlfriend is peacefully engaged in yoga exercises outside. This



Fig.5.16 Scene of *Kippur*

scene, in contrast to the previous sequence of the muddy and chaotic battlefield, leads to a repetition of the opening lovemaking scene: a splash of paint on the white canvas, followed by splashes of primary colors.

As Munk points out, again, the painted naked bodies of the lovers fill the screen tying the lovemaking with the battlefield. But, as opposed to the opening scene during which the camera followed the dynamic lovers, now the camera stays still and remains stationary even when the naked, painted lovers roll out of frame, and the white stain left by their bodies remains on the sheet in the center of the frame, an emblem of the war's traumatic memory (Munk, 2011, p.99).

Regarding the representation of the *bodyscape*, in Kippur we see often not only wounded but even amputated bodies, dipped in the red color of blood.

As Yosef analyzes, also aesthetically, these scenes correspond to the sex scenes at the beginning of the film: in the lovemaking scene the couple rubs paint on one other, with green and red the dominant shades. Similarly, in the scene after the crash, the same colours reappear: the green of the uniform and the red of the smeared blood (Yosef, 2005, p. 65).

The other dominant colour of the movie's *ethnoscape* is the gray of the deep fog, the heavy rain that floods the earth and the boggy mud: a boggy battlefield which represents a non-realistic metaphorical status, for no rain fell during the Yom Kippur War.

As Munk observes, images of wounded soldiers, wading through dark mud, are shown repeatedly, lending the battle connotations of a dreary and never-ending journey. Time and again the protagonists try to rescue injured soldiers that are shown languishing on a deeply rutted battlefield where the enemy is significantly absent, invisible (Munk, 2011, p.99).

According to Yosef, the soldier's passive masculine position is represented by the fact that they are not really fighters: they do not take an active part in the battle, but only arrive in the battlefield after other soldiers have already been fighting there (Yosef, 2005, p. 58).

As Munk analyzed, the sense of abandonment the soldiers experience is depicted through their spatial disorientation. As they move towards the choppers, they are unable to distinguish between north and south. Unlike the authentic representation of Tel-Aviv's empty streets, the monotonous description of the battlefield seems almost abstract. The gray sky that hangs low over the soldiers seems to symbolize the absence of a guiding hand and their constant circles in the mud intensify the sense that they have been betrayed by a seemingly confident leadership that tried to pretend that "everything is under control" (Munk, 2011, p.99).

In many battle scenes, in particular the long-take shot from the perspective of the helicopter flying overhead, the land of the battlefield is seen as furrowed, rent and violated by the tanks' tracks.

As Yosef puts it: "it's an unglorified land, broken down to its material components: dirt and water; it's muddy and swampy land that impedes the soldiers' national mission. The land, which in Zionist culture received a symbolic and abstract meaning ('Motherland') and which was tied to pioneering ideas ('conquering the land', 'making the desert bloom') is here represented as entirely material and concrete, thus losing its national symbolic status" (Yosef, 2005, p.56).

The deconstruction of the motherland mythology through the gaze toward the past is also carried out by Dover Kosashvili, in his movie from 2010 *Infiltration* (*Hitganvut Yehidim*, fig.5.17).

Adapted by the Yehoshua Kenaz's novel from 1986, it is the story of a platoon of young recruits with minor physical disabilities during their basic training at an Israeli army camp in the 1950s.

In the film the story takes place in 1956, a few years after the War of Independence and the establishment of the State, when immigration is at its peak and transit camps are scattered throughout the country.

The movie tells the story of one platoon at Training Base 4, a three-month camp for non-combatants, because all the platoon members are physically unfit or mentally disabled.

The platoon consists of soldiers from cooperative settlements, kibbutzim, towns, Ashkenazim, Mitzrachim, holocaust survivors, secular and religious men.

Despite the fact that they are *jobnicks*, the unit commander is a very ambitious one, who demands to train his unit as if it were *kravi*.



Fig.5.17 Poster of *Infiltration*, Dover Kosashvili, 2010

However, each member has different physical and psychological problem, even Alon, the *kibbutznik*, who dreams of becoming a paratrooper in order to maintain the respect of the rest of the members of the *kibbutz*.

Even the different cultural backgrounds become the reason for conflict. At the end of the training, all the common precepts such as “melting pot”, and “one for all, and all for one” remain unfulfilled.

Instead, the platoon experience here becomes a battle to attain the loftiest dreams, a war waged by individuals against their destiny, as in the case of Alon, who at the end of the film, when he realizes that he will be not sent to the Paratroopers unit, starts to cry and tries, unsuccessfully, to kill himself.

As a *jobnik*, in fact, he is not only unable to fight against the enemy, which does not really exist in the movie, he is even unable to kill himself.

As in *Kippur*, in this movie the enemy also does not exist and the soldiers are not fighters, but lost characters looking for a reason to be part of the IDF.

As in Gitai’s movie, Kosashvili’s film also deals with the mythological past of Israel in order to represent the crisis of Zionist culture in the identity of the Israeli male. This is well represented, in the matter of the *bodyscape* representation, through the weak bodies of the soldiers, indeed, often shot without uniform.

Regarding the representation of the *ethnoscape*, the quasi-absence of the landscape results paradigmatic, substituted with the wall of the anonymous dormitory of the training camp, which is more reminiscent of the claustrophobic dormitory of Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), than the (Mother)land of *Eretz Israel*, and becomes a distinctive pattern of the Israeli cinema of the new millennium.

### *The Others Sides of the Army*

According to the Israelis scholar of Media Studies Gilad Padva, one peculiarity of the Israeli cinema of the new millennium is the improved sensibility for the queer subcultures of Israeli society: “the New Israeli Queer Cinema is interwoven with the deconstruction of Israeli machismo, the growing acceptance of nontraditional masculinities, and the global diffusion of queer subcultures into mainstream popular cultures” (Padva, 2001, p. 314).

Further, as Padva argues, diverse subcultures both outside and inside the mainstream queer community (e.g. orthodox , and Arab GLBTQ people) that were often secluded and mistreated are currently represented in more and more features and documentaries (Padva, 2001, p.320).

It was only in 2000, for instance, that the first Israeli movie representing the subculture of the orthodox in the IDF was made<sup>13</sup>. *Time of Favor* (*Ha Hesder*, fig. 5.18) is the debut of writer-director Joseph Cedar. A former infantry paratrooper, he is one of the few Israeli directors to come out of the orthodox religious community.

The movie tell the story of young modern orthodox men, part of the settler movement, who study at a *yeshivah*<sup>14</sup> in a Jewish settlement in the West Bank territory and serve in the army in a quasi-religious military unit, called *Yeshivah Hesder*<sup>15</sup>, whose allegiance hovers dangerously between their own religious leaders and those of the state.

As Pelege observes, in the film Cedar examines old labor Zionist paradigms through their distorted modern interpretation embodied in *Yeshivat Hahesder*. Whereas Labor Zionism extolled military duty as the ultimate service to the state, the religious soldier in the film perverts that secular dogma by putting God before state (Peleg, 2011, p. 36).

The lecture of Rabbi Meltzer (played by an old much less heroic Assi Dayan), in fact, incites soldiers to act to blow up the Dome of the Rock

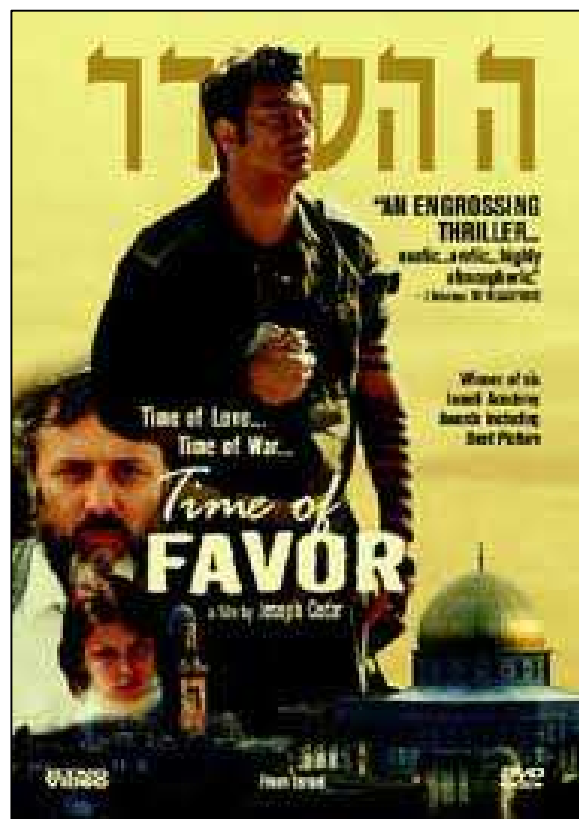


Fig. 5.18 Poster of *Time of Favor*, Joseph Cedar, 2000

<sup>13</sup>According to *Ynet* (the web page of the first Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*) in 2009 over 500 youths studying in *Yeshivot Hesder* (see footnotes below) as part of a program which combines advanced Talmudic studies with military service, joined the army. Among the August 2009 class of yeshiva recruits, over 80% will serve in combat units.

<sup>14</sup> A *yeshiva* (in Hebrew: ישיבה) is a Jewish educational institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts, primarily the Talmud and Torah.

<sup>15</sup> *Yeshivah Hesder* (in Hebrew: ישיבה הסדר) is a Jewish seminary that combines advanced Torah study with military service. It was founded in the 1950s as a way to enable religious youth to combine their strict religious lifestyle with their military duty and become more fully integrated into Israeli society.

mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in order to make room for a third Jewish Temple. However, the form of action he recommends is nonmilitary, that is, to have thousands of Jews praying at the site.

Meanwhile, he wants his daughter, Michal, to marry his best Torah student, Pini, but she does not want to be a commodity and prefers his best friend, the handsome Menachem, who is an officer in the army and has been chosen by the charismatic Rabbi Meltzer of his *yeshivah* (Assi Dayan) to be the commander of their own company of religious soldiers. Menachem is working hard at building up his company, teaching the soldiers how to overcome weakness in battle, and is preparing them for their final ceremony at the Western Wall.

As the love triangle plays out, Pini is the loser, so he reacts by persuading fellow soldier Itamar to steal explosives on the pretext that a big explosion has been ordered by both Rabbi Meltzer and Menachem.

Going into an underground tunnel that extends from the settlement toward the Temple Mount, Pini kills Itamar and is prepared to blow himself up in order to make a political statement.

Michal, realizing that a conspiracy is under way, alerts the Israeli secret service, therefore Menachem is arrested in an effort to find out about the plan.

Menachem, however, knows nothing. After being slapped a lot and humiliated during a long interrogation, he volunteers to talk Pini out of the suicide bomb plot, and then enters the tunnel to save the day.

According to Kronish and Safirman, the film works on two levels. On the political level, it reflects the dangers of exploiting religious fervor for political and violent ends. On the more human level, it criticizes the settlement movement for its lack of sensitivity to the needs and suffering of its individual members (Kronish and Safirman, 2003, p.144).

In this sense, Michal represents the film's most involving character. Unapologetically direct, she speaks her mind about her situation at every opportunity, instigates and quashes romantic situations, and provides an eloquent counterpoint to her father's heedless advocacy and the film's welter of traditional male voices.



However, the turning point in the new representation of Israeli masculinity came with Eytan Fox's 2002 movie, *Yossi and Jagger* (fig.5.19), the first Israeli feature dealing with the issue of the homosexuality in IDF<sup>16</sup>.

Until this movie, only two feature filmmakers in Israel have begun to offer homosexual images on the screen. The first was Amos Gutmann, who, after *Himmo the King of Jerusalem*<sup>17</sup>, confronted the loneliness and pain of AIDS for the first time in Israeli cinema with *Amazing Grace*, made in 1992.

The second Israeli filmmaker to grapple with homosexual issues is Eytan Fox, who already in 1990 made a short film *Time Off (After, 1990)* that challenged the dominant national heteromascularity by signifying gay male eroticism in the IDF through the disembodied cinematic voice.

As Yosef observed, describing a male gay relationship within military homosociality, the film uses the queer disembodied voice to resist and undermine the fixity of sexual as well national subjectivity and the repression of homosexual desire (Yosef, 2004, p. 154).

After his popular first feature film *The Siren's Song (Shirat ha Sirena)*<sup>18</sup>, Fox joined the mainstream media in his hit TV series *Florentin* (1997), scripted by his partner, Gal Uchovsky. Florentine was the first Israeli TV series that included explicitly gay sex scenes and a gay kiss on prime time television, signifying a new phase in the perception of "sissiness" and homosexuality in Israeli society.

*Yossi and Jagger* tells the story of a unit in a

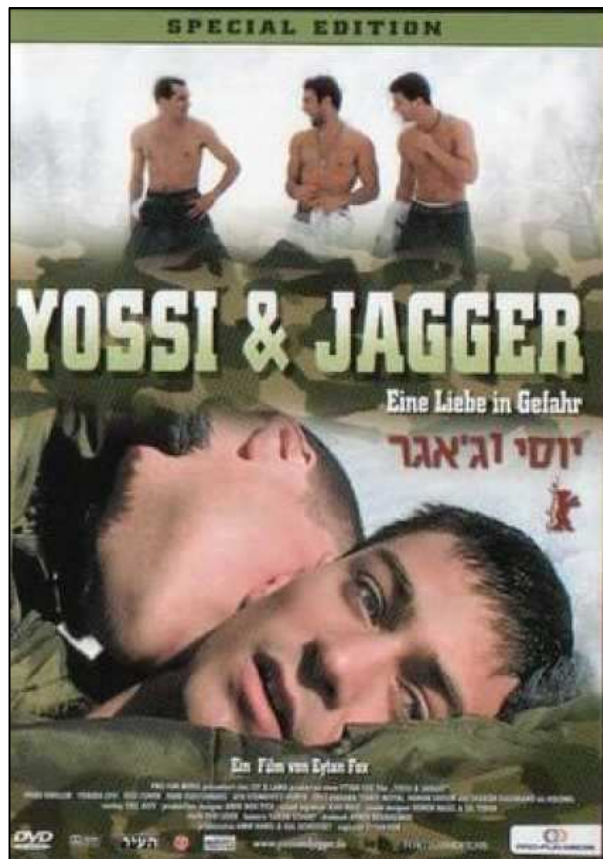


Fig.5.19 Poster of *Yossi and Jagger*, Eytan Fox, 2002

<sup>16</sup> The first movie to represent homosexual love in the IDF is the 1978 *The Troupe (HaLehaka)*, by Avi Nesher (see chapter 3, paragraph 3, p.112), although this was represented only as platonic love.

<sup>17</sup> See chapter 3, paragraph 3, p. 166

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 3, p. 171

remote army base in the snow-covered mountains near Lebanon.

Yossi, the commander, leads a passionate romantic relationship in secret with his second-in-command officer, Lior, who is called Jagger by everyone because of his rock star-like handsomeness. Everyone likes him, and he likes everyone, but there's only one person he loves: Yossi. This becomes a problematic situation because even though Yossi loves Jagger, too, as an erotic romp in the snow establishes early on (fig.5.20), he is Jagger's superior and isn't willing to be even the least bit demonstrative in public, his motto, in fact, is: "Don't ask, don't tell, and most definitely don't lock lips in the machine gun bunker when other soldiers are nearby."

Therefore, even if the other soldiers do not seem to mind the homosexual relationship, the only time they can spend alone is when they pretend to go out to inspect practice fields.

Nonetheless, Yossi is not the only one with a crush on the popular Jagger.

One day, a colonel arrives at the base with two female soldiers, one of whom he immediately sleeps with in the bunker. The other one, Yaeli, becomes very interested in Jagger, while she refuses the sexual advances of another soldier, Ofir, who tries to make it clear that Jagger is not particularly interested in her. "He's probably not your type" is what he tells her, revealing indirectly that he knows about the homosexual relationship.

However, at the end of the movie, the "impossible" love is interrupted. Jagger is fatally injured during a night ambush, and dies in the arms of Yossi, who is only now able to articulate his love for him, and their secret love remains

a secret even after his death. In fact, during the funeral reception at Jagger's parents' house, Jagger's mother mistakes Yaeli for his girlfriend, and no one in the unit reveals to his mother that Yossi was his boyfriend. Rather, they let her think that Yaeli was his girlfriend, even when she laments that she knew very little about her son, including his favorite song, which only Yossi is able to tell her.

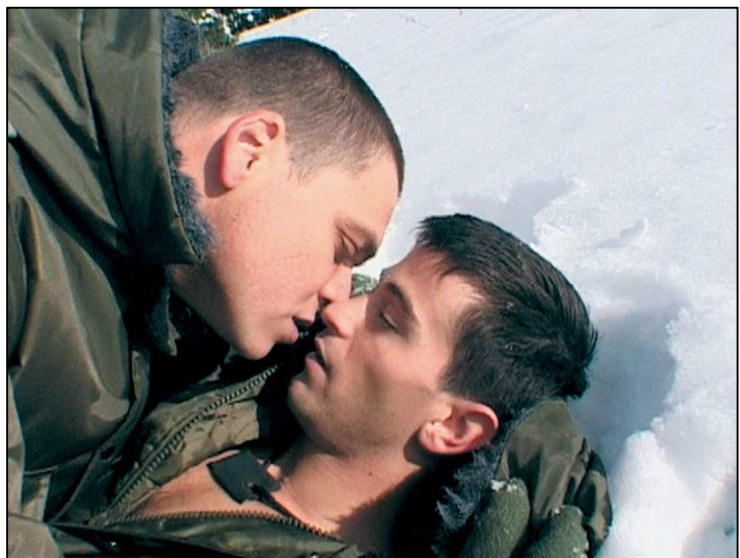


Fig.5.20 Scene of *Yossi and Jagger*

According to Padva, although this film is often criticized for its mainstream attitude, the portrayal of gay love inside the IDF, the heart of the Israeli consensus, is a significant contribution for greater acceptance of homosexuality among its many straight viewers (Padva, 2001, p.318).

Nonetheless, this movie, like some others films of the new millennium which are involved in the description of the queer subcultures of Israeli society, provides an eloquent counterpoint to the traditional nationalist male voices of the Israeli machismo.

In 2005, in fact, Vardit Bilu and Dalia Hager directed *Close to Home* (*Karov La Bait*, fig.5.21) the first movie directed by female filmmakers about the experience of women soldiers in the IDF<sup>19</sup>.

The movie tells the story of Smadar and Mirit, both 18 years old, assigned to patrol the streets of Jerusalem together to check the ID cards of Arabs and register them on official forms that are carried on their clipboards and that they will later submit to the security bureaucracy.

The task doesn't make sense to them. There is a chuckle or two when Smadar brings back an empty form and refuses to speculate on the reasons for her failure to find any Arabs in Jerusalem. "Maybe I don't know what an Arab looks like" she tells their superior officer, Dubek.

The two girls are opposite types: Mirit is pretty but timid and with a natural deference to authority; Smadar is striking-looking and sexy, though not conventionally pretty. She is a rebel and a slacker who at first despises her comparatively spiritless partner, especially when she does things like apologizing to an Arab whom she



Fig.5.21 Poster of *Close to Home*, Vardit Bilu and Dalia Hager, 2005

<sup>19</sup> In 1985 Noav Levitri and Nissim Levy directed *Banot* (*Girls*), written by Assi Dayan. The movie tells the story of five girls during the four weeks of *tironut*, the basic training of the IDF. In order to represent the "melting pot" and "one for all, and all for one" issues, the film combines comedy drama to present the development of relationships and the growth of group feeling and solidarity among young women undergoing the discipline and rigors of basic training. The story concerns an extremely diversified group of girls, all of whom are eventually transformed into a committed and unified group of young women.

has caused to miss his bus. “Why say sorry?” says Smadar “You’re such a moron!”

Mirit, shy and conscientious, wants to play by the book. Smadar is outspoken in her defiance. The story traces the tumultuous relationship between the girls and their apparently opposing approaches to life.

The rigid discipline goes against Mirit’s free-spirited nature and she's not sure how she feels about her work, especially when it means being ordered to harass Arabs by Dubek. Smadar can't be said to have mixed feelings about the army. She clearly hates it and begs her wealthy and influential parents to have her transferred.

Smadar breaks every rule, ducking into shops when they’re supposed to be working – even into a salon for a hair cut – urging Mirit to do the same. Mirit begs her to come back outside, terrified they’ll both be punished for Smadar’s infractions.

Rebellious and outgoing Smadar can't stand types like Mirit, who, introverted and frightened, keeps away from the likes of Smadar.

When Mirit and her friends openly rebel against Dubek, Smadar sides with the officer, and relations between Mirit and Smadar are strained until a terrorist bombing puts the two women on common ground.

As the film develops, Smadar leads Mirit into uncharacteristically rebellious behavior.

Worlds apart in their personality, their initial frosty relationship changes to friendship as they deal with their own emotional issues, the crushes and break-ups in their love lives, as well as the political reality of the city they live in.

The filmmakers use war and ethnic conflict as a backdrop on which to explore the paradoxes and challenges inherent in the passage to adulthood, but not necessarily manhood, as Israeli citizens.

Another Israeli subculture which finally appears on the Israeli screen of the new millennium is the world of the migrant foreigner workers, as represented in the remake of Haim Bousaglo’s *Fictitious Marriage*<sup>20</sup> of 1988, *Janem Janem* (fig.5.22).

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<sup>20</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 3, p.162



Fig.5.22 Poster of *Janem Janem*, Haim Bouzaglo, 2006

Bouzaglo remade the film in 2006, with a nearly identical plot. But this time the character of Eldi is a migrant foreign worker instead of an Arab.

As in the first movie, he is a 40 year old teacher is in a midlife crisis. He just returned from a long army reserve service in Jenin and informs the school principal that he is not coming back to teach. His midlife crisis is blended with the trauma caused by the loss of his friend, who was killed in front of him by a sniper shot in the observation post.

Obsessed by nightmares, one day he wakes up and asks his wife “what are we doing here?”

“I taught for so many years, everyday, the story of Zionism, but the story is happening now!”

Eldi's wife, a psychologist, suggests that he get away for a while. Like in the other movie, he goes to the International airport carrying in his luggage the same “national” belongings: the Bible, *garinim*<sup>21</sup> and the IDF uniform. But this time the uniform has a bullet-hole and has the bullet in the pocket.

Rather than getting on a plane at the airport, he sets out on a journey in his own country.

Traveling incognito, he discovers an unknown world in the middle of Tel Aviv: a world of Turkish and Romanian foreign workers exploited by shady Israelis who hire out laborers and control a group of prostitutes.

This time Eldi speaks English, the lingua franca of a globalized world, and no one really cares where he is from, because everyone is from somewhere else.

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote 11, p.162

As in the other movie, they work on a construction site, and as in the other movie the woman living in front of the building site invites the workers into her apartment, this time with the excuse of painting a portrait of them.

The style of the portrait is the same as that of the Zionist Realist poster from the time of the *yishuv*. As she explains to some of her friends, she decided to paint these portraits because today foreign workers are building the country, as the Diaspora Jews did during the *yishuv*.

And this time they are the victims of a Palestinian suicide attack.

But this time, unlike in the original movie, Eldi doesn't suspect a thing, and even if he survives, the movie ends with a shot of the Israeli flag, completely worn away.

As Haim Bouzaglo told me when I met him on August 11, 2011, at Café *Bacio* in Tel Aviv: "I took the shot of this flag in the neighborhood of the *Tachana Merkazit*<sup>22</sup>. Actually the idea of making a movie about foreign workers came to me when I was walking over there, and suddenly I had the feeling of being abroad."

FM: "So why did you decide to do a remake of your first movie?"

HM: "Because I thought that it could be interesting to deal with the same subject, twenty years later, and show how things have changed in this country, which was built in the beginning by Jews then by Arabs and now, after the Second Intifada by foreigners workers: from *avoda ivrit* to *avoda aravit* in the first movie, and then to the *avoda zara*,<sup>23</sup> which means "foreign" but also "forbidden." Making a movie about "them" was also another way to do a movie about "us", in order to criticize our society."

FM: "Actually in this remake it looks like today there is no hope for Israel, your first movie ended on a much more hopeful note."

HB: "Let's say that there is less hope, that's why I started the movie with Eldiin *miluim*, in the middle of the war, where he loses his friend, and I finished the movie with the bomb explosion, where, still, even when he tried to change his life, he loses his new friends, who are not even Israeli but foreign, as really happened several times during the Second Intifada."

Another relevant subculture, which appears on the Israeli screen of the new millennium is the Russian community, which starting from the dissolution of the USSR became one of the largest

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<sup>22</sup>*Tachana Merkazit* (תחנה מרכזית) in Hebrew means "central station," but it is also the name of the neighborhood of the central station in Tel Aviv, where a lot of foreign workers live.

<sup>23</sup> In Hebrew: עבודה עברית, עבודה ערבית, עבודה זרה

communities in Israel, with more than 1,200,000 citizens, according to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

In 2009 Renen Schorr made the first Israeli film in Hebrew and Russian: *The Loners* (*Ha Bodedim*, fig.5.23).

The movie was inspired by true events that took place in a military prison in 1997, when a Russian-born Golani Brigade soldier named Teddy Martin staged a rebellion in the military prison where he was being held, along with 19 other Soviet-born soldiers. He maintained that he had not been given a fair chance to defend himself. Led by Martin, the soldiers took hostages, tied them up and put them in a cell.

Eventually, they signed an agreement with officers that they would not be punished for their rebellion, a document the IDF then reneged on.

This outraged Schorr, who was intrigued at how a group of military prisoners had become so desperate and had managed to pressure the army into signing such an agreement in the first place.

*The Loners*, in fact, is not a typical immigrant success story with a heartwarming ending, or one in which the protagonists are passive victims of discrimination; instead, their impulsive and violent actions play a large part in complicating and compounding their own problems.

The film tells the story of Glory and Sasha, two Golani soldiers, immigrants from Russia, who are living in Israel alone, without any family. Accused of treason, they are sent to a military prison where they are outsiders in every sense: not only are they “foreigners” whose native language is not Hebrew, they are traitors, rejected even by their fellow inmates.

Still, the two characters do not want to lose their honor as fighters in IDF, even though, smuggling to Hamas, they have committed a crime considered unforgivable in military society and want go through an honorable military retrial. As they try to explain to the commander: “we are Golani, and we want to fight for our army.”

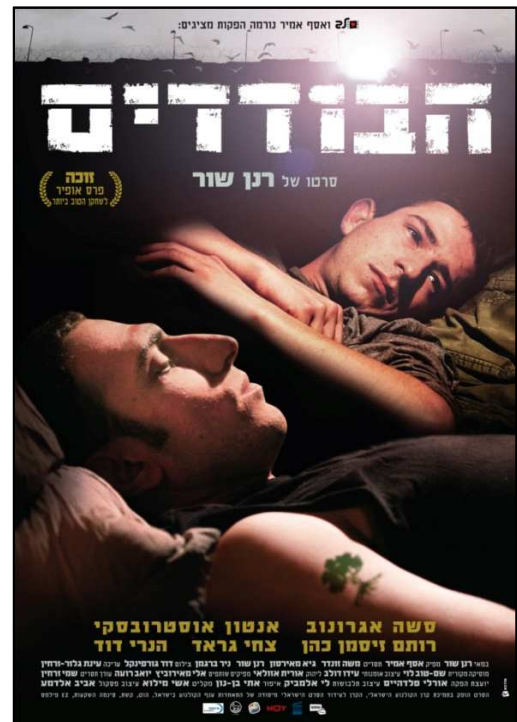


Fig. 5.23 Poster of *The Loners*, Renen Schorr, 2009

But the military system is not interested with these desires, and decides to release them from the army and transfer them to a civil prison, to continue serving their sentences. This causes them to take over a cell block, take as hostages three of the prison's personnel and request a retrial. Within the 36 hours of the mutiny, the two soldiers became the public's greatest enemy. Senior officers and special anti-terrorist warfare units, perfectly camouflaged as fighting in the battlefield, swarmed the prison in an attempt to quickly terminate the embarrassing uprising. Again, as in some other movie of the new millennium, the soldiers fight against no enemy and in a space which is not the space of the battlefield but the claustrophobic space of the prison. In a battle that pitted Jews against Jews, individuals against an oblivious system Renen Shor's film exposes the hidden sides of these young immigrants whose true wish is to belong, to be Israeli.

I met him on May 5, 2011 at the Sam Spiegel School, the School of Cinema which the director is Renen Shor himself, and I ask him how he decided to come back on the camera directing a movie, more than 20 years after his first and last movie *Late Summer Blues*<sup>24</sup>: "I decide to this movie when in 1997 I found this article on the newspaper telling about this story of rebellion. As in *Late Summer Blues*, I was interested in the rebellion's issue. But in my first movie at the end the characters are not able to grow away from the conformity of the society where they came from. Instead in the second movie, they have 'nothing to lose' because they are immigrants, and they are not really part of the Israeli society".

In this sense, the diffusion of queer subcultures in the new millennium characterizes what Kimmerling describes as the "decline of Israeliness" (Kimmerling, 2001), a decline which was represented on the screen also in two others film of the new millennium, dealing with the issue of the murder.

In 2005 the Barbash Brothers returned to the screen with *Salt of the Earth* (*Melah Haaretz*, fig. 5.24).

The movie tells the story of four friends: blood



Fig. 5.24 Poster of *Salt of the Earth*, Barbash Brothers, 2005

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 4, p.148



brothers that were that were bound together by their army experience. In the name of their strong brotherhood, in order to help one of them, who has a huge gambling debt, they decide to commit the perfect crime. They thought that if they will plan things out completely and would not leave anything to chance, as they learned in the army, things would go smoothly. Deciding to use *miluim* service as an alibi, they considered everything, anticipating every step that can go wrong and planning down to the minutest of details, assuming that the outcome will be as well planned. The reality, however, is totally different, and at the end of the movie, in order not to risk imprisonment, they find themselves not only killing the “enemy” and an innocent cop, but even sacrificing the life one of the group.

However, several details bring the investigator back to an IDF team, therefore the movie ends with all of them in a prison cell, completely naked, trying to explain their different points of view.

As Judd Neeman observed in his contribution “The Naked and the Bad”, during the conference *Suspenseful Times and the Moving Image* on June 9, 2010 at Tel Aviv University, the representation of the naked *bodyscape* becomes paradigmatic in symbolizing the group taking charge of their responsibility for the murder as civilians instead of as IDF soldiers.

At the same time, the naked body also represents what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben defines referring to Deleuze and Guattari definition, from “nomadic war machine” to “state war machine”<sup>25</sup>.

On the contrary, the *mise en scène* of the plan of action is always represented in the *ethnoscape* of the Negev desert, the typical (mother)landscape of the Israeli war-movie. This is where the friends start their action and, above all, where their friend loses his life.

Also in this movie, like in most of the movies of the new millennium, there is no enemy to fight against, and at the end of the movie, as Neeman argues, it becomes very complicated to define the border between soldiers, fighters and killers, as in the 2006 film of Udi Aloni, *Forgiveness (Mechilot, fig.5.25)*.

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<sup>25</sup> In their 1986 work *Nomadology: The War Machine* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari redefine the relationship between the state and its war machine. Far from being a part of the state, soldiers become nomads who always come from the outside and keep threatening the authority of the state.

This movie depicts the experiences of David, a twenty year old American Jew, and son of a Holocaust survivor who becomes a war hero at the time of the Independence War. Having grown up as a “yoyo”, as he explains to his army friend, David decides to move back to Israel to find his roots and enlists in the IDF. During the course of the service, David treats the occupied Palestinian population humanely, but the fear of armed Palestinians causes him to fire on an innocent Palestinian woman and her daughter. The incident sends him into PTSD, which leads to his subsequent hospitalization in a mental institution.

This mental hospital was built in the ruins of a Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, where on April 9, 1948, a Jewish militia entered the village and killed over 100 villagers.

The first patients to be committed in the hospital were

Holocaust survivors and legend has it that to this day the survivors have been communicating with the ghosts of the village.

Muselman, also a Holocaust survivor, tells David to listen to the ghosts that are haunting him, that they have something important to tell him. Like the blind prophet Tiberias, Muselman knows that the truth does not hold redemption, and this is why he never tried to reconstruct his life after the camps. Because he lives between the word of the dead and the living, Muselman can act as a conduit between the murdered ghost of the Palestinian woman and David.

At the end of the movie, because the shooting incident is not treated but merely repressed with tranquilizers, when David returns to New York he reenacts the trauma and threatens to shoot another Palestinian woman with whom he is in love and her daughter.

But at the end of the movie, instead of killing them, he kills himself.

As the Israeli scholar of Cinema Studies Yael Ben Zvi Morad argues, *Forgiveness* presents a link between the Holocaust and the occupation. Each situation, being a persecuted people or being an

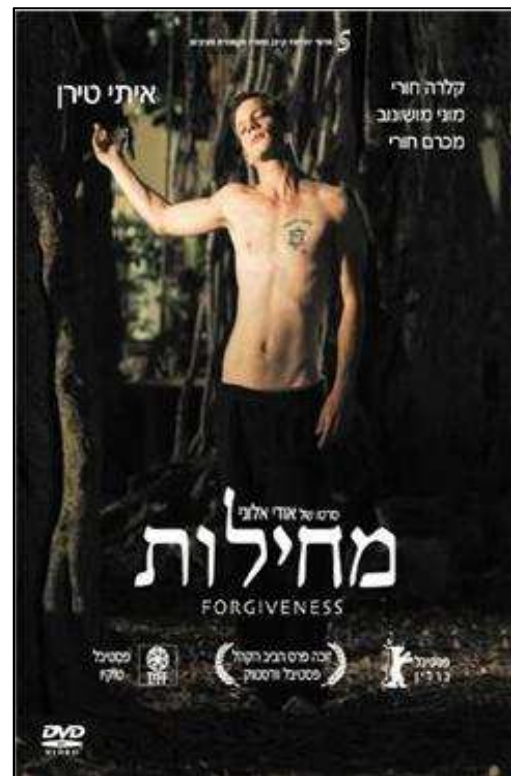


Fig.5.25 Poster of *Forgiveness*, Udi Aloni, 2006

occupying people, is now portrayed as a trauma that feeds the other situation (Ben Zvi Morad, 2011, p.281).

As Yosef suggests, the film deals critically with issues of trauma, guilt, and responsibility in relation to Israeli violence towards the Palestinians, and suggests new ways of understanding national traumas through a comparison between the catastrophe of the Jewish Holocaust and the Palestinian *Nakba*<sup>26</sup>. The film, in fact, avoids the acting out of the Israeli-Jewish victimization discourse by challenge the exclusivity of the Holocaust in Israeli collective memory and by creating an analogy between Holocaust survivors and the Palestinian refugees of 1948 (Yosef, 2011, p.17).

The flashbacks and flash-forwards form the mental institute reveal all the events that led up to his and the others hospitalization, with the story of the eternal return of the trauma and a destiny that seems unalterable. As the director himself explains in the movie's website, "the mood of the film is located between the real and the uncanny, between the conscious and the unconscious<sup>27</sup>".

As Ben Zvi Morad also observes, the Hebrew word for "forgiveness" articulated in the film's Hebrew title (in the plural: *mechilot*) is phonetically identical to the Hebrew word for "burrows" (*mechilot*<sup>28</sup>). Hence the film's title in Hebrew deals with the association between memory and of self-forgiveness, the way in which David tries to deal with PTSD.

Here the representation of the psychological after-effects of war is completely different from that which first appeared in the Israeli cinema of the 1980s.

Instead of being represented as Goliath, in this movie the main character, who is even called David, comes back to his roots in *Eretz Israel* to fight in the IDF, but this time not fighting against a Goliath, but against another, also very fragile, David, who most of the time we cannot even see.

As we saw, the battlefield of this war in the new millennium film is often represented in very claustrophobic *ethnoscapes*. This kind of representation reached its peak in the *ethnoscape* of the Lebanon War, which in the last years became one of the most significant subjects of Israeli cinema.

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<sup>26</sup> Reflecting two different historiographies, Israeli-Jews call the events of 1948 the "War of Independence" (in Hebrew מלחמת השחרור, *Milhemet HaShihzur*) and Palestinians use the name *al-Nakba*, literally "the Catastrophe."

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.forgivenessfilm.com/Udi/interview.html>

<sup>28</sup> In Hebrew: מחילות

### *Back to Lebanon*

In the summer of 2006, Israel invaded Lebanon for the second time. Every year since, Israeli filmmakers have replied with films that are sharply critical of their government's prosecution of its first war, in 1982, and subsequent 18-year occupation of a border zone within its northern neighbor.

Joseph Cedar's *Beaufort* (2007), Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), and Samuel Maoz' *Lebanon* (2009) were huge successes both domestically and abroad, garnering laurels at international film festivals along with consecutive nominations for the best foreign-language Oscars.<sup>29</sup>

When bombs began falling on Beirut after few years of relative peace, the generation of filmmakers who had all served in the first, controversial Lebanon war, found themselves exploring the lasting effects of combat on Israel's young.

In 2005 Ron Leshem, who served as journalist and editor for Israeli mainstream dailies *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*, wrote his first novel, *If There is a Heaven*. The film deals with the final days of the occupation of Beaufort, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Crusader Castle in southern Lebanon, just before IDF troops pulled out on May 24, 2000.<sup>30</sup> The plot centers around the daily routine, dilemmas and fears of the soldiers stationed in the fortress, who, after eighteen years of occupation, began symbolically with the strategic conquest of the Beaufort crusader fort in a fierce battle on June 7, 1982.

From *If There is a Heaven*<sup>31</sup>, Joseph Cedar, a former paratrooper, made a cinematic adaption in 2007 with *Beaufort* (fig. 5.26).

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<sup>29</sup> *Beaufort*, with 5 wins and 8 nominations awards, won the Silver Berlin Bear as Best Director in 2007 and was nominated as Best Foreign Language Film of the Year in 2008. *Waltz with Bashir*, with 29 wins and 26 nominations awards, nominated as Best Foreign Language Film of the Year in 2009, in the same year won Israel's first Golden Globe. *Lebanon*, with 14 wins and 14 nominations awards, won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

<sup>30</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 1, p. 126

<sup>31</sup> In Hebrew *Im yesh gan eden.*, Tel Aviv, Zmora Bitan Publishing, 2005. When it was released, the book was a runaway success. A first novel by a prominent journalist, it reached cult status almost immediately, sold more than 130,000 copies, stayed on newspapers' best sellers lists for well over a year, and won prestigious literary awards. When a film based on the novel was released two years later, in 2007, it met with similar success: The film sold 300,000 tickets, more than any other Israeli film that year, and garnered prestigious prizes in Israel and abroad. It won the Israeli "Oscar," the Ofir Prize, the Silver Bear Award for best director at the Berlin Film Festival, and was nominated for the Oscar's best foreign film that year.

In the book the story takes the form of the diary of the hill's last commander, Liraz, famously prophesying the inevitability of a second Lebanon War as a direct result of the one-sided retreat. The plot remains relatively untouched in the film adaptation. Yet on the visual level the film does not adopt the commander's point of view.

Both tell a story of isolation, desperation, frustration, and ultimately of defeat. However, as Yaron Peleg analyzes in his article "*Beaufort* the Book, *Beaufort* the film: Israeli Militarism Under Attack," the ways the novel and the film present these events, and the lessons they take from them, are starkly different.

In the novel, the difficulties the soldiers face are used to present them as modern Zionist heroes, replete with

all the self-doubt and soul-searching that, against tremendous odds, burnish them as patriots in the great tradition of Hebrew literature.

*Beaufort* the film does something very different. By isolating the soldiers and confining them to haunting and deadly enclosure, it brutally severs their connection to their nation and even their connection to one another (Peleg, 2011b).

According to Munk, the film consciously undermines the realistic rendition of the battlefield by portraying a metonymic war zone: "metonymy is a rhetoric figure of speech in which a part is substituted for a whole. In the case of *Beaufort*, the symbolic part that the fortress played in the narrative of the first Lebanon war enables the filmmaker to relate to IDF occupation of this limited geographical space as representative of the entire IDF situation during this war" (Munk, 2011, p.108).

The metonymic war zone starts to be represented even during the credits. In fact, the confinement to an underground bunker, the close-ups of the claustrophobic cinematography, the ominous silence that makes up much of the soundtrack, as well as the eerie music lend the film a distinct ghostliness.

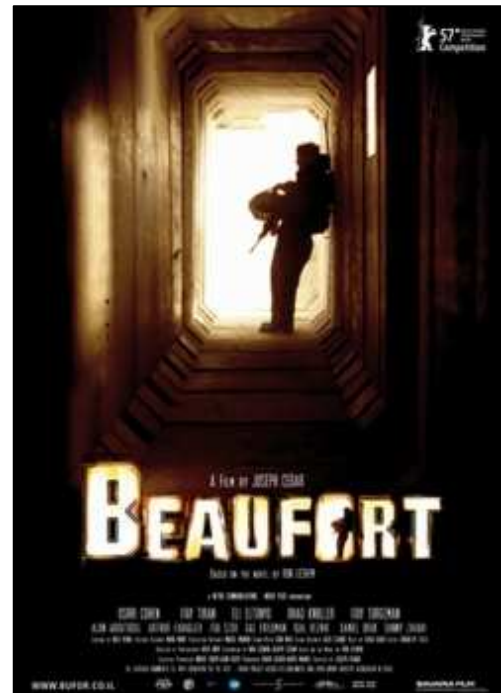


Fig. 5.26 Poster of *Beaufort*, Joseph Cedar, 2007

As Peleg analyzed, when the screen goes black, a gray rectangle appears in its center. It is the end of an underground concrete tunnel viewed from the inside looking out. The outside light at the end of the tunnel is blinding. Slowly, a bulky figure enters the frame of light from the outside. Wrapped in light and enveloped by fog, the figure haltingly makes its way inside, mechanically, zombie-like. The camera then zooms out and the tunnel with the soldier in it becomes the second letter of the film's Hebrew name: בּוּפוּר, Beaufort (Peleg, 2011b).

We gradually begin to move into the bunker, following a soldier who crawls into a secluded tunnel (fig. 5.27), filmed from the inside of the hill. Ziv, a specialist, is brought in to investigate an improvised explosive device planted on the road leading to the base. He understands the futility of his dangerous mission, but undertakes it nevertheless.

As the Israeli American scholar of Modern Hebrew Literature Uri S. Cohen observes, the arrival of the specialist and his subsequent death in action is important: his presence provides proof of the indifference and thoughtlessness of the military command. According to Cohen, the impact of the soldier's death on his surroundings is described when the bereaved father of Ziv appears on national television, seen on the set inside the bunker (Cohen, 2011, pp. 52-53).

When Liraz, the commander (and, indirectly, the person responsible for Ziv's death), watches Gideon Levy<sup>32</sup> interviewing Ziv's father, the interview is shown on one half of the frame, while the other half is filled with official State regalia: the Israeli flag and portraits of present-day policy makers, Chief of Staff, Shaul Mofaz, and the Prime Minister, Ehud Barak.

As Munk analyzes, while at first the television screen seems to amplify the State's official voice, echoing the hegemonic voices of the pictured politicians on the right (the Prime Minister and the Chief of Staff), the TV screen gradually fills the entire frame as if the speakers were addressing Liraz: “the shot/reverse shot editing technique of the scene,



Fig. 5.27 Scene of *Beaufort*

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<sup>32</sup> Born in 1953, Gideon Levy is a notable journalist on the Israeli left, writing opinion pieces and a weekly column for the newspaper *Haaretz* that often focus on the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

which includes cross-gazes between the bereaved father on the screen and Liraz watching him in the bunker, creates the impression that the father's words about the hollowness of the heroic national narrative upon which he educated his son are in fact addressed to Liraz” (Munk, 2011, p.102).

“One can blame the army, the generals. But these generals are really not responsible for my son. They don’t even know him. I’m responsible for him. He is my son. I brought him up. Apparently, I did a bad job. [...] Perhaps I didn’t make him understand how precious his life is. That if something bad happens to them a whole world collapses. That’s our duty as parents. I feel as if I’ve abandoned my child.”

As Munk observes, in these words, the father unequivocally declares the bankruptcy of national values and the urgent need to abandon from the collective spirit that animated the Israeli culture for so long. He admits on television that the State cannot substitute a father’s care and guidance for his son, and implies that those who, like Liraz, believed that the IDF could provide a father figure will eventually be disillusioned (Munk, 2011, p.102).

The interview continues with the interviewer asking Ziv’s father if he is proud of him, for volunteering to serve in an elite unit and for serving his country. Isn’t that what Israeli society considers the highest duty, the highest calling? In response, the father talks about his own upbringing, and how his parents instilled in him the sense that he is the most precious thing on earth. He confesses sadly that he failed to do so himself, to teach his children to be afraid for their lives. This is precisely how he puts it: “to be afraid.”

Significantly absent from the novel, as Peleg analyzed, this scene represents the best articulation of the differences between the book and the film, especially compared to the singing passage in the novel. The meaning of the father’s words clash with everything Liraz believes in, with his entire military career, that was built on a passionate desire to serve his country and a willingness to die for it if called to: “but the words of the bereaved father go deeper and farther than that. In some ways they amount to nothing less than a revolutionary negation of Zionism” (Peleg, 2011b).

Indeed, the following sequence will depict Liraz’s assertive handling of the fort evacuation. In a symbolically charged moment Liraz and another soldier attempt to take down a memorial plaque for the soldiers who fell taking the hill in 1982. After a few attempts Liraz says to a

soldier, to leave it. “They probably want to stay here,” he says with a mixture of resignation and resolve, and he proceeds with the evacuation.

After 18 years of occupation, suddenly the IDF leave and burns the fortress, and what it represents, in the middle of the night. Viewed from afar, the blast burns the night. Then the camera returns inside the hill to see the plaque being hit by the blast, unhinged and illuminated.

According to Cohen, it represents the State itself, and the way it uses power and soldiers, that causes the crisis of faith. As the plaque is engulfed by fire one can only feel the uselessness of the sacrifice: “The film ended with the explosion, this would undoubtedly have been the message” (Cohen, 2011, p. 54).

But the film has another closing sequence. In the next shot, early in the morning from inside the State, we see the vehicles cross the border. The soldiers dismount, hug each other, and call home. Like Liraz, who commands the driver to “drive home,” the soldiers all refer to the Israeli side of the northern border as “home.”

In the final sequence, only when he reaches the home(land), Liraz finally puts his arms down and cries over the loss of what has been most precious to him: the loss of belief.

As Munk puts it: “in the commotion of rejoicing soldiers, when Koris cheerfully announces to his mother over his mobile phone, ‘I’m home’, Liraz continues to walk toward the camera. Falling on his knees, he bursts into tears, crying like a baby who has just been born into a meaningless world, the post-ideological era of the State of Israel” (Munk, 2011, p.104).

As Utin points out, despite the obvious political contexts of the events conveyed in the film, Cedar avoids involving the politics of the time or taking a distinct political stand regarding the situation, focusing instead on the lives of the soldiers trying to survive (Utin, 2008).

As in most of the film of the new millennium, *Beaufort* offers another image of the soldier as vulnerable victim. The soldiers, in fact, are stuck in a kind of limbo, living in an indeterminate state: prohibited from firing back, they must absorb enemy fire by Hezbollah forces (though we never see the enemy) and suffer several fatal casualties without retaliation.

As their commander pleads with his superiors to let him lead an expedition outside the post to attack the Hezbollah forces, he is denied permission to do so. The soldier is not allowed to fulfill his true destiny as a fighter.

According to Kaplan, his true role in the twenty-first century is to be a sitting duck, an idle victim waiting for the order to evacuate, while back home politicians and the greater public



bicker over how to resolve the situation: “the soldiers are being sacrificed not as warriors in battle but as a victim of an unseen enemy” (Kaplan, 2011, p.66).

According to Peleg, that the old ways of conducting war in the Middle East are over is clear from both the novel and the film. In some profound ways, despite their jingoism, Leshem’s soldiers understand that the times have changed. Cedar’s men, on the other hand, seem victimized by a nightmarish world they do not comprehend. As Peleg puts it, “it is quite possible that both works were popular, despite the different ways they present the same reality, because they evoked or tapped into two conflicting notions or forces that coexist in Israel today: vestiges of the *ancient Zionist regime* that is waging an increasingly losing war against the inexorable forces of history, and a maturation of a culture that is coming to grips with the limitations of its power. So while the novel passionately but tragically depicts a last, Bar-Kochbian battle that is doomed to fail, the film already perceives this failure and mourns it with widely open eyes” (Peleg, 2011).

If in the 1980s the movie’s narrative privileged the tormented “shoot and cry soldiers” (Shohat, 1987, p.259), who supposedly suffer from the very fact of being conquerors, who do not hate those they occupy, and who, despite death being ready to surprise them at every corner, are still capable of expressing affection toward the Lebanese, in the new millennium narrative, the soldier is represented as not even able to shoot, but only to cry, as in Samuel Maoz’s *Lebanon* (fig. 5.28).

Chronologically, this movie belongs at the beginning of the Lebanon War. The film describes the experience of four soldiers manning a tank on June 6, 1982, the first day of the first Lebanon invasion.

Set entirely inside the claustrophobic metal walls of the machine, all the action takes place in a similarly enclosed space. Indeed, the only time the audience catches sight of the world outside the tank is through the sight of its gun,



Fig. 5.28 Poster of *Lebanon*, Samuel Maoz, 2009

cracked by a missile at the beginning of the film (see the poster).

The movie tries to capture the narrow experience of the soldiers, whose only view of the carnage is through the sight of a scope, and who wind up having to bear the brunt of making life-or-death decisions while their feckless commanders sit considering abstractions in safe war rooms, far away.

Actually, making decisions is the real issue of the movie. Each one of the four characters, in fact, is unable to do this. The driver, is always stuck with the tank. The gunner, who is supposed to be there in order to shoot, is so afraid to do it, that, when he finally does, he makes a mistake. The commander, who is supposed to take everything under control, completely loses his mind.

Paradoxically, the only one who succeeds is Herzl, the loader, who, starting with his name, is the only one represented as a real *Sabra*. Herzl, in fact, is the only one who succeeds not only inside the tank as a soldier, but also in his real life, as a man. He is the only one who, when they are in danger, instead of asking to talk to his mother, wants to speak to his girlfriend.

On the other side, the driver, who is not able to manage the tank, keeps a picture of a naked woman on the control panel. The gunner, who is unable to shoot against the enemy, is also unable to manage his sexuality.

As he tells his companions during a long scene of not-fighting, he reached his first orgasm the day of his father's funeral, when his school teacher came to the *shiva*,<sup>33</sup> and starting to hug him because he was crying, and he suddenly had an orgasm.

This feeling of *impotentia*, which distinguishes all the characters of the movie also involves the representation of the tank.

In *Lebanon*, in fact, we see only what the tank's four occupants see, hear only what they hear, know only what they know. It becomes claustrophobic and visceral, as was Maoz's purpose: "I wanted the audience to smell the smells, taste the tastes." As he explains to Rachel Cooke in an interview for *The Observer*, "I wanted you to see the victims of war staring straight into your eyes. In a way, the tank is the fifth character. It's like an animal. The men are in the stomach of a wild animal."

In the gloom, unidentifiable liquids seep from mysterious pipes and gather on the tank's floor in foul, viscous pools. Meanwhile, as the turret swings laboriously from this direction to that, it

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<sup>33</sup> In Judaism, *shiva* (in Hebrew: שבועה, from שבע, which means "seven") is the week-long period of grief and mourning after a death.

makes a sound so raw and agonized, it could drive a man insane. “When we created that noise, we tried to mix the sound of a hydraulic mechanism with the sound of a wounded animal.”

This claustrophobic and dark representation of the



tank's *ethnoscape* also Fig. 5.29 Scene from *Lebanon*

contributes to enshrouding the characters in a kind of Conradian *heart of darkness* (fig.5.29).

As in *Beaufort*, the soldiers' battleground is not the one of the enemy “outside,” but the one “inside” the army, what Munk call the “privatization of the war memory.”

Maoz's movie, in fact, is based on his personal experience in Lebanon, when he was a gunner in one of the first Israeli tanks to enter Lebanon in the 1982 Lebanon War.

After the war, he trained as a cameraman at the Beit Zvi theater school, becoming a production designer and cinematographer, living for years shooting music videos and commercials. Only in 2006, twenty five years after his war experience, he began working on *Lebanon*, his first feature film: “I said to myself, you are over 40 and you need to do something with yourself. You are not a young director, and it's now or never.”

As he explains to Rachel Cooke in the interview, he was only 20 years old when he killed a man for the first time. At that time Maoz, was still doing his mandatory service, as a gunner of the tank corps, when the war began.

At 6.15am on June 6, in the stony hills of southern Lebanon, he looked down the sight of the gun of his rickety, ageing tank. In the crosshairs was a small truck. It was speeding down a dirt track towards him, its middle-aged Arab driver shouting and gesticulating wildly. But Maoz did not know if this man was the “enemy”: “This war was different to others that Israel had fought. In the Six Day War, there were two armies, in two different uniforms, fighting over one strip of land. I'm not saying that was less horrible, but it was at least clear. In Lebanon, the war was

fought in neighborhoods. There were 10 kinds of enemies, and many of them were wearing jeans.”

So Maoz heard his orders, looked at the man, and fired. His life changed forever.

Maoz was in Lebanon for 45 days. Thirty of them he spent in his tank, with only three other men: the commander, the driver and the loader for company. “You couldn't leave the tank. But this is the thing: you didn't want to. You hate the tank, but you love it, too. To be inside it is hell. But it will save you. A tank can survive even a rocket attack.”

When he got home, Maoz was considered lucky. He had his arms and his legs, his face was not scarred, his skin had not been burned. His mother flung her arms around him, wept, and gave thanks to God for his safe return. What she failed to realize, however, was that a part of Maoz had died in Lebanon. “I could not escape the fact that I had pulled the trigger, that I was a kind of executioner, that I was the last person in the death link.”

For the next twenty five years, Maoz said nothing. Then, in 2006, Israel again invaded Lebanon. “I was sitting in front of the television, and I realized that this was no longer about me and my needs, my problems, my memories, my pain. Our boys were dealing with the same thing all over again. I suppose you could say it was a mission. I wanted to make a film that might save a life. I took a life; now I could save a life. When the pain is only affecting you, you can ignore it. When it's affecting your children, this is a red light. War is not the last solution. War is no solution at all. War is a beast which, once released, cannot be controlled. The second Lebanon war was a totally bad idea.”

So he began writing. “It was like I had had an electric shock: I had been woken from a long hibernation. There is a huge difference between serving in an army and in a war. They can't prepare you. They can make sure you're in good shape. They can make sure that you know how to use a gun. But they can't prepare you emotionally and, in the end, they don't need to. This is the trick of war. It needs death in order to exist. Normal people can't kill. You need to be a psycho. So the trick of war is to take a human being and put him in this situation. After that, it's a process. It takes 24 hours, maybe 48. It's a metamorphosis. Our most basic instinct, our survival instinct, starts to take control and it's like a drug: you can't resist it. The first step is that you almost lose your sense of taste, because you need to be able to eat everything without saying, ‘I like it, I don't like it.’ Then you start to hear and see very sharply. Then you find that you need

only half an hour of sleep. You don't think about moral calls and this is the trick of war. You're not fighting for your country or for your family. You're fighting for your life."

Even if you do not know who you are fighting against. Like Ari Folman in *Waltz with Bashir* (*Waltz im Bashir*, fig. 5.30).

The film opens with a nightmare of a frightening pack of slavering dogs slashing down Tel Aviv's Rothchild Boulevard in the middle of a stormy night, knocking over café tables, bringing cars to a screeching halt, and terrifying the few pedestrians (fig.5.31). Snarling menacingly, the dogs come to halt before the lit window of an apartment, whose occupant stands looking out at them.

The dogs stop at the building where Boaz lives, a man who was in Lebanon with Folman. As Boaz tries to explain to his fellow soldier, in

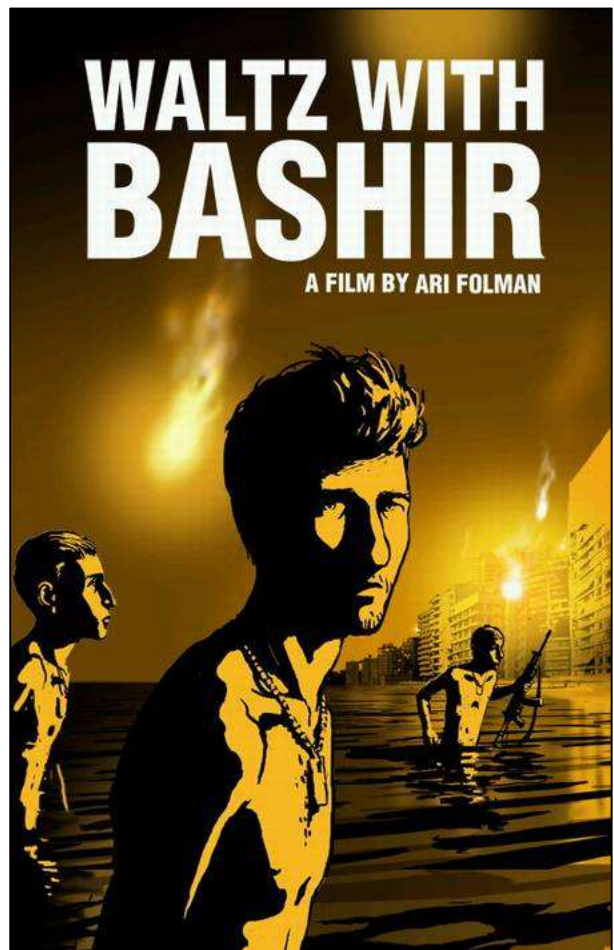


Fig. 5.30 Poster of *Waltz with Bashir*, Ari Folman, 2008

the nightmare he stands at the windows and watches them. This nightmare is interrupting his sleep every night every two years. Always there are 26 dogs in it, the number of innocent dog he killed in Lebanon in 1982, when he was assigned to go at the head of his platoon upon entering villages on nighttime mission and shoot barking dogs with a silencer equipped rifle, when he was forced by his commander to shot 26 innocent dogs so that they would not give away the presence of the IDF in the area prior to battle:

"They knew I couldn't shoot a person. They told me: 'Go ahead and shoot the dogs'!"

"How long before they started appearing in your dreams?"

"Twenty years, more or less"

"Have you tried anything?"

"Like what?"

"Therapy, a psychiatrist, shiatsu, anything..."

" Fig.5.31 Scene from *Waltz with Bashir*

No Nothing. I called you"

"I'm just a filmmaker"

“Can’t film be therapeutic?”  
“You’ve dealt with all the issues in your film, right?”  
“No something like this”  
“ No flashbacks from Lebanon?”  
“No. Not really...”  
“Beirut, Sabra and Shatila?”  
“The truth is that’s not stored in my system”.

The meeting with Boaz took place in winter 2006. That night, for the first time in more than twenty years, Folman had a flashback of the War in Lebanon.

As Yosef points out, the Boaz’s traumatic event of massacring dogs returns, unwittingly, to Boaz’s consciousness, and is only signified as a traumatic memory in a different spatial and temporal context, which is part real, part fantasy (Yosef, 2011, p.2).

Along with two other soldiers he is swimming naked in the sea off a Beirut beach. The soldiers leave the water, put on their uniform, and gaze on the flares that color the Beirut sky a pale shade of yellow.<sup>34</sup> The rest of the film describes the journey taken by Folman, who is also the film main protagonist, in pursuit of his last memories from the Lebanon War.

According to Yosef, the film is a hallucinatory quest into the depths of the director’s consciousness, as he tries to reconstruct three lost days from the war that have been entirely erased from his memory: being abandoned in the battlefield, hiding from unseen snipers, fighting



Fig.31 Scene from *Waltz with Bashir*

<sup>34</sup> Significantly, Folman decided to use this scene as official film poster, see fig.5.28

against children, and the murder of civilians, in the Sabra and Shatila camps<sup>35</sup> (Yosef, 2011, p. 2).

Fragmented memories, constructed through forgetting and marked with traces of fantasy, such as the scene, which inspired the film's title, of a soldier "dancing" a waltz with his submachine gun in the streets of Beirut as bullets whistle past against the background of a huge picture of the murdered Christian Lebanese leader, Bashir Gemayel, the Christian president-elect who was supported by Israel to rule Lebanon and who was assassinated with explosives.

As Yosef points out, all these memories of disremembering represent a deep rupture, or traumatic discontinuity, between the past and the present, history and memory, and point to the decline of historical memory in Israel. This film, in fact, deals with trauma and losses which were excluded from the nation's historical memory (Yosef, 2011, pp. 4-5).

Folman began his script for *Bashir* around the time of the pullout, after he requested early release from his reserve duty as a writer for IDF safety-instruction movies on the grounds that he needed therapy for PTSD stemming from his experience at the front in 1982.

In the spring of 2006, he presented a 10 minute pilot for an animated film exploring his struggle to remember what exactly he did during the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, and released his film in 2008, just ahead of the Gaza invasion, triggering a heated national debate about the nature of responsibility and memory.

At the time of the massacre Folman was 19 year old: "Barely 19, I haven't even started shaving" he says in the movie.

Folman's unit was in the Lebanese capital in mid-August, when the siege ended with the capitulation of the PLO's forces and their expulsion to Tunisia, and was still there in September when Bashir Gemayel, newly elected Lebanon's president, was killed by a remote-controlled Syrian bomb.

In the aftermath of his death, revenge seeking Falangists<sup>36</sup>, on an IDF supported mission to flush out remaining PLO fighters from the Palestinian refugee camp of Sabra and Shatila, massacred close to a thousand of the camps' inhabitants.

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<sup>35</sup> See chapter 4, paragraph 1, p.127, note 7

<sup>36</sup> The Lebanese Phalanges, better known in English as the Phalange, is a traditional right-wing Lebanese political party. Although it is officially secular, it is mainly supported by Maronite Christians. The party played a major role in the Lebanese War (1975-90) and was the official responsible of the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

Twenty five years later, Folman, who became a filmmaker in the 1990s, decided to direct an animation based on documentary video footage,<sup>37</sup> composed of conversations that Folman conducted with friends and journalists who took part in the war, some of whom he has not seen for decades, as well as with the psychologist who specializes in PTSD and who tries to help him reconstruct those missing days from his distant past.

Looking up old army buddies who were with him in Lebanon, he travels all the way to Holland to find one of the two soldiers who form part of his memory on the Beach of Beirut.

He talks to an officer whose men were within a few hundred meters of the refugee camps when the massacre took place, and interviews the Israeli journalist Ron Ben Yishai, the first Israeli reporter to enter the camps the morning after.

As he goes from interview to interview, Folman finds his memories gradually restored. They begin to return on his way back from Holland. He is being driven to the airport through a wintry Dutch countryside when faintly silhouetted palm trees appear against the snow covered field; then, abruptly, the landscape becomes Middle Eastern and an armored personnel carrier that he is sitting in is barreling down a road with guns blazing in all directions.

“Out of pure fear and anxiety we start shooting like lunatics...”

“At whom?”

“How do I know? Then, an old Mercedes drives up. Everyone fires at it like crazy. Two years of training and the fear, the uncontrollable fear... Then the silence. The terrible silence of death.... Lying in the car the bodies of a whole family.”

The Israeli soldiers do not know where they are and what it is they are shooting at, only to find out that they have needlessly killed an entire family (fig.5.32).

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<sup>37</sup> First shot on videotape, its interviews, supplemented by documentary footage taken from archives, were reframed as drawings with the help of computer imaging, while additional scenes were animated from scratch. According to the film production notes from the film's website (<http://waltzwithbashir.com>) the production of *Waltz with Bashir* took four years from the moment research began until the final cut. For one whole year research was conducted during which dozens of testimonies from the First Lebanon War were gathered. Studio photography was conducted for a 96 minute full video film. The editing process took eight months. After the final version of the video film was decided upon, Folman, together with animation director Yoni Goodman, broke down the video film into a basic storyboard, a process which took another four months. After the storyboard phase, the pioneer animation team was established and included six animators who began the animatic stage, the most basic illustrations of the future film in the most basic motion. The animatic stage took another six months and was followed by another round of screenings. When production started out it was exclusively supported by Israeli channel 8 with an amount of 120 thousand dollars. The final cost of the film is two million dollars.





Fig.32 Scene from *Waltz with Bashir*

On the road to Beirut and back to the “big light,” the Israelis are shown driving, sitting in the halftrack and shooting to all sides without any distinguish what it is they are shooting at: “We were shooting everywhere at everything, until nightfall.”

From this point on, the film moves back and forth between Folman’s reawakened memories and the accounts of his interviewees, proceeding through the summer of 1982 to its climax in the September massacre, Folman’s repression of which, it is implied, has been the cause of his amnesia.

Folman’s only memory of the night of the massacre is of firing mortar flares from a rooftop to illuminate the camps for the Falangiests. It is the last of his recollections to surface, and when he discusses this with the psychologist, the latter connects it to his being a child of Holocaust survivors who associates Sabra and Shatila with the World War II murder of Jews. In his unconscious mind, his friend tells him, he has played the role of the Nazi executioner.

“No one who was with me has any solid memories of the days of the massacre. I had only this one vision. And Carmi, the only person in my vision, denies being there with me.[...] A massacre took place. All around were several cycles of our soldiers. Every circle had some information but nobody didn’t stop. They didn’t realize they were witnessing a genocide”.

“What circle were you in?”

“Second, or third.”

“And what did you do?”

“Firing flares. That must have helped them to do what they were doing.”

“Did you fire the flares too?”

“No. But still, what’s the difference?”

“You were there firing flare, but you didn’t perpetrate the massacre.”

And yet, as the American Hillel Halkin observed, he is told, not having known what was happening in the camps that night, he should not torment himself with guilt over it (Halkin, 2009, p.48).

Instead, what really happened in that night is explained by the voice of the war reporter Ben Yishay. He claims that he called Ariel Sharon to inform him of reports of a massacre going on in the refugee camps. According to Ben-Yishai’s account, Sharon appeared to have been sleeping, thanked him for the call, and then hung up the phone “and went back to sleep.”

“When I arrived there...you know that picture from the Warsaw ghetto, the one with the kid holding his hands in the air? That’s just how the long line of women, old people and children looked.”

Folman’s illustrators helpfully provide an image that is obviously modeled on the latter and that shows a little Palestinian boy with his hands raised in the same position (fig.5.33).

It is with Ben Yishay’s account of entering the camps the next morning that the movie ends.



Fig.5.33 Scene from *Waltz with Bashir*

The animation, however, ends before this. For the film's final moments are composed entirely of grainy documentary footage of murdered Palestinians, sprawled and lying in bloody heaps where they were shot by the Falangists.

This, as Helkin points out, can no longer be animated. This is too horrible for the aestheticization of illustrators. This is the reality into which the audience is asked to awake before leaving the movie theater: "all you have seen until now has been merely a bad dream by comparison" (Halkin, 2009, pp.48-49).

The animation, in fact, as Yosef argues, disconnects the sign with its referent, the mode of representation from the reality that is represented, like in *Lebanon* the protagonist observes the reality laid out before them via the technological apparatus of the sight of the tank's cannon (Yosef, 2011, p.4).

As Folman explains in an interview at *International News 24/7* on the French TV channel France 24, on May 16, 2008<sup>38</sup>: "For me there was no another way to tell this specific story. Drawing and animation, in the artistic aspect, I will say, they give me as filmmaker completely freedom to do whatever I like, whatever I imagine, suddenly could be done. But at the end of the movie, showing the documentary footage I want to let you know that behind this beautiful drawings and animation, there were real people, there were killed, there were kids there. There were woman. There were thousands of people there."

At the end of the interview, the interviewer asks Folman if *Waltz with Bashir* is a political film.

"Is a completely not political film. If it was a political film it would have the other side as well, with interview of the Palestinian side, the Christian side. And it is not, it is a very personal film. There is no glory, it is not an American film. There are just young people going from one place to another, shooting nowhere and nothing good can happen, because a lot of antiwar movies are being done, but if you look at that in the eyes of 15 year old youngster they might think 'Wow! It is tough, but looks at the friendship aspect, they are real men, they are brave. I want to be there.' I hope that when one sees *Waltz with Bashir* they just do not want to be there. If it will happen to a few kids, I did my job."

Folman defines his movie as an "antiwar" film. According to Halkin, to be "antiwar" in a general way is possible only for a sworn pacifist: "Otherwise, it makes no more sense than does

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU7Q3\\_n-UWM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU7Q3_n-UWM)

being “pro-war” in a general way. Precisely because wars are never pleasant for the men who fight in them, much less for the civilians who get in their way, it is possible, by ignoring their historical circumstances as does *Waltz With Bashir*, to make an antiwar statement about any war” (Halkin, 2009, pp.50-51).

According to Gideon Levy, *Waltz With Bashir* is not an antiwar film, “nor even a critical work about Israel as militarist and occupier.[...] This is propaganda. Stylish, sophisticated, gifted and tasteful, but propaganda.” As Levy argues, the movie rests on two ideological foundations. One is the “we shot and we cried” syndrome: “Oh, how we wept, yet our hands did not spill this blood.” Add to this a pinch of Holocaust memories, “without which there is no proper Israeli self-preoccupation. What's left is hallucination, a sea of fears, the hero confesses on the way to his therapist, who is quick to calm him and explains that the hero's interest in the massacre at the camps derives from a different massacre: from the camps from which his parents came: “Bingo! How could we have missed it? It's not us at all, it's the Nazis, may their name and memory be obliterated. It's because of them that we are the way we are. ‘You have been cast in the role of the Nazi against your will’. [...] And a dash of victimization, another absolutely essential ingredient in public discourse here” (Levy, *Haaretz*, 19.02.09).

*Thus, Who is the Victim? Who is David?*

Folman calls his film “an animated documentary”. As the Israeli film critic Uri Klein argues, this is a very daring definition, apparently combining two incompatible extremes of cinematic endeavor: the real at its peak and the imagined at its peak. But, as Klein highlights, “isn't every film - feature or documentary - a combination of these two extremes? Isn't Folman, in his decision to make an animated documentary just tugging at this polarity, at the essence of cinema, stretched to the greatest extreme?”

Even so, in its current form, as Kein argues, *Waltz with Bashir* is one of those personal Israeli documentaries that embraces the filmmaker's sufferings, often making them more significant than those of other characters, and often expressing an off-putting degree of coyness, guilt and self-pity.

According to Klein, one could add *Waltz with Bashir* to the list of Israeli works, cinematic and otherwise, in the category of “shooting and crying”. However, what could have been unpleasant

had it been presented in an “ordinary” documentary film is rescued from this embarrassment thanks to Folman’s choice of using animation (Klein, *Haaretz*, 15.05.08).

The very impressive animation not only creates distance between the viewers and the events that the film documents, but also enables Folman to include scenes that are remembered by the people who are interviewed in the film. Especially impressive are the sequences that deal with his mate Roni, a soldier who is abandoned by his fellow soldiers and swims back to the Israeli troops. This scene is in deep contrast to past common belief that no soldier is left behind, but still how Roni explains: “I felt abandoned by our forces. [...] To my amazement, it was the regiment that had abandoned me. After I got back to my regiment, I felt like it was me who had abandoned me comrades, like someone who didn’t help rescue his friends. As if I had left the battlefield just to save my own skin.”

Hiding behind a cliff on the beach, Roni is not even trying to shoot, but he just gives up: “this is the end. I’m done.”

For sure, as Halkin argues, the film that Folman made is much more about his trauma, and the trauma of his a generation, the early 1980s teenage Israelis who left their rock ‘n’ roll dance halls, roared off to war without a pang, and then resumed their lives.

From the minimalist electronic of *This is not a love song* by PiL to the *waltz* Opus 64 by Chopin, even through the soundtrack choice, as Halkin observes, Folman’s film is “a child of our times, which likes its visual bites, like its sound bites, is compact. What terrible things Israel has done and how wonderful it is to have souls sensitive enough to admit it. A country that knows its Chopin can’t be all bad” (Halkin, 2009, p.51).

However, as Yosef highlights, *Waltz with Bashir* raises important questions about the ethical responsibility of the filmmaker, as a witness of the Massacre of Sabra and Shatila.

Folman does not see himself as a perpetrator who is even indirectly responsible for the violence enacted against the Palestinian people, but rather perceives himself as a passive witness of those shocking events, as an innocent victim seeking a cure and redemption from the trauma hunting him.

Hence, like other films that revisit the First Lebanon War, such as *Beaufort* and *Lebanon*, *Waltz with Bashir* also continues to absolve itself of ethical responsibility for having created Palestinian victimhood. As Yosef puts it, “those film are all narratives of victimization and

redemption, seeking to release the Israeli soldier from the trauma of guilt and responsibility for the events of the war” (Yosef, 2011, pp. 16-17).

*Yorim ve bochim*: “they shoot and they cry” said the Israeli journalist Nahum Barnea<sup>39</sup> in his book in 1997.

Thus, who is the victim?

According to Uri Klein, the film critic of the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, who I met in *ArtCafè* in Tel Aviv, on August 19, 2010, “we see ourselves as victim and heroes at the same time. It is something that is part of our culture, as sons of Shoah survivors.”

Then, what happened to the Sabra?

According to Mein Schnitzer, the film critic of the Israeli daily *Ma’ariv*, who I met in *Cafè Bacio* in Tel Aviv, on August 24, 2010, “we are in front of a kind of return to the Old Jew which we try to remove in order to build the Israeli “New” one, because, still fifty year after the establishment of the country, we realized that all the *Sabra*’s narrative didn’t work. How can the Israeli soldier be David, if he is fighting against another David?”

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<sup>39</sup> Nahum Barnea is an Israeli journalist who writes for *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ha’Ayin HaShev’it*. He won the Israel Prize in 2007.