

Chapter one

Making the Desert Bloom: New Jew, Ancient Orient and the Construction of the *Sabra*

SABRA



© 1994 Sabra Dairy, Inc. All rights reserved. Sabra Dairy, Inc. is a registered trademark of Sabra Dairy, Inc.

1.1 From Basel to Tel Hai...from Hashomer to the Establishment of the IDF

I must train the youth to be soldiers. But only a professional army. Strength: one tenth of the male population: less would not suffice internally. However, I educate one and all to be free and strong men, ready to serve as volunteers if necessary. Education by means of patriotic songs, the Maccabean tradition, religion, heroic stage-plays, honor (Theodor Herzl, 1956).

From Basel to Tel Hai...

“The nation’s self representation always involves myth about the nation’s creation and about its members” (Mayer, 2000, p.9). According to Mayer, in Zionism, too, as in other nationalisms, myth and memory have been crucial to the construction of the nation.

The term ‘Zionism’ itself is derived from the biblical word *Tzion* (צִיּוֹן). Referring to a hill near Jerusalem, this term is symbolic of *Eretz Israel*, the Land of Israel. The term refers to the ancient patrimony of the Jews which, according to Jewish mythology, was promised by Yahweh to Abraham and his descendents, the ‘Children of Israel’.

The first use of the term “Zionism” is attributed to the Austrian Nathan Birnbaum, founder of a nationalist Jewish students’ movement called *Kadimah*. Birnbaum first used the term in his journal *Selbstemanzipation* (*Self Emancipation*), published between 1885 and 1894, with some interruptions, and renamed *Juedische Volkszeitung* in 1894.

Zionism does not have a uniform ideology, but has evolved through a dialogue among a plethora of ideologies. The common denominator among all Zionists, however, is the claim to *Eretz Israel*, the Land of Israel. After almost two millennia of the existence of the Jewish Diaspora without a nation-state, the Zionist movement was founded in the late 19th century by secular Jews. This happened largely in response to rising anti-Semitism in Europe, exemplified by the anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire.

Zionism was formally established as a political movement by the Austro-Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl. As the Paris correspondent for the famous Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, in 1894 Herzl covered the Dreyfus Affair¹. Herzl, born in the Budapest ghetto in 1860, was, like Dreyfus, a completely assimilated Jew. He had never been particularly concerned by his ethnic origins until the Dreyfus trial and subsequent outbreaks of anti-Semitism changed his life.

Around this time, Herzl grew to believe that anti-Semitism could not be defeated or cured, only avoided, and that the only way to avoid it was the establishment of a Jewish state. In 1896, Herzl published his manifesto *Der Judenstaat*, (“The State of the Jews”): Herzl was fully aware of the implications of not calling it “The Jewish State”). In the book, he outlined the reasons that the Jewish people so desire to return to their historic homeland, Palestine. The book and Herzl’s ideas spread very rapidly throughout the Jewish world and attracted international attention. In 1897, Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland.

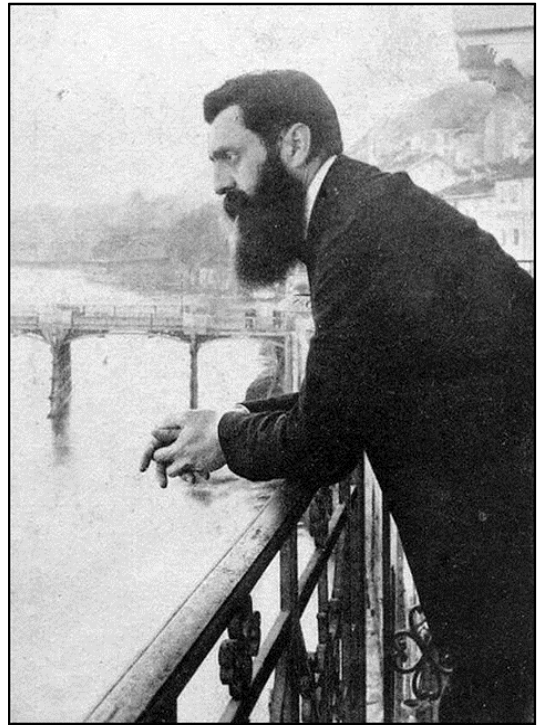


Fig 1.1 Theodor Herzl pictured from the balcony of the Hotel “Les Trois Rois” in Basel by E.M. Lilien

¹ The “Dreyfus affair” was a political scandal that divided France in the 1890s and the early 1900s. It involved the conviction for treason in November 1894 of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a young French artillery officer of Alsatian Jewish descent. Sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly having communicated French military secrets to the German Embassy in Paris, Dreyfus was sent to the penal colony at Devil’s Island in French Guiana and placed in solitary confinement. Two years later, in 1896, evidence came to light identifying a French Army major named Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy as the real culprit. However, high-ranking military officials suppressed this new evidence and Esterhazy was unanimously acquitted after the second day of his trial in military court. Instead of being exonerated, Alfred Dreyfus was further accused by the Army on the basis of false documents fabricated by a French counter-intelligence officer, Hubert-Joseph Henry, seeking to re-confirm Dreyfus’s conviction. Word of the military court’s framing of Alfred Dreyfus and of an attendant cover-up began to spread largely due to *J’accuse*, a vehement public open letter by Émile Zola, published on January 13, 1898, in the newspaper *L’Aurore*. The letter was addressed to President of France Félix Faure, and accused the government of anti-Semitism and the unlawful jailing of Dreyfus. Zola pointed out judicial errors and lack of serious evidence. The letter was printed on the front page of the newspaper, and caused a stir in France and abroad. The Dreyfus case had to be re-opened and Alfred Dreyfus was brought back from Guiana in 1899 to be tried again. Zola was also prosecuted and found guilty of libel on 23 February 1898. To avoid imprisonment, he fled to England, returning home in June 1899.

Herzl dreamed that a national State would free the Jews from the problems caused by 2000 years of living in exile. Significantly, as Mayer argued, Herzl's quest for freedom was associated with a complete transformation of the national, as well individual, character (Mayer, 2000, p.285).

Herzl's explicitly gendered contempt for European Jewry is captured well in his diary, when on June 8, 1895, after visiting some well-to-do and educated friends, he wrote: "they are ghetto creatures, quiet, decent, timorous. Most of our people are like that. Will they understand the call to freedom and manliness?" (Herzl, 1956, p.39).

For Herzl the most important idea of Zionism was to teach the Jewish man, the principal figure of Zionism, to be free and to reclaim the masculine past of the nation. This was necessary, he believed, because years of life in the Diaspora had given Jews many characteristics associated in a pejorative sense with femininity and made them, as a result, easy targets for anti-Semitism. The *New Jew* was to be the antithesis of the "ghetto Jew" that Herzl and other Zionist thinkers saw as helpless, passive and feminine (Mayer, 2000, pp.285-286).

Significantly, historical military figures anti-Roman rebels like Judah Maccabee² and Shimon Bar Kochba³ have served as the heroic exemplars on which Zionism and the Zionist New Jew have been constructed.

The most influential member of the Zionist 'pantheon of heroes' to date has been Joseph Trumpeldor (fig.1.2), a highly decorated Russian Jewish officer who lost an arm in the Russian-Japanese war. He came to Palestine as a Zionist in 1907, fought against the Ottomans in the First World War, and in 1919 became the commander for the Northern Galilee. According to the legend, Trumpeldor was fatally wounded in the battle of Tel Hai, but refused to desert his post and be evacuated. When he finally received medical



Fig.1.2 Portrait of Joseph Trumpeldor during the World War I

² Judah Maccabee led the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire (167-160 BCE) and is acclaimed as one of the greatest warriors in Jewish history. The Jewish feast of *Hanukkah* commemorates the restoration of Jewish worship at the temple in Jerusalem in 165 BCE, after Judah Maccabee removed the pagan statuary.

³ Shimon Bar Kochba was the Jewish leader of what is known as the Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 CE, establishing an independent Jewish state of Israel which he ruled for three years. His state was conquered by the Romans in 135 following a two-year war.

care he is supposed to have said to the physician who treated him: “No matter, it is worthwhile to die for our land”⁴ (Ben Gurion, 1971, p.135). According to Mayer, despite the fact that no one but Trumpeldor’s doctor (a recent immigrant with limited knowledge of Hebrew) heard them, an improved version of Trumpeldor’s words – *it is good to die for our country*⁵ – became what is arguably the most influential motto in modern Zionism (Mayer, 2000, p.296).

To die for one’s land became the ultimate modern sacrifice; it gave meaning to dying in battle and, as Mosse (1990) argued, it enabled fallen soldiers to continue to have a significant impact on the living even after their death.

...*from Hashomer to the Establishment of the IDF*

Nationalism and masculinity are both constructed in opposition to an Other. In the Jewish case, according to Mayer, both nationalism and masculinity have been constructed in opposition: first, to the *Ghetto Jew*, and later, to the indigenous Arab population in Palestine.

Israeli men have been socialized into their gender roles by the reality of the first 60 years of Zionism in Palestine, and by the messages that they have received in youth movements, the educational system, paramilitary training and, ultimately, in the modern IDF itself.

As we examined before, the idea of the *New Jew*, the youth movement graduate turned pioneer settler, *chalutz*⁶, colonizer and defender, became the emblem of Zionism. Although women were *chalutzot*, too, as Mayer argues, and their contributions were crucial to the success of the Zionist project, they did not come to symbolize Zionism’s achievements. While both men and woman opened up the frontier, built *kibbutzim* and created a new Hebrew culture in Palestine, it was mostly men who were involved in fighting the indigenous population of Palestine.

Thus, the Zionist culture that emerged in Jewish Palestine idealized the New Muscle Jew, the antithesis of the stereotyped intellectual European Jew. However, while both boys and girls participated in Zionist education in the *Yishuv*⁷ and both men and woman built and developed

⁴ In Hebrew: אין דבר, כדאי למות בעד ארצנו

⁵ In Hebrew טוב למות בעד ארצנו

⁶ In Hebrew חלוץ

⁷ *Yishuv* (ישוב), that literally means ‘settlement’, is the term used in Hebrew to refer to the body of Jewish residents in the Holy Land before the establishment of the State of Israel. The residents and new settlers were referred to collectively as ‘the *Yishuv*’. The term came into use in the 1880s, when there were about 25,000 Jews living

their homeland together, Zionist culture was unmistakably gendered: for it was largely men who claimed the relevance of national defense (Mayer, 2000, pp.289-300).

Even in the early years of Jewish Palestine, the emerging priority of security contributed in crucial ways to the masculine image of the Zionist success story. Once they began arriving in Palestine in large numbers and transforming land that they saw as unclaimed, Jewish settlers were met with growing resistance by the indigenous Arab population of Palestine. As Arab attacks on Jewish settlements became more regular, the Jews of the *Yishuv* in the pre-state years resorted to defending themselves by establishing several organizations whose sole focus was the protection of the new Jewish communities. However, as the Israeli Anthropologist Uri Ben Eliezer argues, much of the military activity of both attack and defense was wholly unorganized. Militarism developed in different locations and by different people with little planning and coordination (Ben Eliezer, 1995, p.35).

The first clandestine Jewish organization was *Bar-Ghiora*, founded in September 1907. It was renamed to *Hashomer* in April 1909.

Hashomer (literally, “the guard”), established in 1909, is considered to be the basis of later Jewish military and militaristic organizations, and, according to the Israeli Sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, some of its major figures were later incorporated into Zionist mythology (Kimmerling, 2001, p.27).

From the 1920s to the 1940s the *Hagana* (literally, “the defense”) replaced *Hashomer*, which has dissolved as a result of its sectarian and exclusive tendencies. The *Hagana* held a more universal concept of recruitment, which was extended to all eligible members of the Jewish community, and envisioned itself as the nucleus of a future Jewish force.

Teenage members of the youth regiments who came out of these programs (mostly, but not exclusively, male) joined in secret mission of the *Hagana* against both the British and the Arabs, and at times also against other underground Jewish organizations.

As Mayer argues, the routine abuse and cruelty that young men had to endure as a rite of passage⁸ in the paramilitary units marked their manliness. The codes of behavior, the rite of

in Palestine, and continued to be used until 1948, by which time there were about 700,000 Jews there. It is used in Hebrew even today to denote the Pre-State Jewish residents in the Holy Land.

⁸ A rite of passage is a ritual event that marks a person's progress from one status to another. Rites of passage are often ceremonies surrounding events such as other milestones within puberty, coming of age, marriage and death. Initiation ceremonies such as baptism, confirmation and *Bar or Bat Mitzvah* are considered important rites of passage for people of their respective religions. The concept as a general theory

passage ceremonies and the cult of toughness associated with them, further mythologized the male warriors of Israel. Even though in Israel today both Jewish men and women are conscripted into the IDF, it is men who do the actual defense work. For many Israeli Jewish men, in fact, the military has become the only rite of passage into manhood (Mayer, 2000, pp.284-294).

In the third part of this work, I will analyze in more detail the history and the development of the IDF. For now, I would like to highlight just some relevant aspects of the IDF experience, which are connected with the process of the construction of Israeli male identity.

The IDF was founded following the establishment of the State of Israel⁹, following an order issued by Defense Minister and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion on May 26, 1948. The order called for the establishment of the Israel Defense Forces, and the abolition of all other Jewish armed forces. Although Ben-Gurion had no legal authority to issue such an order, the order was made legal by the cabinet on May 31.

According to Kimmerling, the policy of compulsory conscription was designed both to safeguard the existence of the state and to re-socialize immigrants by serving as the central and preferred ‘melting pot’: “within this framework, the new Israeli men and woman were to be created” (Kimmerling, 2001, p.6).

Despite an official policy of universal conscription, in practice different arrangements prevail for different groups of citizens within Israeli society. According to the Israeli Anthropologist Danny Kaplan, their positioning is determined by their relationship with masculinity, Judaism and Zionism. Women are excluded from most combat roles, the archetypal ‘manly’ activity. Ultraorthodox Jews who hold non-Zionist views rarely serve and, if they do, are usually confined to religious service roles. While most Muslims and Christians of the non-Zionist Arab minority are excluded from service altogether, men from the Druze, Circassian and some Bedouin

of socialization was first formally enunciated by Arnold van Gennep in his book of that name, to denote rituals marking the transitional phase between childhood and full inclusion into a tribe or social group (Van Gennep, 1977). Myron Aronoff is the first scholar who has made the explicit observation that service in the IDF is “the primary rite of passage that initiates one into full membership in the Zionist civil religion” (Aronoff, 1989, 132). In 2000, Kaplan defines IDF as, “the bar mitzvah as the meaningful initiation rite for men in the new Israeli religion of security” (Kaplan, 2000, p.140).

⁹ After the November 29, 1947, partition plan adopted by UN General Assembly (Resolution 181), the Jews proclaimed an independent state on May 14, 1948 (the Fifth of *Iyyar* in the Jewish calendar), the day that the British Mandate was terminated, and established this date as Israel’s Independence Day.

communities, who are minorities within the Arab minority¹⁰, are eligible for combat service (Kaplan, 2000, p.128-129).

The Defence Service Law¹¹ specifies which persons are automatically exempt from service: married women, pregnant women, mothers, and woman who declare that they cannot serve for religious reasons. The law does not exempt men for reasons of religion, or marital status. Yet, in praxis Jewish *Haredim*¹² who are actually studying in a *Yeshiva*¹³ are exempt.

During the regular service, *sadir* (סדיר), women have to serve for one year and nine months, compared with three years' service required of male conscripts (the length of service of women steadily decreased in the Nineties: it was cut from twenty-four months to twenty-two in 1992 and to less than twenty-one months in 1994).

Except for those who join the Permanent Service (שירות קבע)¹⁴, after personnel complete their regular service, the IDF may call up men for active duty immediately in times of crisis. Therefore men are obliged to carry out reserve duty service, *miluim*¹⁵(מילואים), until they are 45

¹⁰ According to the Defence Service Law, all Israeli citizens are subject to conscription. The Defense Minister has complete discretion to grant exemption to individual citizens or classes of citizens. A long-standing policy dating to Israel's early years extends an exemption to all other Israeli minorities. There is a long-standing government policy of encouraging Bedouins to volunteer and of offering them various incentives. Also, Muslims and Christians are accepted as volunteers, even when they are over 18. From among non-Bedouin Arab citizens, the number of volunteers for military service—some Christian Arabs and even a few Muslim Arabs—is minute, and the government makes no special effort to increase it.

¹¹ The Defence Service Law (חוק שירות בטחון) is still the same as it was in 1949, besides several adjustments made in 1969, because of the occupation of the West Bank after the Six Day War in 1967, and few minor adjustments made over the last few decades.

¹² The word *Haredi* (חֲרָדִי), which originally was simply the Hebrew translation of *Orthodox*, is derived from *charada*, which in this context (*Orthodoxy*) is interpreted as 'one who trembles in awe of God'. Haredi is the most conservative form of Orthodox Judaism, often referred to as ultra-Orthodox. A follower of Haredi Judaism is called a *Haredi* (*Haredim* in the plural).

¹³ *Yeshiva* (ישיבה), which literally means 'sitting', is any institute of learning where students study sacred texts, primarily the Talmud. Men in the *Haredi* community may choose to defer service while enrolled in *yeshivot*, a practice that has given rise to tension between the Israeli religious and secular communities. While options exist for *Haredim* to serve in the IDF in an atmosphere conducive to their religious convictions, most *Haredim* do not choose to serve in the IDF.

¹⁴ Permanent service is designed for soldiers who choose to continue serving in the army after their regular service, for a short or long period, and in many cases make the military their career.

¹⁵ Although still available for call-up in times of crisis, most Israeli men, and virtually all women, do not actually perform reserve service in any given year. Units do not always call up all of their reservists every year, and a variety of exemptions are available if called for regular reserve service. Virtually no exemptions exist for reservists called up in a time of crisis, but experience has shown that in such cases (most recently, the 2006 Lebanon War) exemptions are rarely requested or exercised; units generally achieve recruitment rates above those considered fully-manned. March 13th 2008, legislation has proposed reform in the reserve service, lowering the maximum service age to 40, designating it as a purely emergency force, as well as many other changes to the structure.

years of age (in a combat unit) or 51 years of age (in all other units). However, men are allowed to volunteer until the age of 55, and women, theoretically, can be summoned for reserve duty until the age of 24.

As Kaplan argues, since active service of *sadir* is an obligatory and self-evident stage for most Jewish-Israeli youths, today it is a much smaller group of male soldiers who serve in combat units, the *kravi*, and risk their lives. Although the law does not differentiate between fighters and logistical staff, this is the most important difference inside (and outside) the army.

According to Hebrew military slang, all soldiers that are not *kravi* (קרבי), literally meaning “fighters”, are *jobnik* (ג'יובניק), a combination of the English word *job* and the Yiddish suffix *nik* meaning “belongs to”. In 2010, approximately 85% of Israeli *sadir* soldier were *jobnik* and only around 15% were *kravi*. Despite this fact, since the establishment of the State of Israel right up to today, the representation of the Israeli soldier in the Israeli imaginary and in Israeli media is always associated with *kravi*.

Only *kravi* soldiers, in fact, represent all the qualities of bravery, honour, heroism and masculinity of the *New Jew*.

Most of the *miluim* soldiers are *kravi* and, in most cases soldiers are called to reserve duty in the same unit over the years that they are obliged to carry out reserve duty. This unit is often the same as the unit of the soldier's active service, and involves the same people who were assigned to that unit in active service. Many soldiers who have served together in active service continue to meet in reserve duty for years after their discharge, causing reserve duty to become a strong male bonding experience in Israeli society.

General Ygael Yadin, former chief of staff from 1949 to 1952, who established the *miluim*, said an Israeli civilian is “a soldier on eleven months' annual leave”.

Actually, on average, *kravi* soldiers devote five to six years of their lives to military service. During that period, the woman remains behind taking care of the home and children and dealing with everyday problems. As Uta Klein argues, the IDF also constructs different identities for women and men: men are the warriors, fighters, and protectors, and women are the emotional supporters of the fighters, the worried, and the protected (Klein, 1999, p.48).

For Israeli Jewish males, military service is an inherent part of maturity, a rite of passage to male adulthood, as Klein puts it: “Military service is internalized by members of the Israeli Jewish collective as essential to a boy's right to belong to this group and, more specifically, to the inner

circle of adult males. Literally a rite of passage, it is related to and spoken of in fatalistic, quasi-religious term, as an inevitable, inescapable, pseudo-biological phase of male maturation” (Klein, 1999, p.53).

Klein also describes how the influence of the IDF is found in everyday life even before and after the army experience. While still in school, Israeli Jewish youths prepare themselves to join the military forces. Lectures are held in school classes delivered by members of the IDF who give information and impressions of life in the Israeli army.

Service is also crucial for a civilian career. Jewish Israeli men gain from their military service by accumulating social capital, establishing contacts for their professional careers (networking) and achieving material and symbolic benefits (Klein, 1999, pp. 54-59).

According to Klein, Israel is often viewed from outside as an egalitarian society, in which women have even entered the last male preserve, the military. Moreover, principles of social justice in the Zionist movement and desire for equality between the sexes on the part of female pioneers created the myth of the liberated Israeli woman. Yet, woman and men are bound into the national collective in different roles (Klein, 1999, pp. 60-61).

As Mayer argues, since the new Jew was regarded as a new man, no models or vision have been created for women. That is why the early female pioneers coming from a socialist background tried to reach gender equality by assuming male jobs in the establishment of the Kibbutzim.

The Zionist ethos of masculine ideals of physical force and strength underwent intensification because of the Shoah, and is since engraved in Jewish Israeli society (Mayer, 2000, 51-52).

It forms part of the mythological *Sabra*, the prototype of the Israel-born new Jew. This is the idea of the native Israeli as a person who is thorny, rough and prickly on the outside, but rich and tender on the inside.

In order to analyze the complex process of the masculinization of Israeli society, in the next paragraph I’m going to analyze the development of the pioneer movement and the construction of the most emblematic representation of the *Yishuv*: the *Sabra*.

1.2. 'Sickle, Hammer and Gun': the role of the *Sabra* in the Socialist-Realist Propaganda of Edification

His figure is raff and inside his heart shines with the flame of his soul. Sabra takes roots in the mountain. Sabra will give fruit in Oasis. It will ride the hills and will hug the sea. Stab, wild, so sweet, Sabra (Chorus from *Sabra*¹⁶, song written by Dudu Barak)

Defining the Sabra...

The collective identity of the *Yishuv*, the Palestinian Jewish ethnic community, was edified gradually and incrementally, much like the country itself. Symbolically the *chalutzim*, pioneers, were engaged in an endless struggle with nature – including swamps and malaria – in the unfriendly land they had chosen to colonize¹⁷. According to Kimmerling, this struggle became the subject of an epic of heroism and sacrifice. These perceptions and the social construction of reality contributed to the cohesion of the *Yishuv* and to the creation of a collective identity that became part of individual identity (Kimmerling, 2001, p.91).

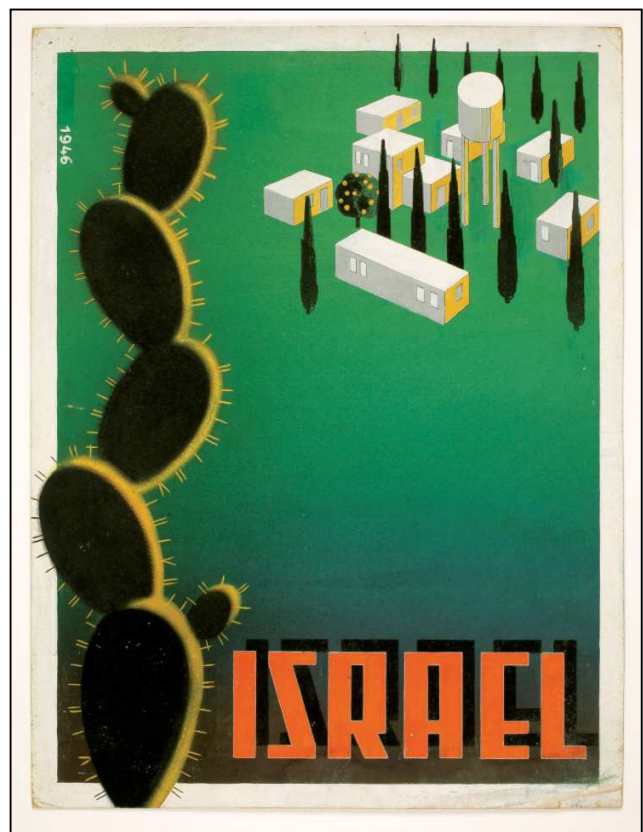


Fig. 1.3, *Israel*, Steven P. Irsai, 1946

As the American historian of religion Daniel Boyarin argues, Zionist masculinity was reconstructed as a masculinity of body, realized through territorial settlement and self-defence, and accomplished through military power (Boyarin, 1997). Influenced by other European

¹⁶ Liberally translated from Hebrew by myself.

¹⁷ Initially, Herzl thought Palestine inappropriate owing to its lack of resources and harsh climate. Among other places, he considered Argentina, with its abundance of free land, natural resources, and good climate. Later, he also considered the British protectorate of Uganda, which was politically convenient.

national movements, the Zionist project endorses what Mosse called the “myth of participation in war” (Mosse, 1990). This view was crystallized with the 1948 generation of: the kibbutz agricultural settlements, inspired by socialist ideology, were a major force in the Zionist revolution and the kibbutz-born youth, who participated in quasi-military activity, came to embody the *Sabra* ethos (Kaplan, 2000, p.138).

The word *Sabra* derives from the Hebrew name for the Indian Fig *Opuntia* cactus, (in Hebrew צבר, pronounced *tsabar*) and is a term used to describe a Jewish person born in *Eretz Israel*, the Land of Israel. The allusion to a tenacious, thorny desert plant with a thick hide that conceals a sweet, softer interior, suggests that even though the Israeli *Sabra* are rough and masculine on the outside, they are delicate and sensitive on the inside.

The term was used a lot politically by the Zionist movement, to celebrate the *New Jew* which the movement created. Unlike the “old Jew” who was born in exile, and was stereotypically bourgeois, the *New Jew* was stereotypically the *kibbutznik* (קיבוצניק), a member of the kibbutz. “The old Jew” spoke European languages or Hebrew with a heavy accent, while the *Sabra* spoke the Hebrew language as a mother tongue. Unlike the “Old Jew” who did not fight for his self-defense in the ghetto, the *Sabra* fought in the Jewish resistance movements, in the *Palmach* and in the other paramilitary groups before the establishment of Israel, and in the IDF following the founding of the state.

The sociological characteristics of the *Sabra* were accurately examined by Oz Almog in his fundamental book *The Sabra - The Creation of the New Jew* (2000). According to Almog the term “*Tzabar*” originated from the insult directed towards migrants of the First Aliyah¹⁸ (which consisted of the first generation of native born members of the Zionist movement) by migrants of the Second Aliyah and the Third Aliyah. The changing of the meaning of the term, to emphasize the softer interior rather than the rough exterior, was done by the journalist Uri Kesari, who published an essay, “We Are the Leaves of the Sabra!” In the essay, published on 18 April 1931 in the newspaper *Doar HaYom*, he argued against the discrimination of the native-born by the new immigrants.

¹⁸The term *aliyah* (עלייה), ‘ascent’, is used in reference to the immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*). It is a basic tenet of Zionist ideology, in fact, according to Jewish tradition, traveling to the Land of Israel is an ascent, both geographically (Jerusalem is situated 2,700 feet above sea level) and metaphysically. In Zionist history, the different waves of *aliyah*, beginning with the arrival of the *Biluim* from Russia in 1882, are categorized by date and the country of origin of the immigrants.

The prestige of the *Sabra* identity culminated during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War and especially in its aftermath. The Israeli public, and especially the older generation, tended to attribute the achievements of the war to the country’s *ashkenazi*¹⁹ *Sabras*, while minimizing the part of the *mizrachi*²⁰ Jewish immigrants who came to Israel in large numbers from Islamic countries only during the 1950s.

In the next chapter I will analyze and discuss in more detail the complex hegemonic relationship between *ashkenazi* and *mizrachi* in Israeli society. For now I would like to illustrate the rich and pervading representation of the *Sabra* in Israeli popular culture.

One of first representations of the *Sabra* was realized by the famous caricaturist Aryeh Navon. Navon was born in 1909 in the Ukraine, formerly part of the Russian empire. He immigrated to Israel with his



Fig. 1.4 Uri Muri, by Aryeh Navon, in *Davar LeYeladim*, 1936

¹⁹ *ashkenazi* (אשכנזי), literally, are Jews descended from the medieval Jewish communities along the Rhine in Germany. In Israel, the term *ashkenazi* is often applied to all Jews of European background living in Israel, in order to distinguish them, representing the secular upper middle class, from the more traditionalist and working class of *mizrachi* (definition follows below).

²⁰ *mizrachi* (מזרחי), literally, are Jews descended from the Jewish communities of the Middle East (מזרח). Today the term *mizrachi* is used in Israel in the language of politics, media and some social scientists for Jews from the Arab world and adjacent, primarily Muslim-majority countries, in order to distinguish them from *ashkenazi* (Jews of European background living in Israel). *Ashkenazim*, in fact, usually more secular and with a higher education compared to *mizrachi*, have played a prominent role in the economy, media, and politics of Israel since its founding. Therefore, during the first decades of Israel as a state, a strong cultural conflict occurred between *ashkenazi* and *mizrachi*. The cultural differences between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews impacted the degree and rate of assimilation into Israeli society. Segregation, especially in the area of housing, limited integration possibilities over the years.

family in 1919. His drawings reflected topical events in Israeli society and his involvement as an artist in society, politics and culture.

From 1933 Navon was commissioned to provide works for *Davar*, the official journal of the labor federation, *Histadrut*, established by Berl Katznelson. At the end of 1934, he began to paint a series of comics for the children's supplement of the journal, *Davar LeYeladim*. Navon published drawings of his old-time comic hero *Uri Muri* (אורי מורי), a short-statured Israeli boy who wore a sock cap, mounted a camel, and walked in the "barren landscape" of *Eretz Israel*. He embodies the young Israel, solving various problems that plagued the developing state in funny and grandiose ways. In one strip from 1936 (fig.1.4), for example, Uri plants cactus seeds in a pot and, miraculously, a cactus-child grows from the ground: "this is a miracle, this is a wonder, a kid is growing from the ground. Where can we find *sabras* like this?"

Beginning with earlier Zionist propaganda, the *Sabra* has become a central part of Israeli popular culture, especially during childhood.

In 1956 the *Sabra* received another artistic and symbolic representation in the form of a character created by the cartoonist Kariel Gardosh, known by his pen name *Dosh*. He created the character of *Srulik* (שרוליק) in cartoons on current events for the daily newspaper *Maariv*. *Srulik* was painted as a young man wearing a *Kova tembel*, "kibbutznik" hat, "biblical" sandals, and khaki shorts (fig.1.5). He represents the pioneering Zionist, a lover of the land of Israel and its soil and a dedicated farmer. During wartime, to raise the national morale, he puts on a uniform and goes out to defend the state of Israel equipped with an *Uzi* machine gun (fig.1.6).

During those times, many have pointed out *Srulik's* function as an antithesis of the anti-Semitic caricatures which appeared in several

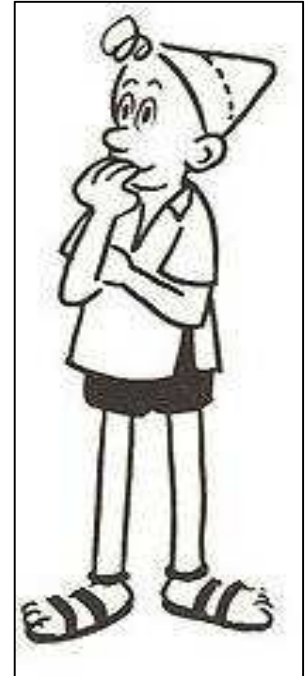


Fig.1.5 *Srulik*, Dosh, 1956



Fig.1.6 *Srulik* in wartime

European and Arab journals. As opposed to the stereotype of the weak or cunning Jew, Dosh, a Holocaust survivor, drew a proud, strong and sympathetic Jewish character. The journalist Shalom Rosenfeld, editor of *Maariv* in 1974-1980, wrote: "Srulik became not only a

the mark of recognition of [Dosh's] amazing daily cartoons, but an entity standing on its own, as a symbol of the Land of Israel: beautiful, lively, innocent ... and having a little *chutzpah*²¹, and naturally also of the new Jew. Because of our history, our religion and the relation between us and the nations that absorbed us in their countries and cultures, stereotypes were created, mostly not so positive of the Jewish man. In the works of the greatest artists of prose, poetry and painting these stereotypes moved between a Wandering Jew, restless, tragic and pathetic and the hunchbacked, crooked-nosed, fleshy-lipped Jew with a pack of banknotes in his pockets, a prototype of the Shakespearean Shylock and The Jew Süß, in Goebbelsian interpretation, and in the modern times of many caricaturists in the Arab countries” (Rosenfeld, *Maariv*, February 2, 2001).



Fig.1.7 Srulik represented on Israeli national stamps

Srulik became such a part of Israeli popular culture that today he is even represented on Israeli national stamps (fig.1.7), as another character which has also become well known: *Kishkashta*, a speaking cactus who appears on an Israeli children's Television program (fig.1.8).



Fig. 1.8 Kishkashta represented on Israeli national stamps

Kishkashta was the main character in one of the first Israeli Educational TV shows: *Ma Pitom* (literally, “What on earth?” or, “You don't say!”), written by, among other screenwriters, Tamar Adar. The show aired in the 1970s and 19'80s, when there was only one television station in Israel, broadcasts were still black and white, and there were only a few hours of programming a day. *Kishkashta* was a talking cactus, a felt puppet (fig.1.9), which embodied the image of Israeli *Sabra* identity, with a deep, melancholic voice and possessed an independent spirit exuding

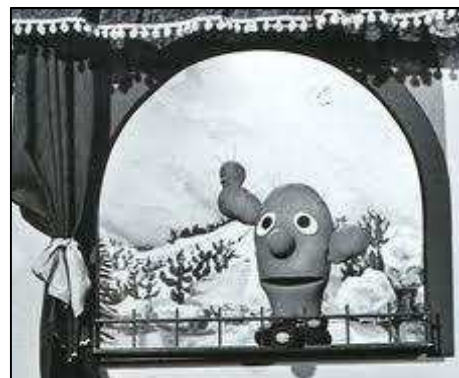


Fig.1.9 Kishkashta's TV shows *Ma Pit'om*

²¹*Chutzpah* (חֲצִפְיָה) is the quality of audacity, in both senses for good or for bad. In modern Hebrew, *chutzpah* is used indignantly, to describe someone who has over-stepped the boundaries of accepted behavior with no shame. But in Yiddish, *chutzpah* has developed ambivalent and even positive connotations. *Chutzpah* can be used to express admiration for non-conformist but gutsy audacity.

the *dugri* (straight) *Sabra* character for which Israelis are known.

Today, in the post-Zionist era, the *Sabra* has become part of the huge tourist industry targeted at the Jewish Diaspora. Several Israeli manufacturers use the *Sabra* to brand products, which are sold in foreign markets, as typically Israeli (fig.1.10). The world's largest hummus manufacturer (as of 2009) is a U.S. company called the “Sabra Dipping Company” (fig.1.11).



Fig.1.10 Sabra magnet



Fig.1.11 Humus “Sabra”

Gendering Sabra: “Sickle, Hammer...and Gun”

“Zionism was not just a national, political and cultural movement of liberation, but also a bodily revolution”. As Weiss argues: “The Zionist revolution involved a ‘return’ to Zion, to nature, and to the body” (Weiss, 2002, p.1).

According to the Israeli scholar Michael Gluzman, Zionism represented “the physical rehabilitation of the Jewish body” (Gluzman, 1997, pp.146-150).

The dichotomy between the corporal and the spiritual became widely recognized as the essential Jewish condition and predicament. One of the more prolific turn of the century Hebrew writers, the social philosopher Ahad Ha’am²², identified these two elements in his essay *Flesh and Spirit* (Ha’am, 1912, pp. 139-158).

Philosopher Aaron David Gordon arrived in Eretz Israel from the Russian Empire. He insisted on sustaining himself through manual labor, especially through exhausting agricultural tilling, and dreamt of a new Jewish culture with a “cosmic” character, which would emerge from the renewed encounter of the Jew with the elements of nature.

²² Ahad Ha’am (אהד ה'אם) Genesis 26:10) literally “one of the people” was the pseudonym of Asher Ginsberg (1856-1927)

This writer, an important figure for the Hebrew labor movement, viewed work, especially agricultural work, as means of spiritual-existential salvation for the person as well as the key of the Zionist redemption in Eretz Israel.

As Israeli literary critic Dan Miron puts it: “through daily labor within nature, which will restore the Jewish people that missing vertebra identity spinal-column, namely, its “cosmic” part, distinct from the historical part which it maintained in the Diaspora as well” (Miron, 2006, p.281).

Also Ber Borochov and other Socialist and Marxist Russian intellectuals and theoreticians believed that a “stoicheological” elementary process of the return of the Jewish masses to a poor and unindustrialized land, would allow the Jewish people, through the industrialization of said land, and the ensuing class struggle in the “classical” sense of the term, to found a Socialist, egalitarian and just Jewish State (Miron, 2006, p.281).

However, the establishment of the State of Israel, founded on the rhetoric of socialist equality, has been continuously shaken by accusations of racial discrimination against *Mizrahi*, Israeli Arab citizens and by gnawing voices insisting on recognition for the Palestinians. “The situation of women, who [has] started out as supposedly equal partners in the radical social experiment of Zionism, has remained sadly unevolved”. As the Israeli scholar of Visual Cultures Irit Rogoff argues: “The feminine subject positions within it are simultaneously colonized and marginalized both in relation to dominant ideology and the ensuant internal contradictions of its own gender specific identity” (Rogoff, 2000, pp.166, 174).

According to the curator at the Israel Museum Yigal Zalmona, Orientalism provided an existential and metaphysical opportunity to sever the umbilical cord – to the occident- and to the Diaspora: “a particular case within Orientalistic ideology, in other words the way that Occident viewed the Orient. [...] It is the root, the healer of all national ailments: it is intrinsic to the national identity, yet at the same time, it also represents the “Other”, that in principle is alien to the Occidental Zionist Jew: an “over there” that defines the Jewish Zionist identity” (Zalmona, 2006, p.239).

As Zalmona remind us, in 1925 Ben Gurion says: “The Significance of Zionism is that we are again Oriental people” (Zalmona, 2006, p.242).

The identification with the Oriental Arab in the Zionist project was artistically represented by several scholars from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. The school is named after

the Biblical figure Bezalel, son of Uri, who was appointed by Moses to oversee the design and construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus, 35:30). Boris Schatz founded the academy in 1906²³ in Jerusalem, in accordance with the Zionist project of Theodor Herzl and the early Zionists.

They believed in the creation of a “national” style of art combining biblical themes, Islamic-Middle Eastern design, and European traditions. The teachers of Bezalel developed a distinctive school of art, which portrayed Biblical and Zionist subjects in a style influenced by the European *jugendstil* (*art nouveau*) and traditional Persian and Syrian art. The artists blended varied strands of their surroundings, “tradition” and “innovation” in paintings and craft objects, in their effort to carve out a distinctive national style. As Zalmona describes, the work produced by the students of the Bezalel Academy

offered, throughout that period, idyllic and pastoral representations of the Orient, based on the biblical “golden age”, which was to act as inspiration for the Zionist future of *Eretz Israel*. This is the era of the change in the physical image of the Jew: rejoining the Jew with his physical being, with the love of beauty and art, with sexuality (Zalmona, 2006, p.241).

In modernist Nachum Gutman’s painting (fig.1.12), the Arab becomes the model of belonging, of stability, of existential natural roots in the land: as far away as possible from Chagall’s Judaism (fig.1.13), from the Jewish *luftmensch* (man of air, in Yiddish), detached and dispossessed. As Zalmona argues, even in the pastoral painting, depicting the oriental panorama, there is an erotic dimension: the vaulting and rolling hills, which the spectator views mostly from above them, hint at a virgin feminine



Fig.1.12 Rest in the Field, Nachum Guttman, 1924



Fig. 1.13 Fig.1.13 Rain, Marc Chagall, 1911

²³ The school closed down in 1929 in the wake of economic difficulties, but reopened in 1935 to this day, attracting many teachers and students from Germany, many of them from the Bauhaus school shut down by the Nazis. Today, it is located in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and has 1,500 students and several Faculties.

territory which succumbs to the look (and the act) of the conqueror (Zalmona, 2006, pp.241-243).

I would like to highlight how also in Hebrew, as in some others languages, both the word “conqueror” (*kobesh*, כּוֹבֵשׁ) and the verb “to conquer” (*likbosh*, לִכְבוֹשׁ) can have a double meaning. They can refer both to the “conquest” (*kibush*, כִּיבוּשׁ), of territories, but also of women. Together, these became part of the construction of Zionist Orientalism.

It was not just artists that were driven by this desire to overcome ethnic extraneousness through the common denominator of places and the scriptures. Statesmen, serious intellectuals and theorists, mainly among the Zionist left, like David Ben Gurion and Ber Borochov, for a long time contemplated the concept that the oppressed farmers of Ottoman Palestine were none other than the descendents of the ancient Jews, who did not follow their brethren to Rome after the Romanian expulsion in 70 AD. As Miron argues, Zionist Orientalism had a fundamental influence on the behavioral patterns of various elite paramilitary groups, which adopted certain affectations of the heroic ethos of the Arab Shebab, the Arab “youth”. The members of Hashomer galloped on fine Arab horses and spoke Arab fluently. The *Palmach*²⁴ members of Hagana, developed the rite of *keffiyeh* and *finjan*, the Arab coffee kettle. Arabic was absorbed into the particular slang which, once developed by the above mentioned groups, rapidly gained popularity, eventually becoming an intrinsic part of the idiom used by Israeli youth in general (Miron, 2006, pp. 286-287).

According to Weiss, “if the Diaspora was the disease, the land was the cure, and the military the necessary means of achieving the cure” (Weiss, 2002, p.44).

Therefore the third essential part of the triptych symbolizing the *Sabra*, represented by sickle and hammer, according to the Socialist and Marxist Russian propaganda, became the gun (fig. 1.14, 1.15, 1.16, 1.17).

²⁴ The *Palmach* (פלמ"ח), acronym for *Plugot Machatz* (פּלוּגוֹת מַחָצ), literally means “strike force”. It was the elite fighting force of the *Haganah*. The *Palmach* was established on May 15, 1941 and in 1948, with the creation of Israel's army, was disbanded. The *Palmach* contributed significantly to Israeli culture and ethos, well beyond its military contribution. Its members, *Palamchnik* (פּלמחניק), formed the backbone of the IDF high command for many years, and were prominent in Israeli politics, literature and culture.



Fig. 1.14 *Shoulder to Shoulder: Recruit for Work*, Rudy Deutsch Dayan, from 1940s



Fig.1.15 *Worker, Soldier, Settler! Vote Israeli Communist Party*, Moshe Vorobeichic Raviv, 1945



Fig.1.16 *Pioneer day. Our destiny: the countryside and working in the field*, Anchor Ion, 1948



Fig.1.17 *Poster of the Party of the United Workers*, 1948

The earliest propaganda images show pioneer women who had emigrated from Eastern Europe at the turn of the century performing both private and public chores. They are shown both laundering clothes and breaking up stones for the paving of roads and the building of houses. However, as we can see from these kinds of images, women only rarely took part in the representation of nation building, even if they contributed a lot in the process of edification. Instead, most of the time the representation of the women was related to the representation of the land, in order to be conquered, inseminated and defended. We can see this in the poster of 1933 advertising one of the earliest *Eretz Israeli* films, *Sabra*, directed by the Jewish-Polish film director Alexander Ford (fig.1.18).

As Ella Shohat argues, the very title of *Sabra*, then, intimates the perspective through which the narrative is focalized (Shohat, 1987, p.41).

This is a typical “frontier” movie, featuring the likes of malaria, drought, war, religious tension, harsh farming conditions, and human passions. Along with a few other movies which were shot between the 1920s and the 1940s, it constitutes the Zionist Realist Cinema. This cinema has its roots in the period before the establishment of the State of Israel and, as we will see in the next paragraph, is fundamental in the process of the construction of Israeli national (and male) identity.



Fig.1.18 Poster of the films *Sabra*, 1933, directed by Alexander Ford.

1.3 Ethnographing Zionist Realist Cinema between Film Pioneers and Zionist Pioneers

I saw myself first as a Zionist and only then as a cinematographer. My purpose as a Zionist, therefore, was to show the good side of building the country. For example, I often shot streets in Tel Aviv and in other places, and always I took a lengthy and tiring walk in order to look for an angle or camera position from which the streets would look prettier. I made an effort so that vacant lots, unfinished streets, garbage, and dirt would not be seen. I wanted everything to make a good impression (Nathan Axelrod, in Shohat, 1987, p.24).

Between Film Pioneers and Zionist Pioneers ...

As Ella Shohat highlights, the portrayal of Palestine in cinema began virtually at the same time as cinema itself, in 1896, when Lumière brothers' crews shot scenes from "exotic" Ottoman Palestine, to be shown on European screens (Shohat, 1987, p.15). The resulting film, *Palestine in 1896 (La Palestine en 1896)* is a panorama of sights and sounds from the old Jaffa port, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, which emphasizes Arab costumes and customs.

The first "local" Zionist filmmaker, Ya'akov Ben Dov, came to Ottoman Palestine from the Ukraine in 1907. He worked as a photographer and taught photography at the Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem. In 1919 he photographed General Allenby²⁵ entering Jerusalem for his first film, *Judea Liberated*, which describes the beginning of the British Mandatory period in Palestine²⁶.

Eretz Israeli filmmaking began during the British Mandatory period in Palestine, with an emphasis on documentary production. The origins and evolution of filmmaking in the *Yishuv*, meanwhile, closely paralleled the evolution of Zionist activity in Palestine. On one level it constituted an extension of that activity, thus establishing an intensive interaction between film pioneers and Zionist pioneers.

²⁵ Sir Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby, (23 April 1861–14 May 1936) was a British soldier and administrator most famous for his role during the First World War in which he led the Egyptian Force in the conquest of Ottoman Palestine and Syria in 1917 and 1918.

²⁶ The British Mandate of Palestine (1923-1948) formalized British rule in former territory of the defunct Ottoman Empire (the Ottoman Empire was in control of parts of the Middle East before the 16th century). With the League of Nations' consent on 16 September 1922, the UK divided the Mandate territory into two administrative areas: Palestine, under direct British rule, and autonomous Transjordan, under the rule of the Hashemite family from the Hijaz in today's Saudi Arabia.

As several cinema scholars argue (Kronish and Safirman, 2003, pp. 1-2; Shohat, 1987, pp.15-27), this period was characterized by ideological and informational films that were produced to convince foreign audiences of the success of the Jewish pioneering enterprise in Palestine and to give the impression that dedication to egalitarianism, socialism and self-defense characterized the efforts of the early pioneers during the 1920s and 1940s. The Zionist institutions of the embryonic state commissioned a number of the major documentaries of that period. These institutions, including the Jewish Agency, Keren Hayesod and the Jewish National Fund, supported films about the pioneering achievements of rebuilding the land, paving the roads and reviving the Hebrew language and culture.

Hoping to attract potential pioneers from the European Diaspora, as well as financial and political support, the documentaries and propaganda films, as well as capturing landscapes and events, also emphasized the pioneers' achievements and the rapid pace of the country's development. Recurrent images of pioneers working the land, paving roads, and building towns show the *Yishuv* as symbolically "making the desert bloom" in agricultural, technological and cultural terms (Shohat, 1987, p.22).

As the anthropologist Meira Weiss highlights, early *Eretz Israel* cinema provided the "embodiment" of Zionist collectivism. The films of the 1930's to 50's always show the pioneers in groups and engaged in the same activities: "working together, eating together, reading newspaper together, smoking together. This unity produced anonymity: those human figures are not individuals but prototypes of the *Sabra* member in the army of labor" (Weiss, 2002, p.23).

As the Israeli scholar of cinema studies Neeman argues, little film time was dedicated to individual and family life. Instead the films focused mostly on groups of pioneers tilling the land, building houses and roads, and drilling water wells. They employed many long and wide-angle shots in order to include as much of the physical reality as possible. Films employed a "Zionist realist style", with abundant long-shots and panoramic camera-movement, showing an expanse of land represented first as desert and then, following the pioneers' tilling of the soil, as a flourishing paradise (Neeman, 2001, p.224).

According to Shohat, Soviet-style montage series summarized the collective life of work and progress, of ploughing, sowing, harvesting, sinking wells, and operating progressively more modernized machines. This summary celebrates the fruitful results of *avoda ivrit* (עבודה עברית), Hebrew work, as a necessary condition for Jewish recuperation, whereby Jews would be returned

to *Eretz Israel* and life would be organized on a more just social basis. The abstract notion of *avoda ivrit* is rendered first through the absence of the close-ups, which might have fostered identification with individual settlers (Shohat, 1987, pp.31-33).

Reminiscent of Soviet films, particularly those of the 30's and 40's, the *Yishuv* period reflects a consistent subordination of complex representation to the demands of the ideology of edification. As Shohat puts it, the two film pioneers (and Russian Jewish settlers), Axelrod and Agadati, had witnessed the enthusiasm of October Revolution (Shohat, 1987, pp.25-26).

Further, the titles of the many propaganda films and documentaries, as well as those of the few narrative films that were produced during that period, reflect the concerns, preoccupations, and Zionist point of view of the *Yishuv*.

As Shohat highlights, the very titles of films such as Axelrod's *The Pioneer*, Alexander Ford's *Sabra* (*Tzabar*, 1933) and Lersky's *Earth* (*Adama*, 1947) point to the collective enthusiasm of a national renaissance in *Eretz Israel* (Shohat, 1987, p.22).

Most of the film production in *Eretz Israel* during the British Mandate was a co-production between the local industry that was beginning to be formed and foreign interest in Palestine. Those two combined initiated some serious film production.

In the following section I am going to analyze both the local and foreign film production in *Eretz Israel*, in order to analyze the specific role of cinema in the process of nation-building, and the process of national edification as a main character of the *Kolnoa Israeli*²⁷.

...ethnographing Zionist Realist Cinema

Soon after his arrival from the Soviet Union in 1926, the foremost film pioneer, Nathan Axelrod, made the first *Eretz Israeli* attempt at a narrative film, *The Pioneer* (*Ha Khalutz*, 1927). The film was intended to deal with the dilemmas and ordeals of a Jewish pioneer. Because of financial problems, Axelrod engendered a dependency on Zionist institutions that trapped the filmmakers

27 At the beginning of the twentieth century Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, one of the major revivers of the Hebrew language, Hebraized "cinematograph" to *reinoa* (ראינוע) - literally "moving images" - in order to describe the movement of film in the time of silent cinema. During the 1930's, with the development of sound, the poet Yehuda Karni Hebraized the new cinema to *kolnoa* (קולנוע), literally "voice and movement" (Salah, 2008, p.329).

within the propaganda apparatus. This meant that the movie was accompanied by public pressure against showing any “negative elements” from the life of the *Yishuv*. The protest created difficulties for Axelrod in obtaining money during the course of the production, and the film was never finished (Shohat, 1987, p.24).

However, in 1932 Axelrod expanded his operations with the success of *Oded the Wanderer* (*Oded ha Noded*), co-produced by Axelrod, Haim Halachmi and FEI (Film Eretz Israel), and directed by Haim Halachmi.

The first dramatic feature film made in Eretz Israel, based on a children's story by Tzvi Liberman, is a Zionist realist adventure film that, according to Neeman, utilizes plot to highlight the ancient landscapes of the Land of Israel (Neeman, 2001, p.301).

The film tells the story of a group of children from Nahalal who are on a school trip in the hills above the Jezreel Valley. Firstly, they stand on a mountaintop from which they can see the fields of the valley below. They are told of their responsibility to make the barren areas fruitful and to make the desert bloom.

Oded, the young *Sabra* protagonist, dressed in typical short trousers and *tembel* hat (fig.1.19), is mistakenly left behind as his teacher and his friends continue their journey. When it is discovered that Oded is missing, a search is mounted. Meanwhile, Oded becomes tired and thirsty, and imagines water flowing before his eyes. He falls into a pit and becomes unconscious. Finally, Oded is rescued and saved by Bedouins.

According to the Orientalist representation of the *Yishuv*, in Axelrod's movies we not only see Bedouins, but also *kibbutzniks* wearing the Arab *kaffiya* “in order to maintain a facade of Arab identity” (Shohat, 1987, p.22).

The film is acted by Hebrew-speaking stage actors, but as it does not have a soundtrack, it was made as a silent film with literary Hebrew intertitles.



Fig.1.19 Scene of *Oded the Wanderer*

Although it has no character development and very little story, the film is an important milestone in Israeli filmmaking. Later narrative films portray similar achievements, such as Baruch Diner's *They were Ten* (*Hem hayu asara*, 1961).

In 1933 the great Polish-Jewish director, Alexander Ford, arrived in Mandatory Palestine and began to direct a full-length feature called *Sabra* (*Tzabar*). This was a big-budget international production that used sophisticated laboratories in Poland, where the film was dubbed. Ford incorporated documentary footage that was shot before the dramatic scenes, some of which was edited later into newsreels and screened in Poland.

The film tells the story of a group of Jewish immigrants who arrive in Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century determined to establish a Jewish settlement based upon communal life. Away from civilization, they suffer from hunger and contract malaria.

As Shohat argues, the original invitation to produce a film about the pioneers metamorphosed gradually into a film about Jewish-Arab tension, their struggle over land and water and the cultural tension between Occident and Orient, "invariably ending with the peaceful and "logical" triumph of the former over the latter" (Shohat, 1987, pp.38-39).

The group of settlers, in fact, enters a land presented as primeval and wild, and encounters Arab natives leading a tribal life headed by a despotic manipulative Sheikh. While the settlers begin to dig a well of their own amidst continuous disillusionment, the Arab villagers pray for water.

Thus, according to the Israeli scholar of cinema studies Nitzan Ben-Shaul, on the one hand we have the symbolic Arab tribe whose social structure is despotic, based upon the exploitation of the tribe's men and women by the manipulative ruling Sheikh. On the other hand we have the symbolic Jewish immigrant's commune, whose social structure is based upon social equality between men and woman, and collective work.

Likewise the presentation of "nature", as Ben-Shaul highlights, as an extension or background to the presentation of the native Arabs, uses marked black and white compositions to enhance the aridity of the land, whites, or its menace, blacks. This can be seen, for example, in the opening sequence of the film, which shows the land to which the Jewish settlers have arrived. It is shown in a shot of a tempestuous night through a turbulent sea, with dark clouds, and the intermittent crisscrossing of lightning.

Contrary to the Arab tribe, as is indicated in the film's final fictional scene, the Jewish commune is presented as having an interest in using nature productively for their collective benefit and the

benefit of those around them. The cessation of hostilities is rewarded by the sudden outburst of water from the Jewish well, implying that there is enough water for everybody (Ben-Shaul, 1987, pp.51-53).

As Shohat argues, the epilogue of *Sabra*, which celebrates the flourishing of technology and the blossoming of agriculture, implicitly celebrates the success of Jewish-European settlers in hewing a civilization out of a godforsaken wilderness (Shohat, 1987, p.47).

According to Neeman, Ford and his wife Olga wrote a script that would eventually serve as the Zionist master-narrative in Israeli cinema, consolidating the fundamental elements of the Zionist programme. This narrative incorporated the redeeming of the wasteland and its restoration to fertility, the construction of a new society and the civilizing of the “primitive” Arabs (Neeman, 2001, p.317).

Sabra became the prototype of many such typical *Eretz Israel* sagas that were to follow. It impacted on Israeli cinema in general, as well as on the specific narratives of *They were ten* (Baruch Diner, 1960) and *Unsettled land* (Uri Barbash, 1987). I will analyze these films in the following chapters.

In 1934, the Polish-born filmmaker Judah Leman, who later made his career in Hollywood, directed the first *Eretz Israeli* “talking” (English) documentary, *Land of Promise* (fig.120), translated in Hebrew as *Lechaim Hadashim*, literally “to the new life”.

This Zionist realist documentary was produced by the Palestine Film Company specifically for fund-raising purposes, in order to encourage settlement and investment in “the Jewish homeland.” It takes a look at the development of Jewish settlement in Palestine.

As the Israeli-American scholar of cinema studies Amy Kronish argues, the film provides a glimpse of the glorious life of the pioneer who works on the land and lives communally, “bringing life and water to the desert”, singing while they work. There are classic shots of pioneering men and woman, using the tools of harvesting and toiling to make the desert bloom



Fig.1.20 Romanian poster of *Land of Promise*

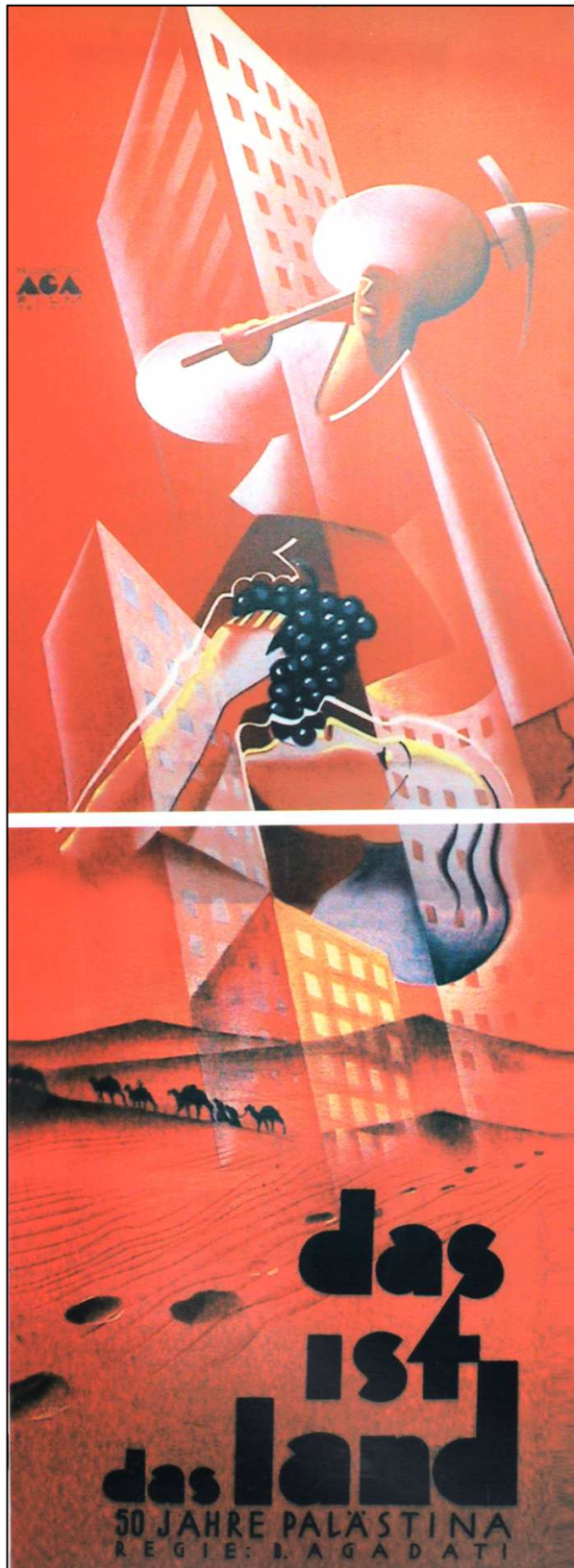


Fig.1.21 German poster of *This is the Land*

(Kronish, 1996, p.7).

Even the film credits describe the movie as “result of the cooperation of thousands of men and women, in the midst of their labor for the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland they placed themselves”.

According to Neeman, Jewish audiences outside Palestine were deeply impressed and many said that the film was the trigger for their immigration to Palestine (Neeman, 2001, p.286).

In 1935 another major (film) pioneer, the Russian Baruch Agadati, with his brother Yitzhak, produced the first full-length Hebrew film with sound, *This is the Land* (*Zot Hi Haaretz*, fig.121).

No particular group commissioned the film. Working on his own initiative, Agadati told the story of fifty years of the history of the pioneers, from the early Zionist settlers who first came to Rishon Le Tzion in 1882, the *Bilus*, to those of the new *Aliya* wave who arrived in Haifa fifty years later.

The film is a combination of documentary and drama, mixing dramatic sequences and documentary footage shot originally by Ya’ackov Ben Dov. Agadati interweaves heroic and mundane images from the rural and urban lives of the pioneers with several important historical moments. These include Lord Balfour’s speech at the 1925 opening of

the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

This film, as he puts in the film credits: “is not a celluloid fancy with imaginary heroes, but an authentic record of actual life. A mirror of the history of heroic pioneer in the historic land of Palestine to redden, with their sweat and blood, and thanks to their sacrifices made the desert blossom again”.

Also in this movie, the main character is “nature”: the sea and the desert, the camels and the *sabras* cacti, the children playing with the animals, the fruits and vegetables in the fields, with which the film ends.

1935 is also the year of *Avodah* (*The Work*), the first major production of a documentary dedicated to the pioneers in Palestine, by one of the most famous German filmmakers, Helmar Lerski. Lerski was born in 1871 in Strasbourg, and in 1932 he moved to Mandatory Palestine where he made two well-known films describing *Eretz Israel*, *Avodah* and *Adamah* (1947). As Lerski puts it in the credits of the film, *Avodah* is “a Palestinian movie for the pioneers in Palestine”.

Dwelling on the agricultural and technological achievements of the pioneers and extolling the idea of a socialist and Jewish state, the film emphasized images of the archetypal pioneers drilling for water, working in the fields, and making the desert bloom.

Lerski’s monumental images of people and machinery, however, were offered in contrast to the Orientalist Palestine that the Jews were trying to change and “improve”.

According to Neeman, the main body of the film illustrates the tour de force of the Jewish pioneers: paving roads, planting, harvesting, building new communes and drilling for water (Neeman, 2001, p.244).

Avodah is a film in the typical style of social realism. It dwells on images that glorify the workers and their monumental achievements. However, no emphasis is placed on the individual. Shot as a silent film, the monumental sound track of music and effects was added using music by Paul Dessau from the Budapest Orchestra.

Like other films of that period, in this movie “nature” is one of the main characters. It is represented through drilling for water, the animals featured in the film and flourishing agricultural production.

In 1938, ten years after the unfinished film *The Pioneer*, Nathan Axelrod, together with Alfred Wolf, shot *Over the Ruins* (*Me’al Hachurvot*), a full-length drama with soundtrack and dialogue,

which provides a chilling prophetic vision of the tragedy that was about to befall the Jewish People in Europe. Tzvi Liberman's screenplay for this film was based on his own novel. The movie is about a village whose adults are carried off by Roman conquerors and whose children rebuild their lives and future on the ruins of their homes. The film opens in the contemporary period with German refugee children of the 1930's arriving at a youth rural community in Mandatory Palestine. Their youth counselor tells them a story about the ancient Roman who attacks a village in the Galilee and all the adults are carried away to slavery. The children must grapple with communal issues and choose their own leaders. After many setbacks the children succeed in building their new society and harvesting their wheat crop.

According to Neeman, this film attempts to create a sequence of Jewish history, ancient and modern, drawing on both the tragedy of Jews in Europe and the nascent independent (Neeman, 2001, p.293).

In 1947, just one year before the establishment of the State of Israel, Helmar Lerski shot his second film in *Eretz Israel*, *Adamah* (fig. 1.22, literally "Earth", translated as "Tomorrow is a wonderful day"), a docu-drama of Binyamin, a young Holocaust survivor, who suffers from post-traumatic stress and is unable to adjust to the society of *Sabra* children in a youth village in Palestine. Binyamin refuse to take part in the pioneering work, because working in the fields surrounded by barbed wire and carrying stones remind him too much his personal experience in the Nazi concentration camps. As the Israeli scholar of cinema studies Raz Yosef argues, Binyamin experiences, to put it in Bhabha's term, an "unhomely moment" that "relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to wider disjunctions of political existence" (Yosef, 2004, p.28).

The touring point in his behavior occurs



Fig.1.22 Poster of *Adamah*

when, seven years later, he is rehabilitated and he finds his place as a pioneer in the founding of a new Kibbutz. According to Yosef, the stormy night in the Kibbutz marks Binyamin's metamorphosis from "sissy" Jew to a new Zionist man. (Yosef, 2004, p.28) It is only that he finds sense in his life in the new country, enjoying the smell of the flowers in the fields, where the earth (*Adama*) is represented as a metaphor for a mother: "a womb or a female vagina, from which the New Jew emerge" (Yosef, 2004, p.29).

This Zionist realist film attempted to explore the complex guilt-ridden relationship between the Jewish community in Palestine and Holocaust survivors. As Neeman highlights, as in other narratives, its protagonists are rehabilitated and find their place in the Zionist project (Neeman, 2001, p.237).

In 1947, another foreign filmmaker, the American-Jewish novelist and journalist Meyer Levin, should also be acknowledged for his pioneering contribution to the fledgling Israeli film industry during the pre-state years. In 1946 he came from the United States America in order to combine the scenery of the Land, Zionist achievements and the story of a little boy he had met during the liberation from Buchenwald concentration camp (Kronish, 1996, pp. 13-14).

The resulting *My Father's House* (*Bet Avi*, fig.1.23), scripted by Levin and directed by Herbert Kline tells the story of David Halevi, a 10 year old concentration camp survivor, who is brought illegally to Mandatory Palestine from Europe via the underground *Hagana*.

Remembering that his father had told him, when they had been separated in Cracow, Poland, that they would meet in *Eretz Israel*, he immediately asks for his father when he arrives at the port in Haifa.

David is taken to a kibbutz, where he is befriended by three people. The first is Miriam, who is also a survivor. The second is Shulamith, a little kibbutz girl who paints his



Fig.1.23 Poster of *My father's house*

Nazi tattoo on her arm because she wants to be his sister. The third is a neighboring Arab boy, who gives him his donkey in order to help him find his father.

As it becomes apparent that David cannot adapt and that he believes his family is still alive, he is sent from the kibbutz to a boarding school near Haifa where the children therapeutically tell stories about their wartime experiences.

Still disbelieving his father's death, David, wearing a military uniform, runs away and obsessively searches for his father. While he is travelling in the desert some Bedouins take care of him and try to help him to find his way back home.

When he reaches Jerusalem, he is confronted by the traumatic news of his father's death and goes back to the kibbutz, which subsequently adopts him.

The movie finishes with the edification of the new kibbutz. During the works, the adoptive father points to a carved stone lying at the bottom of the furrow. Above the carved decoration David can see ancient Hebrew letters and he reads: "Halevi...that's my father's name!" "This is the name of all your fathers, they were here once" his adoptive mother says. And to complete what Neeman calls "the metamorphosis of the Holocaust survivor from Diasporic Jew into the New Jew" (Neeman, 2001, p.27), the film finishes with Davis's last sentence: "this is the house of my father, Israel".

As Neeman argues, this Zionist propaganda film was meant primarily for the Jewish Diaspora, displaying a panoramic view of the scenery and people of *Eretz Israel* and utilizing the Holocaust as moral justification for the soon-to-be-born state of Israel (Neeman, 2001, p.247).

The film credits began with: "This is the story of people of Palestine, not of its politics. We are grateful to all the creeds who erected this film: Jewish, Arabs and Palestinians".

It results very interesting to see how, in most of these Zionist realist movies, Arabs are often portrayed as a relevant part of the country, "largely by sublimating the natives into part of wilderness". According to Shohat, even when Arabs are presented as hospitable, the scene suggests that what they have to offer is scarcely worth accepting. The pioneer films reproduce the colonialist mechanism by which the Orient becomes the passive object of study and spectacle: "in other words, [they] claim to initiate the Western spectator into Oriental culture" (Shohat, 1987, pp.37-43).

The superiority of pioneer over Arab society is also suggested through the portrayal of the status of women in the two communities. As Shohat argues, women pioneerswork alongside the men as

equal members of the collective, with conformity to Zionist pioneering ideals (Shohat, 1987, p.47).

However, this only provided the embodiment of Zionist collectivism. Regarding the *bodyscape*, those human figures are not individuals but prototypes of the *Sabra*, while only men are used to play protagonists. It is also worth noting that most of the time protagonists are young, in order to represent the “generation of the future” and the young nation that is going to be edified.

Still, the real protagonist of all these Zionist realist movies is “Nature”. Regarding the *ethnoscape*, the emphasis on images of “the Land” and of “Nature” in these films is intrinsic to “sabranness”. As Shohat puts it: “Two thousand years of living a vicarious textual geography through the scriptural nostalgia for the Promised Land and of being forced into non-agricultural work is transformed by the Zionist into a concrete touching of a palpable land. The territorialist tendency advances in its religious formulation the idea of the Land as a quasi-magical transformer and guarantor of blessings” (Shohat, 1987, p.29).

According to Shohat, visible prosperity also serves as a kind of retroactive validation of the Zionist vision. In fact, the filmic celebration of agricultural revolution and its concomitant benefits for the people evokes the pioneering spirit, engendering immense achievements and realizing Herzl’s slogan “If you wish it’s not just a legend” (Shohat, 1987, p.52).

A century later the same slogan forms the basis of the new slogan of the latest generation of *Sabra*, “If you don’t wish it, never mind”²⁸, as we see in the fig. 1.24.

In order to illustrate the gap between Herzl’s vision and the contemporary situation in Israel, in the following chapters I will analyze the metamorphosis of Zionist cinema into what Shmulik Duvdevani calls the “Zionist guilt syndrome” in the Israeli i-Movies of the New Millennium Cinema.



Fig.1.24 “If you don’t wish it, never mind”

28 Herzl wrote this sentence (originally in German *Wenn ihr wollt, ist es kein Märchen*) in 1902 *Altneulad*, that in was translated in Hebrew by Nahum Sokolov: “אם תרצו אין זו אגדה”. The new slogan in Hebrew is “לא רוצים לא צריך”.