INTRODUCTION

Motion fiction is, among many other things, a cultural medium for the articulation of collective identities. When we say “collective,” we mean people who experience films, interpret them, and identify with them from a certain “subject position,” which is always the intersection of individual experience and communal frameworks. Our national, ethnic, racial and religious, gender, and other communal affiliations, not necessarily in this order, guide our experience of the fictional world—the story, characters, setting, and our perception of the more subtle elements of the cinematic code, like composition and color, *mise-en-scène*, art, distance and angles, editing, soundtrack, and musical score.

When we say “identities,” we refer to transient and always evolving cultural constructs, not fixed entities. Cultural identities are flexible and open identifications and self-perceptions that we keep developing as we go through life. They are reflected in and through our biographies and depend on cultural contexts (be they national, geographical, or ethnic) that are connected to our professional and personal, private affiliations.

Motion fiction is one of the most fascinating and relevant media for the study of such “moving” or evolving collective identities. Films are a spectacular vehicle for the dramatization of collective myths and for a ritual consumption of these myths through spectatorship. Through the reworking and retelling of familiar stories in variations, films articulate and form the collective unconscious that yearns to connect to an origin of fixed meaning that will anchor identity in the fertile common ground of the collective: stories that nations repeatedly tell themselves, ritualized mythologies which

signify the dreams and the anxieties of these collectives, their utopian aspirations, and their dystopian nightmares.

Movies stir us because they tell us something about ourselves and our fellow humans; they can mobilize us to identify with common ideals, devote and even sacrifice our lives for them. They open a window to cultures we are curious about and hold a mirror to the cultures that create them, reflecting that culture, its highlights, and its discontents.

In our globalized, postmodern, condensed world, where populations are in constant motion and travel, identities become ever more fluid, contested terrains for negotiation and change. It is in this mobile world that films travel across borders and cultural boundaries and become intercultural arenas for the formation of meaning.

Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion is a collection of essays that examine Israeli cinema as a prism that refracts collective Israeli identities through the medium and art of motion pictures. Israeli cinema, we believe, is a particularly fascinating test case, because it has been created within a national cultural context that has reflexively produced itself since its very beginning at the end of the nineteenth century and is still very much engaged in the formation of the evolving national/collective identity in the second millennium.

Israeli culture is a product of a utopian enterprise: Zionism, which started in the late 1880s, was conceived in the contexts of nationalism in Europe and realized in the land of Israel-Palestine as a pioneering endeavor, regarded by some contemporary historians and sociologists as a colonial enterprise. However it is conceptualized, this is clearly an intriguing case of a national community consciously imagining itself, writing its national revival as a new chapter in its ancient collective memory, and reviving its sacred texts and language as a new national secular culture. It is a fascinating case for studying the creation of a unified, cohesive national culture in a territory which existed virtually as a text, in a language used mostly in print and in oral sacred ritual, and on the basis of voluntary and forced immigration from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds.

The evolution of Israeli culture can be placed on the long continuum of Jewish cultural and textual tradition. At the same time, it is also a disruptive revolutionary enterprise in that it forced diverse cultural traditions and collective biographies of the Jewish Diasporas into a "New Hebrew" collective-national mold, later termed "Israeli." In addition to these diverse ethnic-cultural challenges to the newly re-created community, the evolving national culture took root in the mythological ancient holy land of origin, in which other communal identities were and had been living and forming

their own histories, collective memories, lived experiences, oral and print cultures. The encounter with the local Palestinian, Druze, and other communities in the Land of Israel yields a complex cultural clash over collective meanings and dominance. Articles in this anthology by Ben-Zvi-Morad, Gertz and Hermoni, Meiri, and Naaman offer a historical perspective and diverse theoretical positions on the intercultural and interethnic encounters, clashes, and conflicts between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs and on their representations and historiographies in Israeli cinema.

Hebrew cinema took an active part in the mobilization and construction of the new national culture. The creation and dissemination of Zionism, the new ideology which in the late 1880s advocated the idea of the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland in the Land of Israel, coincided with the evolution and consolidation of cinema as a medium and art, both in Europe and in North America. The pioneering national Zionist enterprise mobilized the moving pictures to stir Jews in the Diaspora to join the efforts of construction and national revival in Palestine. Moreover, both silent and talking films made in Palestine itself as well as those co-produced abroad were a medium for the construction and articulation of the evolving national identity. Films such as *This Is the Land* (*Zot Hee Ha'aretz*, Agadati, 1934) documented scenes from the Land of Israel as well as staged scenes of pioneers settling the land, planting trees and expanding agriculture, building diverse communities, and creating new forms of social-communal living, including the urban Tel Aviv and the cooperative kibbutz.

The rebirth of the nation was depicted as a productive effort of building and taming the wasteland into a fertile abundance of life and creativity. This reproductive national project was imagined on the silver screen as a masculine teleological endeavor, a forceful movement through the territory to conquer it by a spectacular bodily effort: Western-like generic narratives of a mythic clash between frontier and homesteaders, wasteland and civilization. The persistent taming of the barren, desolate land was almost always by men and their phallic extensions: the body, the hoe, the rifle, the horse. The Palestinian inhabitants of the contested territory were ambivalently depicted as noble savages who thwart the attempt to bring civilization and harmonic order into the chaotic wild East; as model representatives of the ancient biblical forefathers, the shepherds and farmers of the ancient holy land; or as potent "Orientals," who represented the alternative to a feminized, passive, impotent, victimized Diaspora Jew.

This newly created cultural identity used the new medium of film to convey the creative momentum of the new nation. The aesthetics of Soviet cinema—with its dynamic montage editing style, magnifying oblique shoot-

ing angles, and ideologically committed pathos—was mobilized to create sequences of lively movement and visual and sonic excess, signifying the new life pulsating in the ancient, prehistoric land. At the same time, early Israeli films also borrowed narratives and iconographies from the American Western, with its resolute pioneers who tame the wasteland as well as the stylized encounters with the local natives as a setting for this spectacular national effort to seize and conquer the old-new frontier land.

The hybridization of Soviet and American genres and styles with additional futurist aesthetics—which glorified man and machine, mass production, labor, and industrialization—articulated the new nation as dynamic and Westernized. This pre-state Zionist cinema both expressed and determined the fundamentals of the inchoate Israeli culture, with its masculinist orientations, the centrality of territory and conflict, the emphasis on the collective rather than individual experience, and the primacy of the national over the familial and public over private sphere. Essays by Feldestein, Horak, and Peleg in this anthology offer diverse critical perspectives, interpretations, and re-visions of pioneering cinematic formulations of the Zionist enterprise.

The aftermath of the Holocaust and the 1948 war known to Israelis as the War of Independence brought waves of immigrants into the newly declared state of Israel: refugees from the death camps of Europe and Jewish refugees as well as voluntary immigrants from the Middle East. The encounter between Holocaust survivors and the veteran Yishuv is a formative chapter in Israeli history. The Holocaust, which had crucial consequences for the foundation of a state for the Jews in the Land of Israel, continues to fulfill a major role in the Israeli conscious and less conscious collective memory and psyche. Essays by Avisar, Steir-Livny, and Yosef in this anthology reexamine cinematic Israeli negotiations of the Holocaust and its ramifications in Israeli history, society, and identity politics in films from the 1940s to the 2000s.

During the 1940s and 1950s films in Hebrew and English were still consciously used to consolidate and create an Israeli community out of the diverse traditions and cultural heritages that the new immigrants brought to the country. In the 1960s and 1970s this intensive and deliberate effort, which cinema continued to deploy in a highly stylized manner, gave way to a “normalized” local cinematic idiom, created as part of the collective, lived everyday experience of a culture that began to be less self-consciously fabricated. Whereas in the United States and parts of Europe television became a popular medium for creating and projecting collective experiences in the 1950s, television in Israel was not genuinely legitimized as a productive commercial industry and medium for the collective dreams and anxieties

before the early 1990s. That role was reserved for the film industry, which remained a significant medium for formulating collective identities that were often contested.

In the 1960s films affiliated with the “National Heroic” genre encapsulated the nationalist ethos of survival and cohesiveness, mostly in hybrid narratives and fictional worlds depicted in war films, melodramas, and comedies. These films featured pioneering collectives, warriors, and other socially significant peer groups. As such, they continued to uphold the national collectivist, group-oriented culture and represented the conservative gatekeeping of the boundaries of national identity. For the most part, these films presented a masculine world that relegated women to stereotypical representations, ignored the experiences of immigrants and diverse ethnic traditions, and privileged action and exteriority over the mundane and domestic sphere.

Eventually, however, the conservative nationalist genre lost its hold, as audiences increasingly preferred films that better articulated their real experiences and concerns. Israeli films from the 1960s and 1970s—melodramatic war films such as *He Walked through the Fields* (Yosef Millo, 1967), “group” movies and Bourekas films and comedies like *What a Gang!* (Ze’ev Khavatzelet, 1962), *Halfon Hill Doesn’t Answer* (Assi Dayan, 1976), and *The Troupe* (Avi Nesher, 1978)—projected a cohesive collective, which coalesces out of a diverse and contested multiethnic and multicultural steaming melting pot.

The most popular films during the sixties and seventies highlighted the preoccupation of the local film industry, which, like Hollywood studio films, held a mirror to the nation, narrativized the formulaic stories, and projected the images that it wanted to see. The most popular genre of those years was the so-called Bourekas film: generic comedies and melodramas which adapted popular cinematic traditions from the Middle East and Eastern European Jewish folk traditions and re-created interclass and interethnic clashes that usually unfold in the familial sphere. Typically, the clashes of the Bourekas drama are resolved through intermarriage and integration or containment within the family unit. Such “happy endings” confirmed and endorsed the integrative-utopian thrust of the Israeli melting pot ideology by repeatedly dramatizing the merging of diverse identities in the communal mold. But with changing social and cultural realities this mythic and utopian model eventually became irrelevant. Essays in this anthology by Ben Shaul, Gershenson, Shemer, and Talmon offer a dynamic overview of the evolving cinematic idioms of ethnicity, immigration, and interethnic exchanges in Israeli films and their changing formations.

The Israeli military is another unique institution of social integration and co-option. War and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East continue to haunt Israeli consciousness, collective memory, and lived experience. Militarism and war have taken a painful and traumatic toll on Israelis, which Israeli cinema has dealt with directly over the years. Several essays in this anthology discuss the implications of war and its articulations in Israeli cinema through history: Cohen, Kaplan, Zerubavel, Zanger, Munk, and Ne'eman discuss ideological and mythic aspects of collective Jewish and Israeli memory in the cinematic depictions of war in Israel.

While popular films in the 1960s and 1970s continued to focus on commonplace themes of community, interethnic exchange, army camaraderie, and the emerging petit bourgeoisie, a counter-elitist genre developed that spoke against the egalitarian and integrative ethos articulated by the more commercial and conservative films. Expressing modernist sensibilities, these new films adopted the avant-garde artistic aesthetics of the French New Wave, Italian neo-realism, and American new Hollywood cinema. Highly stylized, these films proposed progressive as well as reactionary models of Israeli existence, an urban, alienated existentialism, and anti-ideological angst. Such films reversed the masculine worldview and integrative fervor of the collective ethos and offered alternative models of masculinity as well as alienated particularistic, individualistic, and privatized modes of existence. The reality of a nation at war, burdened by internal tensions among ethnic, national, and religious minorities, was suppressed in these aesthetically sophisticated films, reserved for the cinematic elite and detached from their Israeli audiences. These "personal" Israeli films, referred to as the "New Sensibility" cinema, strove to reverse the normative collectivist and masculine militarism of the past. Such films articulated a second transition, if not a real revolution, in Israeli cultural consciousness, setting in motion a new phase in the negotiation of collective identities.

At the end of the 1970s Israeli society and culture underwent crucial transitions. The long-lasting hegemony of the socialist labor party (Ma'arakh, Mifleget Ha'avodah) was challenged for the first time in Israeli history in the 1977 elections, which brought to power the nationalist-liberal party (Likud) headed by Menahem Begin. Later that year, the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat came to Jerusalem, initiating what was to become Israel's first peace treaty with an Arab state. Israeli cinema both reflected and took part in these transformations of Israeli culture toward a new social and political agenda. The vigorous revision of mainstream ideologies in 1980s films took place in the symbolic spaces that formerly defined the cohesive national ethos, such as the army and the kibbutz. These cultural sites, which al-

legorically dramatized and textualized the Sabra myth, were now used to deconstruct this very imagined epitome of collective identity. Israeli films from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s renegotiate the altruistic tenets of the individual sacrifice of life and self-realization on the national altar in a variety of familiar contexts: the pioneer commune (*Once We Were Dreamers*, Barbash, 1987), the army (*Paratroopers*, Ne'eman, 1977; *One of Ours*, Barbash, 1989; *The Troupe*, Nesher, 1978; *Avanti Popolo*, Bukai, 1986), the kibbutz (*Noa at 17*, Yeshurun, 1982; *Atalia*, Tevet, 1984), and the peer group (*Late Summer Blues*, Schorr, 1987; *The Wooden Gun*, Moshenson, 1979; *The Summer of Aviya*, Cohen, 1988). These films retell the story of the committed and unified national collective as a countermyth of disintegration and oppression; they shatter the symbolic father and resurrect the repressed feminized diasporic Jew, Holocaust survivor, and excluded Palestinian Arab.

The 1990s saw the acceleration of these trends, especially as Israel increasingly opened up to outside influences. 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. All of these global trends find their articulation in Israeli cinema. Alienated from its audiences by its subversive, deconstructivist political stance throughout the 1980s, Israeli cinema in the 1990s seems threatened by the rapid growth of viable commercial, cable, and satellite television, which have become the most productive sites in popular Israeli culture for the formation of identities.

This threat to cinematic dominance and expression was also an advantage, however, as commercial television uses Israeli cinema as a resource to anchor its discourse in a shared visual and narrative cultural memory as well as repertory. Israeli films are constantly recycled on TV, especially in ritual collective times such as national holidays (for example, Independence Day) and in special programming devoted to the screenings of past and contemporary Israeli cinema. Moreover, the commercial television industry frequently employs filmmakers, producers, cinematographers, and other film professionals for its own original productions, and an exchange of generic traditions as well as authorship feeds both arenas of cultural production.

Among the transformations created by the free market forces of the 1990s in Israel was an important change to the policies of the Israeli Fund for Quality Films, a public financing committee that dominated film production throughout the 1980s. As one of the only financial resources for Israeli filmmakers, the Israeli Fund traditionally supported more artistic and progressive, radically political films. In the 1990s, however, it began to adjust

its support to fit the new and more popular cultural sensibilities. Together with the country's more commercial media, it became a resource for the formation of a new cinematic idiom, which under the slogan "films from here," strives for an authentic expression of real and sensually authentic Israeli life in its Mediterranean, Middle Eastern context.

The intense yearning for a change in the national agenda toward the end of the millennium was accompanied by a quest for authentic expression in the culture at large and in cinema in particular. A spate of second-generation films strove to express these changes through engagement with multiculturalism, collective and multiple biographies and histories, and an almost obsessive return to past traumas. Such films articulate revisionist approaches to representations of the Holocaust, Mizrahim, immigration, national history, and the kibbutz, along with new conceptualization of gender, sexuality, place, and cultural space. New social and cultural groups which were underrepresented within the homogenizing old cinematic discourses, or stereotypically represented in the service of collectivist-nationalist ideologies, are now more visible as well as self-represented. These new discourses of the minor and new sensibilities, which through cinematic expression offer "lines of flight" from obsolete cinematic and ideological paradigms, articulate processes within Israeli cinema and culture as well as larger formations in the postmodern world and global market. Articles by Dushi, Chyutin, Padva, and Kedem discuss such new discourses of old and newly visualized (sub)cultures as well as minorities in Israeli cinema of the current millennium.

The central role of gender formations in the cinematic negotiations of collective Israeli identity and the national history cannot be underestimated. National identities and their deconstruction formed mainly by adopting new masculine models and later shattering and dismantling them. The reaction against the victimized and marginalized Jewish positioning in the Diaspora brought hypermasculine overtones to the generic narrative and aesthetic features of early Hebrew and Israeli films. The opening of Israeli culture to alternative, new, and diverse directions is articulated through new approaches to gender and sexuality, which challenge by now obsolete cinematic and cultural models. Several essays in this anthology, although not included under this title, deal with gender and sexuality, as symptoms of ideological and cultural transitions in the culture.

The 1993 Oslo Accords were a political manifestation of a fundamental change in Israeli culture, signified in contemporary Israeli cinema by film noir-like dystopias reflecting Israelis' broken sense of place and control. The masculine paradigm, which had sustained the Zionist-national discourse,

was replaced by a shift to the feminine aspects of mundane experiences within the private sphere and the legitimization of a personal pursuit of happiness and self-realization. This shift in cultural priorities, which sustained the great support for the peace process and the hopes for “normalization,” was shattered in the early 2000s by the second Palestinian uprising and wave of terror known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The violent Palestinian revolt was preceded by the collapse of the peace process and reemphasized the severity of the internal fissures within Israeli society: the growing centrifugal pressures of subcultures, which no longer conform to a dominant Hebrew unifying cultural core, and the ever-growing quest for new leadership and “normalcy” that will finally end the pressures of war, terror, occupation, victimization, and other moral issues that keep haunting Israeli society and culture.

This anthology brings the discussion of Israeli cinema as a site of struggle over cultural meanings into this very transitional phase in Israeli culture in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Indeed, Israeli cinema has found a respectable place on the global cinematic scene, where the discourse about identity is integral to cinematic discourse. Yet, in addressing Israeli audiences, Israeli cinema remains a major site of negotiation and revisioning of history. This is an ongoing project of Israeli cinema, as demonstrated by the essays in this anthology, which chart a culture in constant motion that defies its deep longing for a stable and untroubled existence. The very conceptualization of Israeli identity and cinema, which we share as editors of this anthology, makes it difficult for us to conclude with tightly knit ends. We hope that readers will start a discussion rather than summarize and canonize one, because the stories we examine here are part of a history still in the making and a historiography much debated. We hope that those interested in the Israeli story will find these pages instructive and thought provoking.

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