

The Arab Other in Israeli Cinema and Discourse

Aner Preminger

The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel; Sapir Academic College, Sderot, Israel

This paper examines the evolution of the representation of the Arab in Israeli Cinema as a reflection of the way Arabs are perceived in Israeli cultural and political discourse. Scholars have mostly depicted this representation as static over time. Using examples drawn from a range of Jewish-Israeli film, this paper argues instead that the cinematic representation of Arabs changes over time in ways that mirror currents in Israeli political and social discourse.

Keywords: representation of the Arab, Israeli Cinema, Israeli cultural discourse, Israeli political discourse

Introduction

Ella Shohat (1989), one of Israeli Cinema researchers pioneer, uses postcolonial theory¹ to explore the ways in which Jewish-Israeli cinema created in Palestine-Israel from the beginning of the 20th century through 1986 ignored Arabs living in Israel. The absence of Arabs from the cinematic narrative is striking, and what little presence they had on the screen was incomplete, biased, distorted, and presented from a patronizing Western perspective. Indeed, Shohat's argument accurately captures the fact that in the period between 1911 and 1991 (the year her book was published in Hebrew), 528 full length feature films and documentaries were produced in Israel, and of them only some 30 films (6%) include a reference—sometimes indirect—to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Further, only 15 of those 30 films include the Arabs directly in the plot. These numbers faithfully reflect the tragic Zionist perception of Palestine as *a land without a people for a people without a land*. Before the Six-Day War in 1967, Arabs appeared in only a handful of Israeli films, and when they did appear, their representation was dichotomous: either as exotic oriental object who blended in with the primordial wild landscape, or as rival-devil-monster. This motif is clearly reflected in Baruch Diner's film *They Were Ten* (1960). In the film, which adopts some of the codes of the American Western, the Arabs are cast in the role of the *Indians*, presenting one in a long line of obstacles and natural disasters the Jews must overcome in their quest to conquer the wilderness.

Though she does not say so explicitly, Shohat appears to build upon Siegfried Kracauer's theoretical outlook, by which a national cinema exposes the underlying currents of a nation's soul (Kracauer, 1947). The obvious link between Kracauer's theory and later postcolonial theories is a natural one to draw on as Shohat does, but herein also lies the weak point of some of her conclusions, as described in what follows.

This paper will show that the evolution of Israeli cinema and of its representation of Arabs is more complex than Shohat suggests and in fact reveals a pattern that alternates between progress and regress in the ability to see and to represent the Other. Shohat's socio-cinematic approach to the question of representation

Aner Preminger, professor, Department of Communication and Journalism, The Hebrew University; Department of Film and Television, Sapir Academic College, Sderot, Israel.

¹ Mainly: Lucien Goldmann, Fredric Jameson, Ismail Xavier (pp. 7-11); Edward Said (p. 2).

subsumes even those cinematic moments which stand out as unique in their treatment of Arabs into her sweeping conclusion. Moreover, Shohat's cinematic study focuses on "the filmic representation of the Oriental Jews, the Sephardim, and the link between their representation and that of the 'Other East' of the Palestinians" (Shohat, 1989, pp. 5-6). Such research is a necessary and illuminating first step. However, an examination of the representation of Palestinians in Israeli cinema as part of the question of the representation of Sephardic Jews is bound to overlook essential differences between these two groups. Alongside their many shared issues—questions of ethnicity, race, culture-gap and hegemony, and economic disadvantage—these two groups and the question of their representation also differ crucially along the axes of majority-minority relations, nationalism and other complex political issues. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to focus on the representation of Palestinians as a function not of their identity as Oriental Other but rather as a national minority within a Jewish majority, in which there is no relevant distinction between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. In this respect it is important to note that, contrary to Shohat's assumption, we are not dealing here with an unchanging, static subject matter. Like Jewish-Israeli society itself, Israeli cinema evolved dynamically. Over the years it has been characterized by an ongoing reciprocal relationship between alternative, subversive films that remained in the cultural margins and social-political perceptions of the Arab Other, in which some of the progressive and radical views gradually moved from the margins into the mainstream. When Shohat discusses subversive films or scenes, she eventually dismisses them as minor deviations—the exception that proves the rule. By contrast, this paper focuses specifically on these exceptions and examines the dynamic relation between Israeli films that were ahead of their time and the evolution in the public perception of the Arab Other. This paper too, draws on Kracauer's theory, but it guides us in a different direction, namely, to examine the atypical subversive films and the developments and turning points that followed them.

The Films in Focus

Two years prior to the Six-Day War, in 1965, Uri Zohar's film *Hole in the Moon* (*Hor Balevana*), provided the first turning point with respect to a reflexive awareness of the exclusion of Arabs from Israeli cinema. Israel was, at the time, a small, young nation, only seventeen years past its first independence day, encircled by four Arab countries that refused to accept its legitimacy. It was a closed society of Jewish immigrants, a high percentage of whom were Holocaust survivors still less than 20 years distant from that trauma, who experienced both a high sense of solidarity and feelings of constant threat to their own existences and to the existence of their state. Under these circumstances it is, perhaps, unsurprising that the earliest Israeli cinema turned mostly inwards to depictions of itself as a means of generating national identity, solidifying cultural community, and reinforcing its own cultural and political legitimacy. Through parody and satire, however, Zohar diagnoses, for the first time, the anomaly of the Arab exclusion. In the film, which tells the story of a production studio set up in the middle of the desert, the characters shoot a scene (for a film within the film) that follows the same formula as *They Were Ten*: Jewish pioneers working the land are attacked by Arabs on horseback. The Arabs—Jewish actors wearing exaggerated black make up to highlight the absurdity of the absence of the real-life Arab—quit the set in protest and complain to the directors of the (internal) movie, Tzelnik (Uri Zohar) and Mizrachi (Avraham Heffner): "We are always the bad guys. We want to be the good guys for once", Mizrachi regards their request as insane. He replied confidently: "You are nuts, what do you mean 'good guys'? You are Arabs" (Zohar, 1965, t. 27:20-29:00).

As they react, we see the three actors in negative. Here Zohar is using the film's raw material, the negative print, in order to give cinematic expression to the absurdity and ridiculousness of the dichotomous portrayal of Arabs. The scene alludes simultaneously to the narrative in which the Arab is invariably the "bad guy"; to his stereotypical depiction as black; and to the absurdity of having him played by a Jew, thereby depriving him even of mimetic representation. Unlike Mizrachi, however, Tzelnik sees in the actor's request a chance for a good gag, and replies: "But this is cinema!" He relents and allows the actors for once to be "good guys"—"but only one little scene". The scene is reshot, this time with the Arabs-played-by-Jews cast as the "good" farmers who are attacked by "bad" Jewish Cossacks.

Shohat (1989) acknowledged this scene but dismisses its significance. She concluded:

Hole in the Moon subverts the traditional imagery only up to a certain point, however. The Arabs, now cast as "good" are made to sing in Hebrew a Jewish pioneer song (here Shohat ignores the scene's ironic tone), thus still associating pioneer ideology with the heroes, and only transferring certain formal elements (Russian dress) to the antagonists. (p. 197)

This claim is perplexing given that Shohat agrees the film is a parody and even points to the parallels between Zohar's cinematic parody and his parody of the Zionist narrative (pp. 194-195).

It seems to the author that with this scene Zohar in fact gives critical and instructive expression to the exclusion of the real-life Arab from Zionist discourse and, accordingly, also from Israeli cinema. In other words, Tzelnik and Mizrachi accept the Arab as "good" only insofar as he identifies with the Jewish pioneer ethos, and not as Other. Thus, the film seems to self-consciously highlight the way in which in Israeli cinema, as in the Zionist discourse, the Arab is present only when there is a functional need for him, as the "bad guy". Moreover, on a cinematic level, the scene serves to undercut the simplistic distinction between "good" and "bad," thereby projecting this criticism onto this same distinction as it occurs in the socio-political discourse. This interpretation is further emphasized by Zohar's characters' names and casting choices. "Tzelnik" is an archetypical Ashkenazi Jew name and "Mizrachi" (literal translation: oriental) is an archetypical Sephardic Jew name, but both actors, Zohar and Hefner, are Ashkenazis and iconic figures in Israeli Western culture of the 1960s. The choice of the Ashkenazi Hefner to depict a character by the name "Mizrachi" mirrors the absurdity of Jewish actors portraying Arab characters.

With this scene Zohar holds up a mirror to Israeli filmmakers, as well as to Israeli society as a whole, a mirror in which Shohat's own claim is clearly reflected. *Hole in the Moon* marks a turning point beyond which filmmakers could no longer return to ways of representing the Arab that were dominant before the mid-1960s.

The next turning point appears right after the Yom Kippur War, in Dan Wolman's 1975 film *My Michael*, adapted from Amos Oz's novel of the same name. The film revolves around Hana Gonen (Efrat Lavie), a tortured and crumbling soul, and her alienated life with Michael Gonen (Oded Kotler). The film's milieu is Jewish Ashkenazi, but the plot is interwoven with thirteen different scenes that employ the image of the Arab and its loaded meanings in Jewish social and cultural discourse. As Hana rides a bus to Michael's kibbutz, she recalls how, as a child, she would play and engage in mischief with two Arab twin boys. We hear her thoughts in voiceover: "Before the war I used to play with two Arab kids. They looked after me. I was a princess. I gave them orders, I controlled them. So far away" (Wolman, 1975, t. 17:00).

Later, a variation of this scene repeats itself within a love scene that goes sour between Hana and Michael, with the voiceover's final sentence stating, "The war has come between us" (t. 38:00).

Between these two scenes is a scene of Hana waking in a panic from a nightmare in which two grown up Arab twins capture and threaten to rape her (t. 23:30). Near the film's conclusion, when Hana is in a state of irreversible self destruction and no longer functions or speaks, the grown twins return to visit her in the form of an erotic fantasy. Later, they are seen armed, crawling under barbed wire, echoing the armed Palestinians who infiltrated Israel throughout the 1950s.

Wolman's use of the Arab characters in this case is complex. It is flawed in ways that Shohat (1989) rightly pointed out: the Arabs are not real, three-dimensional characters with autonomous lives but rather are portrayed stereotypically as representing, on the one hand, an erotic exotica contrasting to the rational and scientific world represented by Michael (p. 239) and, on the other hand, a nightmarish power of darkness and destruction. But, there is, furthermore, also an implied political statement that criticizes the overlooking of the Arabs in Jewish-Israeli society and a warning about the dangers inherent in doing so. Hana, the Ashkenazi Jewish woman, played with the Arab twins as a child. Back then they were unthreatening and, like her, represented innocence and beauty. But they were not on equal footing: she gave them orders, controlled them; they looked after her. The film's point of view is not Hana's, even though the story is told through her eyes and in her voice. Cinematically, Hana's ultimate destruction is represented by the two Arab terrorists. This scene echoes the childhood scene in which the power structure was reversed. Hana's missed opportunity alludes to the opportunity missed by Israeli Jewish society as a whole when it ignored the Arabs and saw them only as a tool to be exploited and controlled. Like Israeli society, Hana ignored the Arabs' uniqueness and the special relationship she could have developed with them back when their relations were humane and both parties were weaker. The film invites its viewers to wonder what would have happened had she had developed a dialogue with the Arabs instead of succumbing to the temptation to dominate. Mizrahi's response to his actors in *Hole in the Moon* reverberates here as a possible reply to this question: "Are you nuts? They are Arabs." But Wolman's reply to Mizrahi is not "But this is cinema!" In Wolman's narrative, the Arab who is dominated and denied eventually becomes uncontrollable and revolts. The inability of Jewish society to create dialogue with the Arab Other and to contain him forms part of its own pathology and is the source of its demise.

In other words, the film contains subversive criticism of the failure to acknowledge the Arab Other and of the purely functional role that he played in Israeli socio-political discourse at the time. In this respect, Wolman can be seen as taking on in a dramatic context the same themes introduced by Uri Zohar using parody and satire in *Hole in the Moon*. Wolman indeed does not focus his narrative on the depth of the Arab characters, who serve as a backdrop to the Israeli Ashkenazi plot, but their ongoing presence in the background is disturbing and threatening. This time they are not just a force of destruction or exotic creatures. Throughout the film we see them as the workmen who build Jerusalem, the laborers who sell fruit and vegetables at the main market. Indeed, their presence floods the vibrant Israeli public sphere, yet they are merely a backdrop for the lives of the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Dan Wachsmann's *Hamsin*², released in 1982, the same year the First Lebanon War broke out, takes a critical look at the racism that permeates even liberal circles in Israel. Here, too, there is an interesting duality that highlights the complexity of this issue. *Hamsin* is set in one of Israel's oldest farming communities in the

² Hamsin is the Hebrew word for Eastern Wind which comes from the Arab desert and brings very hot, dry weather which many times is followed by heavy rain.

Galilee. It focuses on one farming family that descends from the Jewish pioneers of the early twentieth century. Following an Israeli government plan to expropriate Arab land in the Galilee and increase the region's Jewish population, Gedalia (Shlomo Tarshish) tries to buy land from his Arab neighbor, Abass, in order to build a farm on the joint land. Abass, who in the past had a friendly relationship with Gedalia's father, agrees to sell so as at least to recuperate the land's value but then retracts under pressure from Arab political activists who want to prevent at all cost the sale of Arab land to Jews and instead to force the Israeli government to nationalize the land. In a subplot of this difficult land conflict, a sexual relationship develops between Haled (Yasin Shawap), an Arab laborer employed by Gedalia, and Gedalia's sister, Hava (Hemda Levi). Gedalia, who until this point has been portrayed as a liberal humanist who doesn't want to make a profit off the theft of Arab land and who allows Arab workmen to sleep in his yard even though the act is risky and illegal, cannot accept the taboo-breaking act of sex between his Jewish sister and an Arab laborer. The film ends with a scene in which Gedalia and Haled are working together in the dairy barn. Haled is tending the cows and Gedalia walks over to the breeding bull, kept locked up in a separate part of the barn. He looks over at the young Arab man before releasing the bull who immediately charges and gores Haled to death (t. 1:18:20-1:22:00).

Wachsmann chose to set his film inside the Green Line (Israel's pre-1967 border), where the Arab-Jewish conflict does not revolve around the issue of the post Six-Day War occupation. The film represents the first attempt in Israeli cinema to tackle difficult and concrete questions surrounding a conflict about land, ethnicity, and culture. The Israeli, who regards himself as a humanist and a liberal, turns into a cold-blooded murderer when the conflict reaches his doorstep. Shohat (1989) identified a turning point in this film but she nonetheless doubts its subversiveness because, she claims, the bull is "impulsively set free by Gedalia" (p. 248) and Gedalia murders Haled "accidentally" (p. 260). Finally, she claimed that in the film's final scene, "the rain that falls and breaks the hamsin, in the final shot, washing away the blood, [i.e., purging the crime] leaves the narrative open-ended" (p. 260).

I read the scene differently. The way in which it is filmed and edited creates an explicit pause on the exchange of glances between Haled and Gedalia before the charging bull is set free. Wachsmann even drags out the moment, creating a hiatus in which Gedalia can, in principle, consider what he is about to do. Viewers are left to decide for themselves whether Gedalia uses the moment to reconsider or else coldly to plan out the murder. But the act is not done impulsively, and it is not accidental. It is designed by Gedalia to look like an accident, which only serves to further highlight his cruelty and cynicism. Moreover, the heavy rain pounding down on the ground after the murder echoes the biblical Great Flood, providing the film with an apocalyptic conclusion that is not at all open-ended. Analysis of the scene's cinematic utterance further complicates the issue. Whereas the narrative is subversive and unambiguous, Wachsmann's shooting choices reveal an ambivalence in the film's attitude towards its characters. Haled is seen only from a distance, from Gedalia's point of view, while Gedalia himself is shown in close-up, which has the effect of emphasizing his agonized face. Haled's face is shaded so that at the critical moment viewers are not exposed to the victim's humanity. At the same time, the lighting on Gedalia allows them to see his face clearly and identify with him. In other words, however critical and subversive the film, at crucial moments its cinematic expression creates an asymmetry, preferring the Jewish character as an individual human being over the Arab who remains an abstract symbol representing his ethnic/national collective.

In conjunction with the films that were examined earlier in the paper, we can now detect the development of an interesting dialectic of progress and regress in the ability to see the Other from the point of view of Jewish

filmmakers. This dialectic reflects the social and political fluctuations in Israeli discourse over the course of the years in which these films were made.

The cinematic turning points pointed out are all closely related to critical traumatic wars, the Six-Day War (1967), the Yom Kipur War (1973), and the First Lebanon War (1982), that shocked Israeli society and created strong social turbulence that changed political discourse and Israeli understanding of the relationship between Jews and Palestinians. Before the Six-Day War, there were no routine, casual encounters between Jews and Palestinians, not even with Israeli Palestinians, who were then living under a military regime in the “democratic” state. A few months before the Six-Day War, however, the military regime was rescinded, enabling Israeli Arabs to formally regain their civil rights. After the war, thus, Jews went into the Palestinian territories, and Palestinians came into Israel as laborers. As time progressed, each subsequent war brought new thoughts and ideas about the complex and abnormal relationship between Jews and Palestinians, as well as new understandings of the strong bond between Jews and Palestinians, who were, by this point, irrevocably tied together. However, each war also brought also new trauma and more fodder for irrational, growing hatred and threats that in turn created new obstacles to Israelis’ being able to see the Palestinians as equal human beings.

With his 1984 film, *Beyond the Walls*, Uri Barabash makes a move that is interesting and innovative for the time of the film’s release. In the film, which is set in a prison, Barabash purports to meet the challenge set before Israeli cinema by Uri Zohar in *Hole in the Moon*. The Israeli prisoner is the “bad guy” while the Palestinian prisoner, described in Israeli discourse as a terrorist, is portrayed as a freedom fighter and is the film’s most mature and positively depicted character. This choice is enhanced by the casting of Muhammad Bakri, the charismatic blue-eyed Palestinian actor. Shohat (1989) welcomed this shift in the representation of the Palestinian but criticizes Barabash for not going far enough: he settles only for a partial inversion of the stereotype instead of completing it by applying it also to the representation of the Sephardic Jew, portrayed here as a “primitive” criminal felon (p. 271). We have here a perfect example of a case in which it is imperative to distinguish the Sephardic Other from the Palestinian Other. Differentiating the two helps bring into focus a new difficulty with Barabash’s choice with respect to the Palestinian’s representation. In effect, we have here an important attempt to break a stereotypical representation at the cost of creating a new stereotype, opposed to the old one. Muhammad Bakri has the looks of a Palestinian Paul Newman. In many respects the film reinforces a stereotypical reading of the characters, since Bakri’s mimetic exceptionality causes him to be perceived as an exception that proves the rule, i.e., that only Arabs who look like him are human, three-dimensional characters.

In the mid-1980s, shortly before the First Intifada³ broke out, when growing parts of Israeli society were beginning to sense the lie behind the notion of an “enlightened occupation”, several films succeeded in finding a new way to tackle the difficulties and dilemmas this paper has been discussing. The new approach became apparent once directors set out to create a true reversal in the point of view of their characters and/or actors. In 1985, Nissim Dayan cast the Palestinian actor Makram Houry in the role of the military governor in his film *On a Narrow Bridge*. In 1986, Shimon Dotan made a similar choice in his film *The Smile of the Lamb*. These reversals echo the absurdity that Zohar pointed to when Jewish actors played Arabs in *Hole in*

³ Intifada is the Arabic word for uprising and became the name in both Arabic and Hebrew for the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation.

the Moon. In one of several dramatic confrontations between the governor Katzman (Khoury) and the army doctor, Uri (Rami Danon), who believes he can help Katzman to maintain an “enlightened occupation”, the two men argue about the legitimacy of collective punishment. In a rare monologue, Katzman talks of his past. He suffered persecution in Poland and will not let the same thing happen again to the Jews. The fact that this monologue, loaded with a heightened sensitivity to anti-Semitism, is spoken by a Palestinian actor who suffers—socially and politically, if not personally—from discrimination in Israel, sums up the significance of casting Khoury in this role and creates a subversive representation of the Palestinian Other in Israeli discourse.

The use of shifting points of view was carried to a new level by Rafi Bukae in his 1986 film *Avanti Popolo*. The film’s narrative focuses on two Egyptian soldiers (Salim Dau and Suheil Haddad) trying to find their way back to the Suez Canal after their army’s defeat in the Six-Day War. Along the way they come across two Israeli soldiers who, for lack of a better idea, drag the Egyptians along with them. This time, the Egyptian soldier is the protagonist of the story, which is told from his perspective. He is also the underdog, dependent on the help of the powerful and arrogant Israeli soldier. Bukae gives special meaning to this role reversal in the scene of the first encounter between the Egyptian soldiers and the Israeli patrol. The Egyptians, having earlier found a bottle of wine in an abandoned United Nations jeep, are drunk and very thirsty. They beg the Israelis for water but are refused. Salim Dau, whose character in the film is a professional actor who has always dreamed of playing Shakespeare, begins reciting Shylock’s famous monologue from *The Merchant of Venice*:

I am a Jew.
Hath not a Jew eyes?
Hath not a Jew hands, Organs,
dimensions, senses, affections, Passions,
fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons,
subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means,
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer,
as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?
If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
If you Poisson us do we not die? (Bukae, 1986, t. 58:00-59:10)

The film uses exactly Shakespeare words but it is interesting to note that it ends Shylock’s monologue before Shakespeare’s line (1951): “And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge” (p. 443) as if it has hope that the circle of symmetry would be broken before the revenge stage.

Shakespeare’s speech by the Jewish merchant, in the new context of *Avanti Popolo*, spoken by Dau—an Arab Israeli actor—completes the satirical circle opened by Zohar in *Hole in the Moon*. This time, the Palestinian is not asked to sing a Jewish pioneer song but rather is awarded one of the most challenging and coveted dramatic texts—and Bukae has no need for the special effect of using a negative print. Bukae and Dau get just as many laughs as Zohar did, but at the same time they succeeded also in moving the audience. They don’t just strive for change, they create it.

One year before the outbreak of the First Intifada, Israeli cinema gave powerful expression to the

inability of Israeli society to see the Other, to adopt his point of view or narrative. It is interesting to point out that the Other in this case is clearly neither a Palestinian nor even, to borrow Shohat's term, an "Oriental Other". He is Egyptian. *Avanti Popolo* was made just over a decade after the trauma that beset Israel with the Yom Kippur War and later the beginnings of reconciliation with Egypt. Perhaps it was from this perspective alone that Jewish-Israeli discourse was prepared to see and represent some form of symmetry between Jews and Arabs.

One year into the First Intifada, director Chaim Buzaglo created a different sort of reversal in his film *Fictitious Marriage (Marriage of Convenience)*. In Buzaglo's film (1988), Israeli Jewish actor Shlomo Bar-Aba—best known for his longtime portrayal on television of the comic character Yatzek, an intensely Zionist Polish Jew—portrays a Sephardic Jew who pretends to be Palestinian and tries to live and work with Palestinian day laborers from Gaza. This time, a Jew attempts to feel what it is like to be an Arab. The attempt fails at the moment of truth, when an instinctive existential fear causes the Jewish character to unjustly suspect his Palestinian friend to be a terrorist and to withdraw back into the heart of Israeli consensus, a consensus that encompasses Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews alike. Nevertheless, the character's experience of the daily details of Palestinian life—the humiliations and poverty under Jewish dominancy—enable director Chaim Buzaglo and the film's audience to observe the Other from his own point of view.

Conclusions

In closing, several further stations in Israeli cinema, which were not touched on here have to be mentioned since they constitute important contributions to this ongoing debate. These films include: *My Name is Ahmed* (Ram Levi & Avshi Katz, 1966); *Hirbet Hiza 'a* (Ram Levi, 1978); *The Silver Platter (Fellow Travellers)* (Judd Ne'eman, 1983); *Ricochets (Two fingers from Sidon)* (Eli Cohen, 1986); *Cherry Season* (Chaim Buzaglo, 1991); *Cup Final* (Eran Riklis, 1991); *The Flying Camel* (Rami Na'aman, 1994); *Yellow Asphalt* (Danny Veret, 2001); *The band's visit* (Eran Kolirin, 2007); *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008); *Earth (Adama)* (Rani Blair, 2011). All these films, though very different from one another in visual style, genre, approach, perspective and ideology, aim to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in focus by exploring the larger conflict rather than simply remaining on the level of character discussion. These films share a common understanding that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the main challenges facing Israeli society, a challenge that must be confronted and resolved in order to achieve a harmonious national existence.

This paper has shown that as early as 1965, Uri Zohar challenged Israeli cinema by accurately diagnosing the problem of ignoring and denying the Arab Other, and that the subsequent three decades produced several films that tackled this problem, with the key scene from Zohar's *Hole in the Moon* looming in the background. While depictions of Arab characters have remained largely excluded from Israeli cinema, cinematic responses to this exclusion have adopted shifting perspectives over time. It is interesting to note that most of these films were minor releases⁴, but they influenced the political discourse, and later when some of their insights penetrated the consensus—at least among the cultural and political community—the changed discourse enabled new radical films to explore the issue further.

⁴ There were few exceptions as for example: *The Band's Visit* (Eran Kolirin, 2007); *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008).

References

- Barabash, U. (Director), & Cohen, R. (Producer). (1984). *Beyond the walls (MeAchorei Hasorragim)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: April productions.
- Bukae, R. (Producer & Director). (1986). *Avanti Popolo* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Bukae productions.
- Buzaglo, C. (Director), & Sharfstein, M. (Producer). (1988). *Fictitious marriage (Marriage of convenience)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Michael Sharfstein productions.
- Dayan, N. (Director), & Sharfstein, M. (Producer). (1985). *On a narrow bridge (Al Gesher Tzar)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Michael Sharfstein Productions.
- Dienar, B. (Producer & Director). (1960). *They were ten (Hem Hayu Asara)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Baruch Dienar Productions.
- Dotan, S. (Director), & Aroch, J. (Producer). (1986). *The smile of the Lamb (Chiuch Ha' Gdi)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Jonathan Aroch Productions.
- Kracauer, S. (1947). *From Caligari to Hitler*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (1951/1600). *The merchant of Venice*, Act 3, Scene 1, p. 443. London: Collins Press.
- Shohat, E. (1989). *Israeli Cinema—East/West and the politics of representation*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Wachsmann, D. (Director), & Lifshin, J. (Producer). (1982). *Hamsin* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Lifshine Productions.
- Wolman, D. (Director), & Phlyne, A. (Producer). (1975). *My Michael (Michael Shely)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Phlyne Productions.
- Zohar, U. (Director), & Navon, M. (Producer). (1965). *Hole in the Moon (Hor Balevana)* [Motion Picture]. Israel: Hertzelia Studio.